

Handbook of Contemporary  
Japanese Religions

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# Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions

*Edited by*

Inken Prohl and John Nelson



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## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

BARBARA AMBROS is Associate Professor of East Asian Religions in the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The Ōyama Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan* (2008) and *Bones of Contention: Animals and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (2012).

JØRN BORUP is Associate Professor in the Department of Culture and Society and director of the Centre for Contemporary Religion, Aarhus University, Denmark. His research focuses on contemporary Buddhism in Japan and the West, on religious diversity and on relations between religion, migration and globalization. In addition to his academic articles and books, he is a publisher himself and has written travel books and a wide range of popular articles for various journals and newspapers as freelance writer. He is the author of *Japanese Rinzai Zen Buddhism: Myōshinji, a Living Religion* (Brill, 2008).

JOHN BREEN is Professor at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto. His research has focused chiefly on early modern and modern Japanese history. He is the author of *Girei to kenryoku Tennō no Meiji ishin* (Heibonsha, 2011), the co-author, with Mark Teeuwen, of *A New History of Shinto* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) and the editor of *Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past* (Columbia University Press, 2008). He is currently working on the modern history of Ise.

STEPHEN G. COVELL is the Mary Meader (Associate) Professor of Comparative Religion and Chair of the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University. His upcoming publications include a biography of the Tendai priest Yamada Etai and book on the teachings of contemporary Temple Buddhism.

BENJAMIN DORMAN is a Permanent Fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture and Professor in the Faculty of Foreign Studies, Nanzan University. He co-edits *Asian Ethnology* with Frank Korom (Boston University). He is the author of *Celebrity Gods: New Religions*,

*Media, and Authority in Occupied Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2012). His research interests include media and representation of religion and society in historical and contemporary contexts, identity, and celebrity.

LISETTE GEBHARDT is Professor of Japanese Literature and Culture at the Goethe-University, Frankfurt, Germany. Her research is on Japanese modern and contemporary literature with a focus on intellectual concepts of the modern self and discussions of Japanese identity. She also has an interest in the relationship of Japanese literature with religious thought and Japanese lifestyles, and the search for the spiritual in the work of contemporary writers.

TIM GRAF is a Research Associate at the Institute of Religious Studies and the Collaborative Research Center Ritual Dynamics at Heidelberg University. His research interests focus on transformations of Buddhism in contemporary Japan and more broadly deal with the interplay of religious practice and modern social change. He published several articles on changes in Japanese funerary practices and recently completed his doctoral fieldwork on Zen Buddhist prayer temples as a foreign researcher at the University of Tokyo. He recently finished editing *Souls of Zen: Buddhism, Ancestors, and the 2011 Tsunami in Japan*, a documentary film about Buddhism in the midst of Japan's recovery from the 3/11 disaster.

ISOMAE JUN'ICHI is Associate Professor at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. His research is focused on the discursive formation around the concepts on 'religion' and 'history' in modern Japan. He is the author of *Japanese Mythology: Hermeneutics on Scripture* (Equinox Publishing, 2010, 1998 in Japanese); *Genealogy of Religious Discourse in Modern Japan* (2003 in Japanese, forthcoming in English and Korean); *Sense of Loss and Nostalgia: Toward the Margin in Modern Japan* (2007 in Japanese, forthcoming in Korean). He is also the co-editor of *Overcoming Modernity: East Asian Community and the Kyoto School* (2010 in Japanese, forthcoming in English) and *Colonial Korea and Religions* (2012 in Japanese and Korean).

KENTA KASAI is a Research Fellow of the Center for Information on Religion. He is interested in the comparative study of meditations and the author of *Modernity and Meditation: Altered States of Consciousness* (2010, Japanese); *Sobriety in Communalilty: People who Believe in their*

*Recovery from Alcoholism* (2007, Japanese) and a co-editor of *Keywords for Religious Studies* (2006, Japanese). Now he is editing a book on Buddhist psychology.

NORIKO KAWAHASHI holds a doctorate in Religious Studies from Princeton University and is Associate Professor of Religion at Nagoya Institute of Technology. She has published extensively on the subject of gender and religion in Japan and Okinawa, both in English and Japanese. She has co-authored with Masako Kuroki a book on religion and postcolonial feminism, *Konzaisuru Megumi* (2004), and co-edited the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Special Issue on "Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan" (30/3-4, Fall 2003). Her articles include "Gender Issues in Japanese Religions" (in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) and "Folk Religions and its Contemporary Issues" (in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, Blackwell, 2005).

SATSUKI KAWANO is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph, Ontario. Her publications focus on the topics of ritual, family, death, and aging. She is the author of *Ritual Practice in Modern Japan: Ordering Place, People, and Action* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005) and *Nature's Embrace: Japan's Aging Urbanites and New Death Rites* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

GREGORY P. LEVINE is Associate Professor of the art and architecture of Japan and Buddhist visual cultures in the Department of the History of Art at U.C. Berkeley. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, Fulbright Hayes Fellowship, and other awards. His first book, *Daitokuji: The Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery* (2005), was a finalist in 2007 for the Charles Rufus Morey Prize ("for an especially distinguished book in art history") awarded by the College Art Association. He was co-curator with Yukio Lippit of the exhibition *Awakenings: Zen Figure Paintings from Medieval Japan* (Japan Society, 2007) and catalogue co-editor and contributor. He is also co-editor of the forthcoming *Crossing the Sea: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Professor Yoshiaki Shimizu* and conference proceeding volume, *Re-presenting Emptiness: Essays on Zen and Art* (both P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art and Princeton University Press). He is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Buddha Heads: Landscape, Race, and the Visual Cultures of Buddhist Modernism*.

MARK MACWILLIAMS is a Professor of Religious Studies at St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY, where he teaches East Asian religions. His current areas of research are Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage, and manga, anime and Japanese visual culture. In addition to several manga-related publications, he has recently edited a book, *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in Manga and Anime* (M.E. Sharpe, 2008). He is the recipient of an National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowship, on Japanese Visual Culture and Religion. He is currently completing a book entitled, *Graphically Religious: Visual Representations in Japanese Religion*.

LEVI MCLAUGHLIN is Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at North Carolina State University. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 2009 after previous study at the University of Toronto and the University of Tokyo. His research interests center on religion in modern Japan and deal with intersections of religion and 'secular' spheres such as politics and education. Levi is currently completing a book manuscript entitled *How to Cultivate a Mass Movement: Buddhism and Romantic Heroism in Sōka Gakkai*.

MARK R. MULLINS is Professor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Graduate School of Global Studies at Sophia University, Tokyo, where his teaching and research focus on religion in modern societies. He is the author and co-editor of a number of studies, including *Christianity Made in Japan* (1998), *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan* (2011), and *Handbook of Christianity in Japan* (2003). He is currently engaged in research and writing on neo-nationalism and contemporary Japanese religions.

JOHN NELSON is Professor of East Asian Religions and Chair of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of San Francisco. As a cultural anthropologist, his research and publications explore the interaction between religion, society, and politics in East Asia. He is the author of two books (*A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine* [1996], *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* [2000]), numerous articles (including "Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine" in the *Journal of Asian Studies* [2003]), and also produced a documentary film, "Spirits of the State: Japan's Yasukuni Shrine" (2005). His current project is titled *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan*.



REV. MASAZUMI SHOJUN OKANO is the President of Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, a lay Buddhist order in the Tendai tradition established in 1936 in Yokohama, Japan. After receiving his B.A. from Keio University (Tokyo) in Oriental History, Rev. Okano obtained D.Phil in Sociology of Religion from the University of Oxford. He has taught subjects on Asian religions and Japanese society at the University of Vermont and the University of Hong Kong. He currently serves as one of the Directors of IBEC, as a member of the Advisory Board of INEB, and as a member of the Executive Committee of Japan Buddhist Federation.

INKEN PROHL is Professor of Religious Studies at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg and a member of the “Cluster of Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context, Heidelberg.” For several years she has been conducting fieldwork in Japan. Her research interests focus on recent history of religions in Germany, Japan and the USA, the transformations of Buddhist thoughts and practices in modernity and new approaches of ‘Material Religion’. Her publications include *Religiöse Innovationen: Die Shintō-Organisation World Mate in Japan* (Reimer, 2005) and *Zen für Dummies* (Wiley, 2010).

MICHAEL K. ROEMER received his Ph.D. in Sociology from The University of Texas at Austin and is the Director of Global Initiatives at Trinity Valley School in Ft. Worth, TX. Previously, he was an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Ball State University, where he taught courses on Japanese religions and Buddhisms of East Asia. Recent publications include book chapters in the Sociology of Religion’s *Religion and the Social Order* series (2006 and 2011) and in *Atheism and Secularity* (2010) and articles in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2007), the *Review of Religious Research* (2009 and 2010), *Social Forces* (2010), and *Japan Forum* (2010).

AIKE P. ROTS has an MA degree in Japanese Religions from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, and BA degrees in Japanese Studies and Religious Studies from Leiden University. He has published several short articles and presented conference papers on the topic of Japanese Christianity. He is currently employed as a Doctoral Research Fellow by the University of Oslo, and is in the process of writing his dissertation. His PhD research focuses on Shintō in contemporary Japan, with particular emphasis on environment-related discursive and institutional practices, as well as notions of ‘nature’, ‘animism’ and

'sacred space'. In 2011, he won the first prize in the International Shintō Foundation's essay competition for his essay "The Discourse on *Chinju no Mori*: Redefining Shintō and Shintō Sanctuaries in Contemporary Japan" (publication forthcoming).

BERNHARD SCHEID is a Senior Research Fellow at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia, in Vienna. He has published widely on Japanese religious history, most recently on *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (co-edited with Mark Teeuwen, Routledge 2006). He is also known as the author of a popular handbook *Religion-in-Japan* published on the internet (2001–present).

SHIMAZONO SUSUMU is Professor in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Tokyo. He has published widely on modern and contemporary religious movements as well as on modern Japanese religions in general. He has published eight books in Japanese, one in Korean, and one in English entitled *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan* (Trans Pacific Press, 2004). Together with Mark Mullins and Paul Swanson he edited *Religion and Society in Modern Japan* (Asian Humanities Press, 1993).

GEORGE J. TANABE JR. has published widely on religions in Japan and Buddhism in Hawaii. His books include *Myoe the Dreamkeeper* (Harvard), *Religions of Japan in Practice* (Princeton), and *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion in Japan*. He has served on the Board of Governors of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, and is the President of BDK Hawaii, an affiliate of the Numata Foundation in Japan. He was a 2007 recipient of the Japanese government's Foreign Minister's Award for the promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and America.

JONATHAN S. WATTS is a Research Fellow at the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) in Yokohama under the auspices of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, where he is working with Rev. Okano on a book on socially engaged Buddhism in Japan. Watts is also a Research Fellow at the Jodo Shu Research Institute (JSRI) and an Associate Professor at Keio University in Tokyo. Watts serves on the Executive Board of the International Network of Engaged Buddhist (INEB).

DUNCAN RYŪKEN WILLIAMS, Chair of the School of Religion and Director of the USC Center for Japanese Religions and Culture at the University of Southern California, received his B.A. in Religious Studies at Reed College (1991), his M.T.S. at Harvard Divinity School (1993), and Ph.D. in Religion at Harvard University (2000). He works primarily on Japanese Buddhist history, Buddhism and environmentalism, and American Buddhism. He is the author of *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Soto Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, 2005), translator of four Japanese books, and editor of three volumes including *Issei Buddhism in the Americas* (Illinois, 2010), *American Buddhism* (Curzon, 1999), and *Buddhism and Ecology* (Harvard, 1997). He is currently completing a manuscript entitled *Camp Dharma: Japanese-American Buddhism and the World War Two Incarceration Experience* (forthcoming, UC Press).

URS MATTHIAS ZACHMANN is the Handa Chair of Japanese-Chinese Relations at the University of Edinburgh. His research focuses on the political and intellectual history of modern Japan as well as on law and legal sociology the sociology of law in contemporary Japan. He is the author of *China and Japan in the Late Meiji Period: China Policy and the Japanese Discourse on National Identity, 1895–1904* (Routledge, 2009) and of *War and International Order in the Japanese Discourse on International Law, 1919–1960: Studies in the Intellectual History of Interwar and Early Postwar Japan* (forthcoming 2012).



## PREFACE

For most of the twentieth century, the study of religions focused mainly on the history and teachings of religious traditions. Sacred texts, charismatic founders and proponents, holy sites, and so forth constituted the general content for the academic study of religion. Since the 1970s, however, there has been increasing interest among researchers in the religious scenery of the present day. Many excellent studies have been published as a consequence of this shift in perspective and have provided exciting insights into the contemporary religious world. The series of Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion provides a most welcome forum enabling us to present recent work in a thematically concentrated form on the religious situation in Japan.

Multiple monographs and essays dealing with the fascinating religious landscape of contemporary Japan have been published within the last two decades. With his work *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (1991), Ian Reader was a pioneer in this field. A series of important collected volumes have been published more recently, including the *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions* (edited by Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson, 2006). Other important works are *Religions of Japan in Practice* (edited by George Tanabe, 1999) and Robert Ellwood's *Introducing Japanese Religion* (2008).

Although these volumes offer helpful introductions to the Japanese religious landscape they leave many open-ended questions about the actual practice and situation of specific religious traditions and practitioners. When Brill asked us if we had interest in compiling a handbook on religion in contemporary Japan, we found the invitation to be a wonderful opportunity to publish studies devoted to specialized topics and issues and thereby contribute towards a fuller picture of the current situation. The changing religious field in Japan, as in other parts of the world, is characterized by a growing relevance of hybrids and innovations, of new social forms of organization influenced by market forces, of the role of the media including the internet, and of a progression of demand-oriented usage for religious services.

Part 1 of the *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions* offers an introductory essay on Japan's religious contexts and patterns as well as two articles dealing with the questions of Japanese survey data and the problems of applying the term 'religion' to Japan. Part 2 concentrates in

a classical way on the traditions and transformations within Shintō and Buddhism. Part 3 covers New Religions and Social Activism as well as issues concerning the interaction of the State and Religion. Taking into account the changes in the field of religion, part 4 surveys changes associated with Spirituality and Religion in a New Age.

We wish we could have provided more articles on the exciting developments in the sector of New Religions, especially regarding the changes within communities of Buddhist lay practice, the role of religious topoi in entertainment and recreation, as well as the importance of religion in Japanese civil society and the field of internet-based religion. Due to the many existing publications on Aum Shinrikyō we have decided to not include a separate article on this subject.

With this volume we hope to devote increased attention to these important fields of religion in today's Japan. We are very happy about having overcome numerous difficulties thanks to the great commitment of our assistant-editor Elisabeth Socha from the University of Heidelberg. We also would like to thank Tim Graf, also at Heidelberg, who translated and adapted the articles by Shimazono Susumu and Isomae Jun'ichi from Japanese into English. Additional thanks go to Torben Bellinghoff, who contributed to the compilation of literature lists and bibliographies. Finally, we would like to thank James Lewis for his friendly invitation to this volume and also our editors at Brill.

The most important acknowledgement of all goes to this volume's contributors from Japan, North America, and Europe. It is obvious that the book would not exist without the wonderful cooperation and collaboration of the authors who contributed their scholarship. We are deeply grateful for their participation and support. We hope that the following pages will deliver new and useful insights about the dynamic and ever-changing religious scenery of contemporary Japan.

San Francisco and Heidelberg, July 2012  
Inken Prohl and John Nelson

PART I  
ORIENTATIONS





## RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS AND PATTERNS IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

INKEN PROHL AND JOHN NELSON

When looking at the interaction between religion and society, we want to know how the relationship works, how it shapes people's lives and worldviews, and how religious practitioners find meaning that can help them make sense of the complexity around them. The chapters in this book provide richly contextualized analyses of these issues in contemporary Japan. While the topics covered are specific to one nation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the challenges of rapid social change brought on by a mix of domestic and external forces are familiar to most people around the world. As societies and individuals adapt to constantly changing circumstances, we see shifts in religious beliefs, practices, and institutions as they try to remain relevant. These themes help to unify the chapters of this book because they surface (or remain just out of sight) in a majority of discussions about religious practice and expression in contemporary Japanese society.

The scholarly interests represented in this book also point towards the diversity of religious practice in a society frequently described as 'homogeneous'. After Japan's devastating defeat in 1945, a period of occupation by the Allied forces laid the groundwork for the nation's transformation into a stable democracy and future economic powerhouse. The emperor was obliged to renounce his divinity and Shintō was stripped of its status as the *de facto* state religion. Buddhist denominations that had contributed ideological and material support to the patriotic fervor of the war years were contrite but silent, acknowledging their responsibility only recently. Perhaps most importantly, Japan's post-war constitution (1947) guaranteed freedom of religion for individuals as well as ensured that the state could not single-out a particular religion to patronize or promote.

In the questioning that followed a war in which so many people died and so much had been lost, this new sense of religious freedom encouraged individuals to challenge old religious paradigms and choose new affiliations. As a result, a proliferation of religious movements and organizations attracted millions of members. Part of the allure of new religions can be attributed to the sense of community they provided to people uprooted by rapid social changes after the war, especially dislocations

linked to urbanization and an urgent surge of industrialization. New religions created instant communities and social networks promoted by charismatic individuals and housed in sometimes impressively elaborate buildings. As several authors in this volume point out, while Japan's new religions were advertised as helping individuals cope with the challenges they faced living in a new type of society, they also created efficiently hierarchical organizations that advanced both spiritual, political, and economic agendas.

When successful, as in the case of Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, strong internal controls helped structure religious affiliation into self-help methods, employment opportunities, and multi-million member voting blocs leading to the creation of a political party (the Kōmeitō 公明党). But when dysfunctional or corrupt, smaller organizations have bankrolled extremist views of radical personal and social transformation. The most dramatic example has been the Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 cult ('the Supreme Truth of Aum'), established in 1987, which was responsible for a number of crimes and murders. Aum members launched a sensational sarin-gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in the spring of 1995 that killed twelve people and injured over 5,000. As a result of these attacks and the testimony of Aum members during court trials, the Japanese government began instituting more rigorous measures to monitor all religious organizations.

Japan's rise as an economic power should not be seen as the sole force driving religious developments and change. As the first decade of the twenty-first century unravels into a daunting array of economic, environmental, and political challenges, scholars of contemporary religions have their hands full trying to identify the benefits and consequences of globalizing forces on religious activity in Japan. Media headlines may highlight the drama of particular issues—such as religiously-inspired terrorism, dysfunctional families, suicide, or corporate downsizing—yet their underlying causes have been gestating in the hothouse of late modernity since the early 1980s.<sup>1</sup> With these trends playing out in societies around the world, it

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<sup>1</sup> Although a number of authors in this volume refer to the current historical moment as 'postmodern', we find the term problematic when applied to religious activity. Rather than leaving modernity behind, as the prefix 'post' would suggest, there appear to be as many continuities as there are disruptions between the earlier periods of certainty and today's increasingly globalized world. James Beckford points out that the fastest-growing and most dynamic areas of religion are those where "clear doctrines, conservative ethics, tradition-centered lifestyles, and authoritative patterns of leadership are dominant." These conservative movements are still engaged with a rapidly globalizing world because

is not surprising that religious institutions in Japan are also being affected in ways that are uniquely responsive to local conditions.

Many excellent studies have raised awareness of the various transformations taking place in religious organizations worldwide. Driven in part by policies fostering economic liberalization, both religious leaders and lay participants have attempted to devise strategies that respond to and accommodate dramatic social change. New communication technologies, transnational capital flows, security issues, demographic shifts, and identity politics (to name only a few influential forces) contribute to social conditions in which some kinds of religious belief and practice prosper and proliferate, while others are adversely affected. Several of the chapters in this volume examine successes and challenges as individuals and religious organizations in Japan adapt to both subtle and dramatic alterations in the fundamental nature of family, work, communication, spirituality, and religion.

Japanese society and the religions embedded within it have weathered periods of profound change and crisis before, but these disruptions have been overtly political and economic. There is at present a 'crisis of orientation' affecting millions of individuals and a majority of Japan's religious institutions.<sup>2</sup> This situation has resulted from forced compliance with not only rapid industrialization and corporate deregulation but also their bureaucratic, educational, political, and legal support systems. Traditional identities oriented around what were once the foundations of society—family, community, and occupation—have shifted in the allure of opportunities offered by a globalizing world. In a variety of modernizing societies, the grip of class, gender, religion, and region has loosened and thus transformed contemporary consciousness into an ongoing struggle with the questions of "Who am I?" and "What do I want?"<sup>3</sup> While

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they shape their doctrines, ideologies, and institutions in defensive positions as a form of resistance to the relativism of cherished 'truths' required when living in a multi-ethnic and pluralistic world. See Beckford 2003: 201.

<sup>2</sup> We are adapting the phrase 'crisis of orientation' to include far more than just a crisis of consciousness, as originally stated in Sennett 1998: 98.

<sup>3</sup> While the situation described here applies primarily to religious institutions and organizations within liberal democracies in the West, there is ample scholarship on a similar crisis within religion in Thailand. As reported by Michael Parnwell and Martin Seeger (2008: 83ff.), "underlying processes of modernization, development and globalization are most immediate and apparent, and from which influences such as commercialism, materialism, anomie, atomization, acquisitiveness, and disillusionment have mapped the nature and direction of change in Thai religiosity." For more on the theme of social change in the West, see Beck 2002: 6.

customary categories of identity are still influential, they are increasingly negotiable depending on one's education, patterns of consumption, and economic situation. Religious affiliations too are dramatically affected by these shifting parameters.

In thinking about the present moment and how religion is positioned within it, we have to keep in mind that the global dynamics of modernization are "elaborated, made sense of and experienced everywhere in a continual dialogue with local ideas and practices" (Osella and Osella 2000: 260). As a result, today even the son of a poor farmer in Japan's depopulated regions can imagine a very different life for himself. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai reminds us that in addition to the more recognizable aspects of globalization, imagination has also become a tangible social force associated with these trends. It is a powerful form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility (Appadurai 1996: 36).<sup>4</sup> For many Japanese in the postwar period and the twenty-first century, they have imagined creative religious responses to changing cultural values and found meaningful paths into uncharted social and cultural territories. Memorials for pets, new types of household altars unaffiliated with Buddhist denominations, comics conveying religious messages, and many types of foreign 'new age' influences domesticated for local spiritual demand are some of the practices active in contemporary Japan which are relevant to this book. At the same time, this proliferation of options in a pluralistic religious landscape may still lack relevance for individuals who—because of increased education, religious scandals, or a desire to rebel against the authority of family traditions—now hold more secular or anti-religious worldviews. In the next section, let us examine briefly why there can be such diversity of religious concepts and practices and look as well as some of the causal forces behind these views.

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<sup>4</sup> Just as imagination has become a social force extending the possibilities for individual lives, even more so is the range new technologies provide to an individual's imagination and voice. One of the most significant aspects of the current era is the ability of common people to expand their ideas, influence, and political effectiveness through cell phone, internet, and wireless technologies, evidenced by the popular uprisings in the Middle East (2011), massive protests in the U.S. and Europe against wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (2002 and 2003), and the political candidacy and election of U.S. president Barack Obama (2008).

*The Social Context of Religion in Contemporary Japan*

Japan is a particularly significant site to observe how some of the general trends, themes, and processes of late modernity have surfaced through specific incidents in the recent past. Without an awareness of the social and cultural contexts for religious practice, it is challenging in the extreme to 'connect the dots' between domestic realities and the various influences that shape them. Perhaps no other country modernized so quickly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nor inflicted (as well as suffered) such disastrous consequences from a combination of imperial, colonial, and military ambitions. Equally rapid was Japan's recovery from the war and its astonishing transformation into a global economic powerhouse. Despite a prolonged recession that began in 1993 and lasted until 2002, only in 2010 did the country's GNP drop to the third largest in the world (after the U.S. and China). Both the benefits and costs of rapid social change are condensed within several living generations. Some of these social, economic, and political conditions have direct implications for the topic of change within Japan's religious landscape. The situations and incidents noted below can be thought of as a kind of background 'scenery' that sustains a tense cultural atmosphere as religious leaders, visionaries, and entrepreneurs attempt to navigate a shifting and in many ways unfamiliar social terrain.

Building upon David Leheny's account in *Think Global, Fear Local* (2006: 3–46), seven situations beginning in 1993 continue to reverberate through Japanese society and culture: (1) instability within and among Japan's leading political parties; (2) the February 1995 Kobe Hanshin earthquake which claimed over six thousand lives; followed quickly by (3) the religious cult Aum Shinrikyō's gas attack in March on the Tokyo subway system; (4) ongoing restructuring (*risutora* リストラ) of banks and corporations; resulting in (5) marginalized and underemployed older men and younger workers; (6) sabre-rattling by North Korea, as well as its shocking admission that its state agents forcibly abducted Japanese citizens in the 1970s; and (7) the 'ostentatious' sexuality of teenagers but especially that of high school girls and unmarried female office workers. It is necessary to supplement Leheny's observations with (8) an increasingly sensationalized and growing crime rate characterized by shocking murders; (9) cultures of bullying and ostracism in schools and workplaces; and (10) a resurgent nationalism that has jeopardized relations with China as well as stigmatized foreign workers and illegal residents as responsible for much of the recent crime wave.

The March 3, 2011 ‘triple disaster’—where a 9.0 magnitude earthquake, subsequent *tsunami* waves higher than any recorded, and the nuclear reactor meltdowns and release of radiation in Fukushima—was unparalleled as a catastrophe witnessed by a majority of Japanese. Prime Minister at the time, Mr. Kan Naoto, stated that, “In the 65 years after the end of World War II, this is the toughest and the most difficult crisis for Japan” (CNN Wire Staff 2011). With over 20,000 people killed and extensive property loss along Japan’s Tohoku coastline (from the city of Sendai all the way to the northern tip), the initial damage was compounded extensively by clouds of radiation from the Fukushima Daiichi reactors. Three reactors went into full meltdown, creating the largest nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986. (This *Handbook* was being finalized as the disaster occurred, and time did not permit a special chapter devoted to the earthquake and its aftermath.)

Due to extensive video coverage of major aspects of the disaster, it is safe to say that every Japanese old enough to understand an earthquake witnessed the incredible images of communities being inundated and destroyed, corpses being extricated from tangled debris piles, numerous injured and dislocated people being cared for (some after days without aid), as well as aerial video of the plumes of radioactive smoke and gas riding the winds south to Tokyo and beyond. Japanese religious traditions were referenced one day after the *tsunami* by then governor of Tokyo Ishihara Shintarō when he said in a news conference that the disaster was “punishment from heaven [*tenbatsu* 天罰] because the Japanese people have become greedy.”<sup>5</sup> Reaction was swift and accusatory, and Ishihara later apologized for his outrageous remarks.

Religious leaders in the areas hardest hit provided solace to survivors even though their own temples, shrines, and churches were severely damaged and their members directly affected. Of particular concern was the need to conduct funeral rituals in a timely manner, despite the inability to cremate bodies or locate those missing. Buddhist priests from neighboring prefectures willingly gave their time to conduct these memorial services, with some of the dead buried in mass graves. Services were held as well for people whose bodies were never found, a common practice in villages along the coast where fishermen are frequently lost at sea. It remains

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<sup>5</sup> Governor Ishihara says the earthquake is ‘punishment from heaven’ and the tsunami needs to wash away self-interest (of the Japanese people) (*Daishinsai wa tenbatsu, tsunami de gayoku arai otose, Ishihara tochiji* 「大震災は天罰」「津波で我欲洗い落とせ」石原都知事; The Asahi Shinbun Digital 2011).

to be seen, however, whether the triple disaster will serve to nurture religious belief and affiliation along traditional lines, or whether it will motivate new manifestations of a more spiritual orientation, as well as outright expressions of disbelief and atheism.

There are many more issues that could be added to this list of crises within Japanese society keeping policy makers awake at night (women postponing or refusing marriage, the feminization of society,<sup>6</sup> whitewashing historical textbooks, Mongolian wrestlers and organized crime syndicates dominating *sumō* 相撲 wrestling), but it should be obvious that a highly-literate, media-saturated society like Japan leaves an individual few places to hide from discussions about the state of the nation.

It may seem tenuous to link media headlines with a crisis of orientation affecting individual psychology, but two statistical benchmarks indicate there is a real correspondence. The first is Japan's suicide rate which, for the thirteenth year in a row in 2011, totaled over 30,000 deaths. Of these, some 23,472 (or 71.5%) were males.<sup>7</sup> Studies have shown a direct correlation between Japan's long economic recession and a loss of jobs and confidence among middle-aged men, with a resulting rise in suicide rates for this age group.<sup>8</sup> The second statistic pointing to anxiety in society can be seen in the numbers of underemployed workers as corporations seek flexible employees without having to pay benefits or pensions. Temporary workers of all types make up about one-third of the Japanese workforce, up from one-fifth in the last twenty years.<sup>9</sup> Characterized by a series of

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<sup>6</sup> A new term to describe young men who do not fit standard patterns for male behavior is that they are not 'carnivores' but 'herbivores'. Coined in 2006 by author and pop culture columnist Maki Fukasawa, she uses the term in a series of articles on marketing to a younger generation of Japanese men. She sees their self-described characteristics of passivity, weakness, and non-aggressiveness as a result of growing up during Japan's troubled economy in the 1990s. See Neill 2009.

<sup>7</sup> These numbers are taken from the National Police Agency's report on suicides in 2011 (Keisatsuchō 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The first six months of 2009 recorded 17,076 deaths, which caused considerable alarm nationwide as this figure indicated it would be a record-breaking year for suicides. However, the last six months showed a slower pace (Anon. 2009). See also "Jisatsu yobō ni kansuru chōsa kekka hōkokusho 自殺予防に関する調査結果報告書" (A Report on Survey Results Regarding Suicide Prevention), in Somushō Gyōsei Hyōkakyoku 2005, as well as "Jisatsu kyūzō no haikai 自殺急増の背景" (The Setting for a Sudden Increase in Suicides) by Yamada Yasuo in the October 2006 issue of *Chūō Kōron*, part of a special feature, "Kokoro o yamu sanjūdai," on being mentally unstable in one's 30s.

<sup>9</sup> While the number of *frītaa* フリーター (from the English word 'free' and the German 'arbeiter') seems to have peaked in 2003 at 2,300,000 workers, it remained over 1,780,000 into 2010. These statistics are taken from a report issued by the *Kōsei Rōdōshō* 厚生労働省 (Ministry of Labor and Public Welfare) (see Honkawa Yutaka). Psychological profiles

short-term jobs and ambiguous social status, workers also have issues of diminished self-esteem. These conditions represent a significant change from what is considered a 'proper' life course not only for Japanese males but for women as well (Kelly and White 2006: 72). A term currently in vogue is to call the contemporary situation a 'society of disparities' (*kakusa shakai* 格差社会).

For each positive aspect of the late modern period—a more cosmopolitan worldview that includes human rights, a greater sense of relativity about religious and ethnic identities, increased exposure to other cultures and ideas, more chances for social mobility—there are accompanying dilemmas that often translate into mental, spiritual, or physical problems. A 2008 Cabinet Ministry poll of over 100,000 men and women throughout the country reflected high levels of uncertainty and anxiety about 'everyday life' in over 70% of responses (Kyodo 2008). These results reflect a key characteristic of globalization that

generates anxiety because it places people within the reach of forces which are, or seem to be, outside the range of conventional forms of political control. Along with the sense of powerlessness comes the cognitive and emotional anxiety of conventional frames of reference losing their relevance, without new, hospitable and welcoming images being available. Political conventions, analytical frameworks, mental habits, all are under pressure. (Pieterse 1979: 79)

Religion has frequently provided solace and meaning to people in confusing times. Through worldviews and rituals, religion addresses feelings of anxiety and then prescribes solutions to ease the predicament at hand. From the perspective of religious practitioners, these resolutions may provide comfort, community, and a feeling of control where formerly there was disorder. There is no doubt that people throughout the centuries have benefited in positive ways from religiously-inspired explanations and practices, although it must also be said that religious leaders have often capitalized on moments of crisis as a way to ensure an authoritative role for themselves. The explosive growth of Christianity in Russia following the end of communism or Japan's own postwar 'rush hour of the gods' immediately after World War II are only two examples of this worldwide phenomenon (MacFarland 1967).

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of this cohort note low self-esteem, few personal friends but many casual acquaintances via cell-phone and website networks, a profound lack of trust in any institutionally-based authority, reliance on virtual or cyber worlds for entertainment rather than seeing real people, and considerable anxiety about the diminishing possibility of an actual career.



And yet, contemporary Japan seems to be an exception to this model. Although Japan has weathered over fifteen years of economic deflation and recession (at the time of this publication), as well as pervasive unease about the future, these conditions have not translated into increased membership for existing religious organizations. While many programs, activities and notions of religion in contemporary Japan offer ways to deal with rapid social change they also provide various techniques of cultivating, optimizing, refreshing and even amusing the 'self'. The result is a fairly stable yet also flexible religious field in constant transformation. New groups and organizations surface regularly—a prime example being Shinnyoen 真如苑—but they rely heavily on the charisma of a founder interpreting existing themes in new and enticing ways. However, it is frequently the case that a new religious movement generally stumbles in broadening their appeal to the next generation of members. Even religious phenomena like Sōka Gakkai that experienced explosive growth in the 1960s and 1970s now find themselves treading water. Levi McLaughlin's chapter in this volume shows that the children of current members have different spiritual priorities and cultural values than their parents, and that Gakkai stalwarts have been unable to recruit a steady flow of new members.

Data about membership in Japan's major religions supplied to the Agency of Cultural Affairs by religious organizations themselves would seem to point to stable affiliations. One reads there are some 96 million Buddhists and 106 million for Shintō, but the total equals a number that is two-thirds larger than Japan's current population of 120 million! Far more reliable is data from the Japanese General Social Surveys of 2000–2003, and 2005, administered by the Osaka University of Commerce as probability samples in all forty-seven prefectures. Michael Roemer's chapter shows how these surveys of over 12,470 individuals provide a much more accurate picture of religious affiliation and belief. For example, when asked whether they believed in a religion, around 34% of respondents said they did. But of this number, some 23% indicated their belief was based on customary affiliations between their household and a Buddhist temple. That leaves 11% of the total sample who say they have a religion in which they personally believe.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Although the question is slightly different and asks not about belief but "the importance of religion in your life," a U.S. survey in 2009 revealed that 45% of respondents aged 19–29 years old answered in the affirmative. 59% of those between 30 and 65 said religion was important. These high response rates would indicate that religion remains relevant for many Americans as they navigate some of the same economic and social issues related to

Part of the reason for this slow-to-no growth is that religions in general, and traditional Japanese religious institutions in particular, are perceived by many as promoting worldviews that are out-of-touch with contemporary issues. For example, many Buddhist priests are considered to be little more than ritual specialists who conduct profitable funerals and memorial services for their own enrichment and do next to nothing to make society better. There are also lingering, largely negative associations affecting the way the informed public thinks about religion that stem from Aum Shinrikyō cult's deadly sarin-gas attacks in 1995. During a five year period after the Aum attacks, a multi-year survey from 1995–2001 among over 3,500 university students nationwide indicated more than half found religion 'suspicious' with nearly 80% holding negative opinions about religion in general (Inoue 2007). Thus, any religious organization, whether Buddhist temple, Shintō shrine, Christian church, or hybrid new religion that appears to be proselytizing in an aggressive fashion—even if only trying to raise awareness about a pressing social problem—now faces considerable skepticism from the general public. At the same time, however, the declining participation in traditional religious institutions is compensated by a vibrant field of 'spiritualities', religiously-inspired books on self-help and healing (see Gebhardt this volume), and goods and services for entertainment, such as manga, anime, and TV. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether these many options belong to the sphere of religion or amusement and leisure.

Until very recently, traditional religious institutions in Japan and elsewhere around the globe exercised considerable clout within social and political orders. Most people were so deeply embedded within their cultures that they had neither the means, education, nor luxury to think about the 'truth' of these messages. But the current era is acknowledged by many scholars and scientists as one of those vital turning points in human civilization and history. Conventional values, cultural and ethnic identities, political affiliations, morality, social structures—all of which have helped to keep dominant religious institutions stable—are being deconstructed and decentered as never before. New institutional patterns and beliefs have already emerged, including reactionary ones like Aum Shinrikyō or the God's Light Society that acknowledge but then choose to resist these global trends.

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global market forces. See the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's 2010 report titled, "Religion among the Millennials" (POLL 2010).

Many traditional religious institutions that have been around for centuries (if not millennia) in countries like Japan, China, or Thailand face the future with misgivings and mixed expectations, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters by Scheid and Borup. Religious institutions find themselves in unfamiliar territory as they must now accommodate the society in which they function rather than society passively accepting religious claims about the nature of reality. What has worked in the past to generate legitimacy, such as wide-spread belief in karmic retribution or the allure of paradise in a Pure Land heaven, is no guarantee of future success.

*Consistent Themes in Contemporary Japanese Religions*

There are, however, a number of characteristics related to religious practice in Japan that appear to bridge historical eras and generations, and which remain relevant to a study of contemporary society and religion. Over the five centuries since Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation in Germany, most Westerners have gradually come to think of religion as a matter of personal belief, based on individual experience and needs. We often ask in casual conversation, “So what’s your religion?” or “What do you believe in?” and usually respond with equal respect to almost any answer (short of Satanism, animal sacrifice, or bodily mutilation). After all, we think belief is a personal matter, and a mature, secular democracy is supposed to honor every citizen’s right to freedom of religion.

Compare this perspective with the attitude of a typical Japanese, whose experience with religion has a degree of freedom (and lack of coercion) hard to imagine for individuals raised in predominantly monotheistic traditions. In a family that participates in major Buddhist holidays, holds memorial rites for their ancestors, and supports a local temple financially, the trappings of religion appear obvious at first glance. And yet, family members may know very little about the doctrines of the denomination, may rarely (if ever) attend events at the temple, and may never have spoken with the temple priest about religious matters not connected to ancestral veneration.

These same individuals might also be parishioners of a local Shintō shrine. After ringing a bell at a Buddhist temple late on the evening of December 31, a typical Japanese finds it quite natural to visit a shrine in the first minutes of the new year or the next day. But that’s not all. She regularly consults horoscopes (in the newspaper and online) and may

occasionally, ‘just for fun’, have her palm read. Over the coming year the same person will probably participate in a variety of both Buddhist and seasonal festivals, such as *obon* お盆, when the spirits of the departed are honored. And at year’s end, before the bell-ringing and shrine-visiting, she may very well enjoy some kind of Christmas-related activity. Despite all these activities, it is likely she would assert that she is most certainly not ‘religious’.

In fact, the Japanese language had no equivalent to the word ‘religion’ until the 1880s, when, as part of a government modernization campaign, the characters for ‘teachings’ (*kyō* 教) and ‘sect’ (*shū* 宗) were combined to form *shūkyō* 宗教, the term used for ‘religion’. The lack of a specific ‘religion’, however, does not necessarily mean a lack of religious belief, feelings, or orientation (Pye 2004). Japan has no fewer than seven major and sixteen minor schools of Buddhism and countless ‘new religions’, most of them founded in the wake of modernization campaigns. It is also common to read that there are more than 80,000 different *kami* 神—the spirits associated with Shintō which are thought to come from natural phenomena, powerful individuals, and specific sacred places. So it is not surprising that a Japanese person might feel confused when asked whether they adhere to the teachings of *one particular* religious community. As should be apparent by now, most Japanese people have no trouble tolerating doctrinal diversity at the popular level.

It is important to emphasize that whether in historical or contemporary Japan, religious belief generally takes a back seat to religious activity. Taking some kind of action—if only to purchase an amulet from a Shintō shrine or a Buddhist temple, or perhaps read a best-selling book on spiritual power—may significantly reduce anxiety about an upcoming examination, a relationship problem, or a health condition. There are, of course, dedicated individuals who pursue systematic study of religious texts, teachings, and so on, but they are a minority within the ways religion functions in contemporary Japan.

A traditional approach to the study of Japanese religions emphasizes important doctrines, institutions, historical incidents, and charismatic leaders associated with each of the three major traditions—Buddhism, Shintō, and neo-Confucianism—as well as a minor yet still influential religion, Christianity. However, recent scholarship has questioned the validity of this approach. Scholars now generally agree that for much of Japanese history, these grand traditions—one of which, Shintō, did not exist in its current form until the mid-to-late nineteenth century—were neither discrete nor autonomous. In fact, with their specific doctrines and

ritual practices, these religious institutions have been subordinate to the following five characteristics for more than a thousand years: this-worldly benefits, a marketplace of competing religious possibilities, reciprocal relationships between humans and spiritual agents, increasing individualization, and religious innovation. Let us briefly take a look at each one.

### *Benefits in this World*

Central to most religious traditions in Japan, whether centuries-old or recently arrived, is the pragmatic desire to secure various benefits (*riyaku* 利益), either in this world or the next. It usually matters little to the average person whether a particular shrine is devoted to the Buddha or to a local *kami*. What matters is the efficacy of the spiritual agent in helping the petitioner deal with a particular situation such as healing an illness, winning a confrontation, starting a new business, passing an examination, finding a marriage partner, or conceiving a child. A person may visit both temples and shrines, engage priests to perform rituals, make regular offerings, or even seek alternative forms of religious practice until the desired outcome is obtained—or until there is recognition that those efforts have failed. At this point, he or she may well have little to do with any organized religion until the next problem arises.

### *Diversity in the Religious Landscape*

Another theme characterizing religions in Japan is an amazing diversity of beliefs and practices. To individuals who self-identify as Christians, Jews, or Muslims, the kind of benefit-driven religious behaviour described above may be interpreted as little more than a privileging of selfish concerns above genuine religious commitment. Where are the moral codes, the divine commandments, or the sacred texts that are supposed to guide all aspects of life? Where is the congregation of fellow believers with whom the faithful can share their sorrows and joys? How is it possible for an individual to draw from multiple religious traditions without violating at least some basic religious or moral principles? An answer can be found in the explanation of one Shintō priest to a group of young people after a coming-of-age ritual:

We Japanese like to have choices. Why should we have brand-name loyalty to only one religious approach to life's problems when, thanks to the wisdom and tolerance of Japanese religious culture, we can access a variety of

solutions? Sometimes I feel sorry for Westerners who see the world from only one religious perspective.

Instead of thinking of religions in contemporary Japan following Western or monotheistic models, imagine them as gathered in a marketplace where consumers decide which 'shops' to patronize on the basis of cost, product availability, and benefits received. Variables of time, place, and occasion also enter into consumers' calculations (Nakamaki 1994). Thus, a religious 'product' appropriate for the end of summer—for example, a ritual to protect the ripening rice crop from insects, typhoons, or fire—is not the same ritual required to protect one's business from financial trouble or one's soul from a Buddhist version of hell. Just as consumers go to different stores, depending on the kinds of goods they need to buy, so Japan's religious consumers utilize diverse traditions that offer what they consider to be appropriate assistance for the situation at hand.

### *Reciprocity*

A person may search for the right religious 'product' or service, but once a decision is made, they enter into a reciprocal relationship that entails certain obligations and expectations. In exchange for tangible assistance from a spiritual agent—whether kami, deity, bodhisattva, or buddha—one must show gratitude not only by performing various formal rituals but by treating that agent with special respect. Japanese literature (and more recently, the internet) is full of cautionary stories in which an ungrateful or arrogant person who has offended one or more of the deities ends up chastened and contrite. Looking a little further, there are also tales where ungrateful or negligent people become possessed, insane, or their soul consigned to the worst regions of hell.

### *Individualization*

The restructuring process of late modernity has coincided with, and contributed significantly to, the individualization of religious practice. The communities that once supported temples financially are slowly being eroded by demographic shifts and greater personal choice regarding religious affiliation. James Sprickard (2006: 177) has identified several key characteristics of religious restructuring in general that parallel some of the features of the situation in Japan. First, there is the crafting of a

custom-made religious life (individualization) that is no longer dominated by loyalty to a particular tradition. People are no longer coerced or socialized to follow exclusively the 'institutional package' of their religious upbringing and may look elsewhere for ideas, practices, or communities that better align with their life situation and the evolution of their beliefs.

Next, Sprickard calls this process of selection 'religion á la carte', resulting in a 'bricolage' of ideas and practices which diverge from doctrines set forth by a religious organization. This assertion of personal agency creates a third feature, what he calls 'religious localism' (2006: 176). Individual interests and goals are given greater significance than directions from distant authorities or even local religious leaders. Since the marketplace has become the dominant paradigm for how consumer-driven societies organize themselves, it is no surprise that individuals try to maximize their benefits while managing carefully their investments of time, money, and effort.

### *Innovation*

To be sure, there have always been individuals who take advantage of religious traditions for personal financial gain. Through a mix of compelling information, marketing skills, and a knowledge of consumer preferences and concerns, they capitalize on cultural trends by introducing new ideas that often find a receptive clientele. Traditionalists may scoff at these individuals and consider their affairs to be little more than aberrations, but innovations often introduce products or services that are much more in tune with prevailing popular attitudes and a changing society than mainstream religious organizations realize. The analogy is a common one, but religious entrepreneurs are like nimble sailing ships able to adjust to both dramatic and subtle shifts in climate conditions. Large religious organizations, on the other hand, resemble huge ocean-going freighters that require all hands at their stations when trying to alter course or avoid sudden obstacles. They tend to be less concerned with the cultural climate because they think their size insulates them from surface fluctuations affecting smaller vessels.

The democratization of technology and a proliferation of online information about temples, denominations, shrines, churches, and religious teachings and services on the internet and through guide books and tourism has forced religious leaders to adapt. Their websites must be distinctive in some way so as to stand out and, if not attract attention, then at

least not squander it. They know that potential visitors seeking a particular benefit or service now have the ability to compare religious traditions and 'service-providers' without ever leaving their home. In most cases, they can also view information about transportation access, an institution's history and purpose, its art and landscaping, and the benefits (*goriyaku* 御利益) attributed to it. Japan's new religions (such as Sōka Gakkai, Shinnyoen, or Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会) were especially quick to capitalize on the internet to attract the attention of people seeking community based on shared interests rather than residential proximity or family obligations.

The internet has also diminished the ability of religious authorities to censure what they see as interlopers elbowing for position in a marketplace that often rewards innovation and advertising appeal over substance and tradition. Private companies offering cut-rate prices on Buddhist posthumous names, grave stones and sites, memorial services, interment options, and memorials for pets have sprung up in the last fifteen years, with a number of shady practices stealing market share away from more traditional institutions. For example, frugal-minded consumers can now purchase, for a cut-rate price, a posthumous Buddhist name from an internet site not affiliated with any major denomination.<sup>11</sup>

### *Religions in Transition*

Religious institutions in Japan have entered a new and destabilizing period where conventional patterns of belief and practice are no longer guarantees of survival. Because of increased education, the relativization of religious claims to truth, and skeptical attitudes about religion in general—all characteristics of late modernity and contributing factors

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<sup>11</sup> Starting as a tiny company in 2007, Rev. Hayashi Kazuma came to the Tokyo area because he was the second son of a temple priest in rural Gunma prefecture and therefore had little chance to assume the role of head priest. Thanks almost entirely to the internet—and building upon his knowledge about individuals living in cities without strong religious ties—he has carved out a viable and relatively inexpensive alternative to the costly temple and mortuary company (*sōgiya* 葬儀社) monopoly on funerals and posthumous names. The company sends free-lance Buddhist priests to officiate at funerals and memorials, cutting out the temple and mortuary network. In a rather ironic twist of fate, he rocketed to nationwide attention thanks to a brief mention in a rather sensationalistic 2008 *New York Times* article titled, "In Japan, Buddhism May be Dying Out." On his website, *obosan.com* (*obōsan* お坊さん means 'priest'), a number of profiles broadcast on leading media channels serve as testament to his entrepreneurial spirit. As he says in one of these reports, he feels justified to offer this service because it meets a very real spiritual need that also happens to be affordable.



to a more experimental approach to religion—long-standing notions of divine retribution and karmic punishment have ceased to intimidate the general public (although smaller organizations such as Agonshū 阿含宗 still leverage these traditions). Once the coercive dimension of religion loses its grip on popular imagination, religious innovators use every tool at their disposal to craft novel approaches, beliefs, and products that can be displayed and circulate in a kind of public commons (created by the internet or other media) with little concern for stirring up the indignation of either deities or religious authorities. Criticism may occur, of course, but the market is generally indifferent to ideology and rewards business plans that respond to consumer preferences.

Ancient shrines and temples still attract many visitors, but most are interested in the history, art, and natural settings embodied by these old institutions rather than their reputation as providers of religious benefits (*riyaku*). Recent years have seen a high interest in Buddhist statues (a ‘Buddhist statue boom’ or *butsuzō būmu* 仏像ブーム) displayed in national museums and for special showings outside a temple’s traditional pattern for viewing their sacred images (a custom known as *gokaichō* ご開帳). And yet, membership numbers are dropping at a majority of Buddhist temples all around Japan. As a result, a number of younger Buddhist priests are trying to engage more directly with the problems of society, offering community services, providing sanctuary for victims of domestic violence, and working to protect the environment against unnecessary development (see the chapter by Watts and Okano in this volume). In urban areas, local festivals mounted by Shintō shrines continue to attract broad-based participation, especially among women who were barred for generations simply because of their gender. In many rural areas, however, it is becoming difficult to find enough people to carry the portable shrine. Meanwhile, new religions continue to lure individuals away from traditional religions based on the strength of savvy public relations, charismatic leaders, and the social support offered by a community of like-minded practitioners.

As emphasized throughout this opening discussion, there is an increasing tendency in Japan for individuals to exercise freedom of choice and move away from traditional religious affiliations, especially from the financial demands they impose. It is predicted that, as Japan’s baby-boomers age and pass away, their funeral rituals will become less identifiably Buddhist and more like the eclectic services typical of North America and Europe. Subsequent generations—what westerners would call Generation X (born between 1962 and 1983) and everyone after that—will further

reshape the spiritual and religious heritage of Japan in ways that will continue to privilege the individual over the institution. It is certainly the case today that while young people are distrustful of organized religion in general, partly because of a series of financial scandals and the Aum terror attack, many still seem interested in personalized spiritual pursuits. Books related to the occult, fortune-telling, and the spirit world always sell well (as Gebhardt outlines in her chapter). It is a *cliché* still used by the Japanese that they “turn to the gods in times of trouble” (*kurushii toki no kamidanomi* 苦しい時の神頼み) but it is far more likely they do so not solely because of crisis or difficulties but because of personal interests, curiosities, and cultural trends. When they turn to religious or spiritual pursuits, they increasingly do so on their own terms, not those imposed by religious institutions either new or ancient. Religion in contemporary Japan will, as new generations gain prominence in society, further modulate into yet another lifestyle-enhancing resource: one that can assist individuals in navigating simultaneously the challenges of both global and local conditions.

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# JAPANESE SURVEY DATA ON RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY\*

MICHAEL K. ROEMER

## *Introduction*

For the most part, studies of Japanese religions and religious practices, experiences, and beliefs rely on qualitative research methods. Ethnographic (e.g., in-depth interviews and participant observation) and historiographic (e.g., diachronic) methods dominate the field, and quantitative research from surveys is rare. One important reason for this trend is that survey data in Japan have been characterized by several serious problems. Namely, public access to survey data has been limited or restricted, few surveys include religion questions, and many studies are limited to exclusive samples (e.g., community samples or samples of certain socio-demographic groups only). There are also questions of validity. Perhaps the most glaring examples are the reports from the Agency of Cultural Affairs that more than 1.5 times the total Japanese population are claimed as 'religious affiliates'. As discussed below, there are certain reasons to doubt the accuracy of these reports, especially because they contradict most ethnographic studies.

Another concern is that in the past, the few studies that included questions about religiosity tended to rely on religious affiliation or attendance questions only, or they emphasized God- and belief-centered models from Abrahamic religions (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). Such question

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\* This study uses data from the Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS), which are designed and carried out at the Institute of Regional Studies at Osaka University of Commerce in collaboration with the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo under the direction of Ichiro Tanioka, Michio Nitta, Hiroki Sato and Noriko Iwai with Project Manager, Minae Osawa. The project is financially assisted by Gakujutsu Frontier Grant from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for 1999–2005 academic years, and the datasets are compiled with cooperation from the SSJ Data Archive, Information Center for Social Science Research on Japan, Institute of Social Science, the University of Tokyo. I am grateful to Robert Kisala for allowing me access to the AVS data and to Jersey Liang and his colleagues at the University of Michigan and the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology for providing me with access to the 2002 NSJE data before it became publicly available.

types are characterized by monotheistic, exclusive religious beliefs, texts, and practices and they confound our ability to form accurate interpretations of religiosity in Japan based on quantitative analyses. As Isomae argues in this volume such important issues are not limited to survey research, however.

The main objectives of this chapter are: (1) to report descriptive statistics from religion questions on surveys dating from 2000; (2) to address issues of reliability and validity in these surveys; and (3) to discuss the limitations and promising new research directions when using this kind of data for the study of Japanese religions in the twenty-first century. This chapter focuses on descriptive analyses of eight individual-level survey datasets, which will be described in more detail in a moment. By reporting simple statistics, we are able to compare directly findings from multiple surveys at one time, allowing for an in-depth assessment of psychometric properties (i.e., reliability and validity). This is an essential step if we are to continue using any of these data. The present study also aims to serve as a single source for a variety of statistical information concerning contemporary Japanese religiosity. It is imperative for readers to recognize, however, that these data—like all data—must be read cautiously. They are best understood in combination with qualitative sources, and it is important to recognize that no single measure can adequately describe ‘religion’ in Japan or elsewhere.

Survey data have the advantage of revealing social trends that can be generalized across a society or among certain people within a society. Statistical analyses can also be useful in identifying significant relationships between social phenomena that can be used to confirm or repudiate studies that use much smaller samples or are limited by regional or socio-demographic characteristics. On the other hand, survey data are bound by questions on a survey that might be limited in their scope, inappropriate, or invalid. For these reasons, I promote the use of these and other datasets as useful only so far as they can help fill gaps that other research methodologies might be weaker in, or as far as they can reveal general trends in a society, such as common beliefs, practices, or attitudes. By combining methodological approaches with multiple sources of data, we are able to understand more comprehensively organized religions and personal religiosity in contemporary Japan.

This chapter begins with an overview of the data and methods used. Following that is a discussion of the main findings of this study, including multiple measures of (1) religious identification; (2) general religious

beliefs, opinions, and attitudes; (3) beliefs and attitudes concerning *kami* 神 (briefly and typically, Shintō gods, deities, or spirits), *hotoke* 仏 (ancestors/buddhas), and other superempirical<sup>1</sup> beings or forces; (4) rituals and religious activities and attitudes, and (5) ownership of household altars, frequency of offerings or rites made at these altars, and who is being thought of during these rituals. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the benefits and problems concerning the use of survey data in the study of Japanese religiosity, and I address some possible solutions to these problems.

It is clear that religion is a multidimensional construct and characterizing Japanese religiosity in English and from a Western perspective can be problematic. This study acknowledges these complications by describing some of the erroneous assumptions that may stem from survey data. On the other hand, we should not discount all survey data completely. From these datasets, for example, several consistent and important patterns emerge. First, identification with, participation in, and trust in or support of religious organizations is low. Next, it appears that few Japanese maintain beliefs in religious phenomena such as an afterlife, heaven, hell, and so forth. Third, most Japanese seem to accept the idea of some kind of ‘life force’ or power in Nature but are less likely to commit to the idea and efficacy of *kami* or *hotoke*. Finally, household rituals are some of the only rites that are somewhat common (regardless of self-identified religious affiliation), and it appears that much more than *hotoke* or *kami* are being thought about at household altars. This study is a critical examination of the use of multiple measures in survey data for the purpose of interpreting contemporary Japanese religiosity.

### *Data and Methods*

In this chapter I include eight international, national, and community datasets that were conducted in 2000 or thereafter. Table 1 provides a general overview of the eight datasets cited. These surveys were chosen because they are publicly available for free or may be accessed with permission from the principal investigators. The surveys are also limited to

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<sup>1</sup> Replacing the frequently used term ‘supernatural’ with ‘superempirical’ acknowledges the presence of the ‘unseen order’, or gods, deities, and spirits that reside *within* nature—as is the case in Japan (see Smith 2003: 98).

those that may be accessed at the individual-level,<sup>2</sup> allowing for descriptive research such as this (e.g., percentages and basic descriptions) or multivariate analysis that examines statistical associations between different religious measures and other social behaviors, opinions, and attitudes. Though this list of surveys is not exhaustive, it provides a range of the data available for scholars and students of Japanese religions.

As a reference, examples of somewhat recent studies that have used these and other survey datasets—consisting of mostly community or convenience samples—for descriptive analyses of one or more religious dimension include Covell 2005; Davis 1992; Hardacre 2002; Inoue 2003; Ishii 1996, 2004; Iwai 2008; Kaneko 1990; Kawano 2005; Kimura 2002, 2003; Mullins, Shimazono, and Swanson 1993; Nelson 1996; Okada 1994; and Stark, Hamberg, and Miller 2005. The few studies that have used survey data for multivariate regression analyses include Krause et al. 1999, 2002, 2010; Matsutani 2004; Miller 1992a, 1992b, 1995, 1998, 2000; Miller and Stark 2002; Roemer 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011; Sasaki and Suzuki 1987; and Tagaya et al. 2000.

Table 1 presents the names of the studies, the years of data collection, the acronyms I use in the text, sample sizes, age ranges and mean ages, percentage of women, the number of religion questions included in this study, whether the sample is international, national, or community-based, and the access locations for each dataset. For example, based on this table we can see that the Asia Europe Survey (ASES) was conducted in 2001 and included a sample of 1,129 Japanese, with ages ranging from 18–79 years old, and the mean age was 48.97. Of this total, 52.44% were female. I used five religion variables from this study (religious affiliation, concerns about religious conflicts, government responses to religious conflict, and attendance at religious services), and the last two columns reveal that this survey was international and that the data can be accessed from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Readers are advised to refer back to this table to put each statistic into perspective based on the size and composition of the dataset referenced.

There are a few exceptions in this table worth mentioning, such as the fact that the number of questions varies per year in multi-year surveys

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<sup>2</sup> These criteria excluded other datasets such as the International Social Survey Programme because the most recent accessible version with religion questions was in 1998 and the 2003 Japanese Character Study because it is not available at the individual-level.



Table 1. Survey characteristics

	N (Japanese)	Age Range/ Mean	Percentage Female	# Religion Variables	Int'l, Nat'l, Cmmnty	Access
Asia Europe Survey 2001 (ASES)	1,129	18–79/ 48.97	52.44%	5	I	ICPSR (icpsr.umich.edu)
AsiaBarometer 2003, 2004, 2006 (AB)	891	20–69/ NA	52.63%	17*	I	asiabarometer.org ICPSR (2003–4)
Asian Values Survey 2001 (AVS)	1,000	18–75/ 44	50.10%	35	N	Available with permission from Nanzan University
East Asia Value Survey 2002 (EAVS)	787	Not available	Not available	6	I	ism.ac.jp/~yoshino/ea/ japan/index_e.html
Health & Faith Survey 2007 (H&F)	333	23–94/ 50.52	56.95%	24	C	Available upon request from author
Japanese General Social Surveys 2000–2003, 2005 (JGSS)	14,322	20–89/ 53.12	54.76%	4*	N	ICPSR (icpsr.umich.edu)
National Survey of Japanese Elderly 2002 (NSJE)	2,825	56–99/ 80.52	57.95%	8	N	ICPSR (icpsr.umich.edu)
World Values Survey 2000, 2005 (WVS)	2,458	18–86/ 47.45	54.70%	30*	I	worldvaluessurvey.org

\* Number of questions varies per year; total for all years listed.

Age range/mean and percentage female are averaged for multiple years in the AB, JGSS, and WVS data.

Sample size for AB is averaged for the three years of data.

ICPSR is the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, a digital storehouse of data from around the world. Membership is free.

Percentages for the H&F are weighted to better reflect the general population.

such as the AsiaBarometer (AB), the Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS), and the World Values Survey (WVS). Sample sizes for datasets that include multiple waves of data are combined and reported, and statistics are averaged. In all tables, the findings for the Health and Faith (H&F) survey are weighted. This is a survey I designed and administered (for survey details see Roemer 2010b and 2012), and these weights are based on the actual sex ratio and age ranges (increments of five years from 20 to 80 and older) for Kyoto Prefecture in 2005 (actual statistics from Statistics Bureau 2007: 37, 50–51). The weighted variables more accurately reflect

the true population and improve our ability to generalize the results of a, comparatively, smaller sample.

All eight datasets included a strategic random sample of Japanese adults. The national and international surveys were randomized based on stratified multistage sampling from throughout Japan (i.e., stratifications of population by region and by population sizes of cities/districts). The H&F data came from a probability sample of Japanese households listed in the May 2007 Kyoto Prefecture phonebooks. The eight surveys were conducted with face-to-face interviews, self-administered mail surveys (H&F), or a combination of the two (JGSS).

### *Tracking Japanese Religiosity in Statistics*

The term ‘religiosity’ can describe a number of religious characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Such characteristics may or may not be associated with a specific religious tradition, such as Buddhism or Shintō, or they may apply to multiple religions simultaneously. I apply the term here to include communication with, reverence to, or offerings for *kami*, ancestors, buddhas, or other superempirical beings. Religiosity may also be characterized by ritual behaviors that are distinct from daily actions because of their context (e.g., offering food to one’s ancestors versus offering a gift to a friend), location (e.g., a sacred site such as a shrine or temple versus an office), or the objects of attention (e.g., bowing at a household altar versus bowing to a co-worker). Thus, religiosity is used here as a broad term to encompass a number of rites, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes and is not exclusively tied to organized religions.

Concerning religious identification, for decades scholars have relied upon the Agency for Cultural Affairs to get a sense of how many Japanese could be identified as ‘adherents’ of a religion. As Figure 1 illustrates, these data indicate a highly disproportionate number of ‘religious adherents’ in comparison to the total population—the number of adherents has reached nearly twice the total population. The main problem with these figures is that they are reported by religious organizations that are officially registered with and recognized by the government. They do not reflect *individual* adherence levels (cf. Tamaru and Reid 1996). In other words, it is highly plausible that a Japanese citizen could *be claimed by* the Buddhist temple where her ancestors are buried and simultaneously *be reported as* ‘Shintō’ by a local shrine while she does not personally

identify with either of those organizations. Further, as Robert Kisala has noted, these data may be ‘misleading’ because the survey process lacks a single definition of membership (2006: 11). Astley (2006: 97–98) discusses the difficulty of assessing percentages of new religions in Japan based on these data, citing such problems as distinguishing between religions that could also be identified as Buddhist or Shintō, weak laws for identifying religious organizations, the tremendous variety of new religions—many with few members, and affiliation with more than one religion at a time.

These figures are also troublesome because they contradict qualitative studies, whose informants more often than not identify as ‘not religious’ (*mushūkyō* 無宗教, see e.g., Kawano 2005; Nelson 1996; Reader 1991). What these data lack most is a sense of how Japanese *individuals* identify themselves (see also Roemer 2009, 2010a). As the findings below reveal, there are a number of concerns with relying solely on these data when exploring religious identification and religious adherence in Japan.

Table 2 is the first of three tables that addresses religious identification using different sources of data. The frequencies in Table 2 come from all eight surveys, and indicate that, on average, less than 50% of the populations surveyed admitted to belonging to a religious institution. The range across datasets is substantial, though. For example, only 24.40% claimed a religion in the EAVS (the lowest frequency), and in the H&F 80.55%

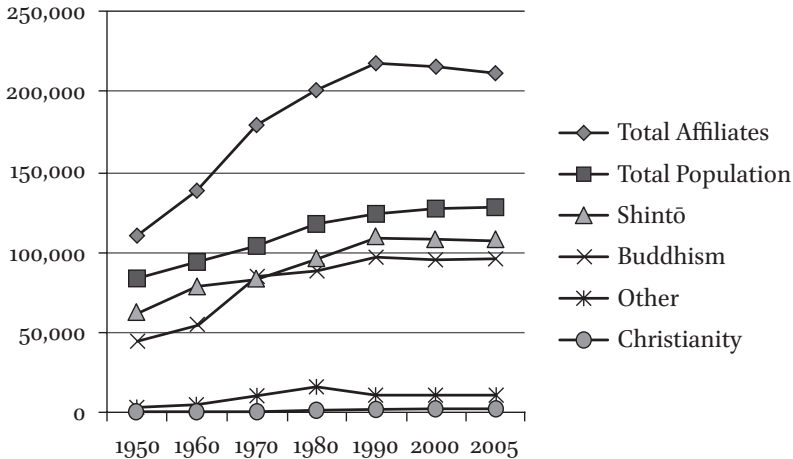


Figure 1. Religious adherents in Japan (1950–2005) (Source: Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2008)

Table 2. Religious identification I—religious affiliation

	TOTAL	N	% Buddhist	N
AB	30.35%	891	19.20%	891
ASES	55.33%	1126	51.15%	1126
AVS	27.90%	1000	18.09%	984
EAVS	24.40%	787	20.50%	192
H&F	80.55%	311.29	34.99%	317.10
JGSS	33.81%	12,471	21.82%	13,968
NSJE	—	—	48.35%	2825
WVS	48.65%*	2458	33.0%	2458

Percentages for the AB are approximations based on reports from their web site ([asiabarometer.org](http://asiabarometer.org)); they are averaged for the three years of data.

Total not available for NSJE data based on data accessed.

\* In response to a different question concerning groups one 'belongs to,' only 10.60% chose religious organization in 2000 (question not asked in 2005).

Percentages for the H&F are weighted.

reported having a religion or religious sect they believe in (*shinkō shite iru shūkyō/shūha* 信仰している宗教・宗派).<sup>3</sup> Overall, the average for these data is 42.99% (or, 39.21% if we drop the highest and lowest frequencies, or 'outliers'). This table also shows that, of those who claim a religion, most are Buddhist. The percentages are based on the total samples surveyed unless otherwise specified (see EAVS, H&F, and JGSS).

In comparison with Figure 1, far fewer Japanese report religious affiliation than are reported by religious institutions in the Agency of Cultural Affairs' data. Also, Buddhism—not Shintō—is the most commonly selected affiliation. Indeed, as the next table (Table 3) reveals very few Japanese personally affiliate themselves with Shintō.

Table 3 reports religious affiliation exclusively from the Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS). Elsewhere (Roemer 2009), I have used these data to examine some of the theoretical explanations for religious affiliation in Japan. In that article, I also discussed some of the drawbacks of this

<sup>3</sup> It is not clear why such a high percentage of respondents reported having a religion they believe in personally (46.25%) or a household religion that they do not practice (38.44%) for the H&F sample. The survey population was limited to Kyoto Prefecture residents, and it is possible that people from this region are more likely to belong to a religion (though Kimura (2003: 154) found very little difference for Personal religious identification between regions using the 2000–2001 JGSS data). On another question, only 21.98% reported they were 'religious' or 'somewhat religious', and this is comparable to findings from the AVS and WVS (see Table 4).

dataset; however, the main benefits are that it is multi-year, it includes large samples of Japanese adults from throughout the country (over 12,000 when we combine years), and (most importantly for this chapter) response questions allow us to distinguish between Personal, Household, and No religious affiliation. Answer categories are ‘yes’ (i.e., their Personal religion), ‘I don’t really believe [in one], but I have a household religion’ (*toku ni shinkō shite inai ga ie no shūkyō wa aru* 特に信仰していないが家の宗教はある, i.e., a Household religion), and ‘no’. This distinction between Personal and Household religion is significant and sets this dataset apart from others that do not include a ‘household religion’ option. Following Davis’ (1992) use of exchange theory to explain religious behavior in Japan, those who reported a Personal religion have ‘in order to’ motives because—initially at least—they joined for the purpose of gaining some sort of benefit, such as well-being. A Household religion is more

Table 3. Religious identification II—JGSS (2000–2003, 2005), detailed results

	Personal Religion N=12,471	Household Religion N=12,471	Total Sample N=14,322
Total	1,317 (10.56%)	2,899 (23.25%)	8,255 (66.19%)
Buddhist	547 (4.51%)	2,468 (20.36%)	3,048 (21.82%)
‘Buddhist’	233 (1.87%)	842 (6.75%)	1089 (7.6%)
Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land)	149 (1.19%)	720 (5.77%)	878 (6.13%)
Zen	27 (0.22%)	282 (2.26%)	314 (2.19%)
Shingon	34 (0.27%)	250 (2.00%)	284 (1.98%)
Jōdoshū (Pure Land)	27 (0.27%)	185 (1.48%)	214 (1.49%)
Nichiren	72 (0.58%)	130 (1.04%)	204 (1.42%)
Tendai	2 (0.02%)	41 (0.33%)	43 (0.30%)
New Religion	402 (3.32%)	79 (0.65%)	485 (3.47%)
Sōka Gakkai	241 (1.93%)	25 (0.20%)	268 (1.87%)
Tenrikyō	41 (0.33%)	27 (0.22%)	68 (0.47%)
Christian	114 (0.94%)	26 (0.21%)	140 (1.00%)
Catholic	25 (0.20%)	8 (0.06%)	33 (0.23%)
Protestant	9 (0.07%)	4 (0.03%)	13 (0.09%)
Other	105 (0.87%)	130 (1.07%)	235 (1.68%)
Shintō	23 (0.19%)	49 (0.40%)	72 (0.52%)
Ancestor Veneration	7 (0.06%)	15 (0.12%)	22 (0.15%)

Due to non-response, sample sizes vary and some figures do not add up to the ‘totals’.

of an obligation—typically to one’s ancestors, and association with one is likely to be less voluntary than a religion one actively chooses to join. This explains one theoretical difference between these two categories.

Table 3 reports the numbers and percentages in all years of the JGSS that were accessible when this chapter was written. There are several key findings worth mentioning here. The columns are divided into Personal, Household, and Total religious affiliation. Beginning with the first two columns, we see that only 33.81% (10.56% + 23.25%) of those who answered this question on religious affiliation (N=12,471) identified themselves as ‘believing’ (*shinkō* 信仰) in a religion. Second, also in support of ethnographic studies, of the individuals who claimed to believe in a religion, a strong majority (68.76%; 2,899 out of 4,216) reported their affiliation as Household, not Personal. Third, out of these 12,471 respondents, only 1,317 (10.56%) answered that they have a religion in which they *personally* believe. In other words, based on these data, less than 11% of the Japanese population identifies personally with a religion—a stark contrast from the average of 167% of the population that was reported for 2000–2005 by the Agency of Cultural Affairs. Moreover, a follow-up question in the JGSS inquired about a respondent’s devotion to a religion, and only 2.47% of the 14,186 respondents maintained that they were ‘devoted’ (*nesshin* 熱心), 7.99% said they were somewhat devoted, 18.50% said they were not devoted, and the remaining 70.95% claimed no devotion.

Another advantage of this survey is that it allows us to get a better sense of the religions with which Japanese identify. Those who identified themselves as having a religion (Personal or Household) were asked to write in the name of the religion. Table 3 reveals the frequencies for those who identified as Buddhist, a new religion member, or Christian, and I created an Other category. As expected, most who identified with a religion claimed to be Buddhist, and a significant portion of that group (81.86%; 2,468 of 3,015) claimed it as a Household religion. Within that category, the most frequent responses were ‘Buddhist’ (for a combined total of Personal and Household affiliation of 7.6% of the total sample), Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land, 6.13%), Zenshū (2.19%), Shingonshū (1.98%), Jōdoshū (Pure Land, 1.49%), Nichirenshū (1.42%), and Tendaishū (0.30%). New religion members were second in frequency (3.32% Personal; 0.65% Household), and of those 1.87% claim to be Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 members, and 0.47% were members of Tenrikyō 天理教, for example. There were 140 Christians in these data (114 Personal; 26 Household), including 33 (0.23%) Catholics and 13 (0.09%) Protestants. Shintoists are included in the ‘Other’ category because only 23 (0.19%) reported Shintō as a Personal

religion and 49 (0.40%) as a Household religion. Overall, Household religions count for a majority of these religious affiliates, except in the case of more exclusive religious groups such as new religion members and Christians.

Because these data come from a strategic, multistage probability sample of all 47 prefectures, we are able to generalize the results with a decent degree of confidence. In other words, if these data provide any amount of accuracy then we can conclude that during these years (2000–2003 and 2005) there were an average of approximately 22.3 million<sup>4</sup> adult Buddhists (Personal and Household), and of that figure 6.3 million affiliated with Jōdo Shinshū, 2.2 million with Zen, 2 million with Shingon, 1.5 million with Jōdoshū, 1.45 million with Nichiren, and just under 307,000 with Tendai. Similarly, we can estimate that there were about 1.9 million Sōka Gakkai members, 480,912 Tenrikyō members, 235,340 Catholics, 92,090 Protestants, and 532,073 Shintoists. These figures include those who identified with both personal and household religions.

These statistics contrast substantially with that of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs' data, and this (in large part) is due to the difference in respondents: religious organizations versus individuals.<sup>5</sup> Now that we have data such as the JGSS, we should be much more cautious about relying solely on statistics that depend on reports from religious organizations. Also, the figures above should be seen as calculations based on average population sizes, and there may be problems that arise from members of new religions identifying as 'Buddhist', for example (see Roemer 2009). The statistics in Table 3 should not be interpreted as exact figures; however, they are much more likely to reflect actual religious affiliation because of the sampling procedures used and the fact that they support what other research methods (namely ethnographic) have found in the past.

Another way to measure religious identification is to ask about religious salience, or the extent to which one is 'religious'. We have already seen that few JGSS respondents (2.47%) consider themselves 'devoted' to

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<sup>4</sup> These figures are determined by generating an average for the true population of Japanese 20 years old and older in 2000 and 2005 (102,321,780, see Statistics Bureau, "Population and Households") and multiplying this population by the percentages generated from the JGSS data (e.g.,  $102,321,780 \times 0.2182 = 22,326,612.40$  Buddhists).

<sup>5</sup> Though it is possible that part of the discrepancy stems from multiple reporting that undoubtedly occurs with the Statistics Bureau data (that is, the same individual gets listed by more than one religious organization), according to the 1996 and 2002 NJSE only 7.4% claimed to belong to two religions and only 0.5% claimed three (see Krause et al. 2010). Also, in the 2000–03, 2005 JGSS only 26 respondents (out of 13,968) identified as 'Shintō and Buddhist'.

a religion. Table 4 reveals important distinctions between the AVS, H&F, and WVS datasets that are a result of answer categories. All three surveys included three main answer categories: 'religious', 'not religious', and 'atheist'. The H&F survey included three other options to reflect some of the nuances of Japanese religious identification. However, if we add the 'religious' and 'somewhat religious' categories of the H&F survey, there is little difference between the 'religious' in the AVS (27.39%), WVS (25.35%), and H&F (21.98%) samples. The greatest discrepancy lies in the more secular categories. In the AVS, 57.37% and 15.25% claimed to be 'not religious' and 'atheist', respectively. These figures are 60.90% and 13.75% in the WVS sample but only 16.75% and 12.62% in the H&F data. This is very likely due to the additional category I added to the H&F survey. After conducting in-depth interviews, focus groups, and pretests of the survey I added a middle category ('I am not religious, but I do rituals', *shinjin fukaku wa nai ga ogandari oinori wo shitari suru* 信心深くはないが拝んだりお祈りをしたりする), and as it turned out, this response was selected most frequently (48.64%).

In Japan, rituals are often interpreted as 'traditions' or 'cultural' and not explicitly referred by respondents as 'religious', and it appears that the H&F survey categories likely reveal a more accurate portrayal of religious salience in contemporary Japan: less than 30% see themselves as 'religious', about the same percentage sees itself as 'not religious' or 'atheist', and almost 50% are involved in household (and other) rituals but do not view themselves as religious, per se. If we compare these findings with the religious affiliation statistics from the JGSS (see Table 3), we see that while a minority identifies with a specific organized religion, conducting rituals and making offerings remain relevant practices in contemporary Japan.

Table 4. Religious identification III—religious salience

	Religious	Somewhat religious	Not religious, but do rituals	Not religious	Atheist
AVS	27.39%	—	—	57.37%	15.25%
H&F	6.04%	15.94%	48.64%	16.75%	12.62%
WVS	25.35%	—	—	60.90%	13.75%

'Atheist' (*mushinronsha* 無神論者) is followed by the phrase 'I don't believe in a religion' in the AVS and 'I do not believe in *kami*' in the WVS.

Percentages for the H&F are weighted.



In addition to the information in these tables, several of these datasets include other questions that provide more insight into religious identification in Japan. For the most part, these additional statistics indicate a lack of religiosity. For instance, while 41.37% of the AVS sample reported that they were ‘brought up religiously at home’, only an average of 4.20% of the AB samples (2003, 2004, and 2006) agreed that ‘religion or faith’ (*shūkyō ya shinkō* 宗教や信仰) was important in their lives. The AB also asked which social circle was most important to the respondents, and a mere 0.63% listed ‘religion’ from the options. Similarly, the ASES asked whether respondents felt as though they see themselves as being part of some community or group, and only 2.74% chose ‘religion’. Also along those lines, the WVS asked about active religious membership in 2005 (4.40% said ‘yes’), whether respondents spend time with people at their religious institutions (8.90% said 1–2 or more times per month, 2000 only), and only 3.30% reported volunteering for a religious organization (2000 only). The only exception to these reports is a question from the EAVS, which asked about the importance of having a religious heart or spirit (*shūkyōteki na kokoro* 宗教的な心). Approximately 67% maintained that it was important.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, these statistics concerning religious identification indicate strongly that affiliation with an organized religion (e.g., a Buddhist sect, new religions, Christianity, Shintō and others) is rare in Japan. This is not a new finding; ethnographers, for example, have made this claim repeatedly. Anthropologist Satsuki Kawano (2005), for instance, explained that many of her informants reported having ‘nothing to do with religion or the New Religions’, and that by this response they meant ‘they do not belong to a religion that emphasizes personal faith, such as Christianity and the so-called New Religions (22–23). We can see from the data presented in this chapter that it also means they have little to do with other organized religions such as Buddhism and Shintō.

What is important here is that we now have quantitative data from a number of large national randomized samples that support these conclusions and (arguably) give us a more accurate sense of what percentage does identify with a religion. Additionally, the JGSS and H&F, for instance, allow us to differentiate between *personal* religious affiliation and *household* religions. The latter are a better indicator of family traditions and

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, 70% of the 2003 Japanese Character Study sample reported that ‘having a religious heart’ is important (<http://survey.ism.ac.jp/index.html>).

are not, in all likelihood, a valid measure of an individual's religiosity (see also Covell 2005; Traphagan 2004). It is also apparent that some forms of religious identification that are not connected directly with a religion or organization, such as ritual practices and the need to have a religious heart/spirit, are much more common. Distinguishing between personal and household and organized and subjective religious identification clearly are important in Japan in this century.

*Tracking Religious Beliefs, Opinions, and Attitudes in Statistics*

This section evaluates religious beliefs, opinions, and attitudes towards religion and the religious. In some cases, we are able to compare frequencies across surveys because they ask the same (or similar) questions. These comparisons are particularly informative because, in some cases, they indicate a lack of reliability for questions or reveal how the nuances of different word choices may alter findings.

Table 5 includes commonly asked religious belief questions, such as beliefs regarding ancestors, the afterlife, heaven, and hell. With the exception of the first question concerning the importance of respecting ancestors, 50% or fewer maintained these beliefs. Answer categories for the first question in the EAVS were 'more than the average Japanese', on average with other Japanese, and less than other Japanese, on average. Approximately 89% replied that they respect their ancestors at least on average with other Japanese. The question and answer categories were worded differently in the H&F, which asked about the extent to which respondents 'agreed' or 'disagreed' (based on a 5-point scale) that it is important to respect ancestors. Regardless of these differences, there was little discrepancy between survey results concerning this traditional belief.

One difference among surveys concerns the afterlife (#2). Although there was little discrepancy between the AVS (46.54%) and 2000 WVS (50.80%), the rate of those who reported believing in an afterlife was much lower (38.05%) for the 2000–01 JGSS samples (cf. Covell 2005: 174). This topic deserves elaboration for several reasons. First, such a difference between the JGSS and the AVS and WVS may be attributed to survey design. In both the WVS and the AVS, this question is embedded in a list of questions on belief in several religious phenomena (e.g., *kami*, heaven, and hell). In the JGSS it is a stand-alone question, and there are no other questions on religion close before or after it. It is plausible that listing this

Table 5. General religious beliefs

Response categories shown	AVS Yes*	EAVS More than average/ Average	H&F Agree/ Somewhat agree	JGSS (2000–01) Yes	WVS (2000) Yes
1. It is important to respect ancestors		88.80%	87.86%		
2. There is an afterlife	46.54%			38.05%	50.80%
3. I believe in hell	33.58%				30.10%
4. I believe in heaven	40.95%				37.50%
5. I believe in sin	33.77%				
6. I believe in resurrection of the dead	8.68%				
7. I believe in reincarnation	40.33%				
8. I believe in divination (believe/ believe somewhat)	28.53%*				

\* Percentages reflect those who responded ‘yes’ unless noted otherwise (as in #8). Percentages for the H&F are weighted.

question with a number of other related questions as opposed to by itself affected the way respondents answered it. The Japanese wording (*shigo no sekai* 死後の世界) for all three surveys was the same.

What may be more revealing about this question is how many respondents selected ‘don’t know’ (*wakaranai* 分からない) and how the inclusion of that category affects the statistics. The frequencies in Table 5 are based on only those who answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If we add those who answered ‘don’t know’, a different picture unfolds for all three datasets. Those in the AVS who responded that they do believe in an afterlife were 43.30% of the sample. Approximately 37.30% said ‘no’ and 19% said they do not know. In the WVS, these figures are 31.60%, 30.50%, and 37.9%, respectively, and the JGSS reveals yet another picture, with 18.67% reporting that they believe in an afterlife, 30.27% disagreeing, and 50.77% reporting they do not know.

The inclusion of the ‘don’t know’ answer category is important for this question, as it affects the percentages substantially. The overall percentages of those who believe in an afterlife drop from 46% to 43% in the AVS (the smallest decrease), 38% to 18% in the JGSS and 51% to 31% in the WVS. These varying statistics and the fact that so many reported that

they do not know how they feel about this question indicate strongly that this question is not likely telling us what we want to know about Japanese attitudes towards the afterlife. It may be that many simply have not thought about it, that they have mixed feelings, or that opinions are 'shifting' (Covell 2005: 175). They may want to believe that there is an afterlife—as indicated by the fact that many Japanese own ancestor altars and conduct rituals for their ancestors, for example (see Table 8 below); however, many appear to be unwilling to commit to a simple affirmative or negative answer. The afterlife, after all, is not something that can be measured scientifically, so it is not surprising that people are unsure what to think. Further, in societies that are predominantly one Abrahamic religion or another, religious doctrines regarding the afterlife are more influential culturally. For the most part, individuals in predominantly Muslim, Jewish, or Christian societies know what religions say about the afterlife, thus making it easier (ostensibly) to answer such questions. In Japan, on the other hand, where religious doctrines are less influential, many may not be aware of what the 'correct' or religiously prescribed response is. Others may not care, or they may respond contrarily to Buddhist doctrines, for instance, to disassociate themselves from organized religions intentionally.

Future studies that wish to include this question should consider using the Likert scale response categories (e.g., 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'). This is more likely to capture nuances that arise from the varying degrees to which people accept these claims. It is obvious, though, that this topic requires much more research to capture what these statistics do not clarify.

Table 6 demonstrates opinions and attitudes towards religious organizations and the religious. For the most part, these data reveal that Japanese have negative opinions—or at least they are not particularly positive towards—organized religions and religious leaders. These findings offer support for the results in Tables 2–4, in which it was revealed that few Japanese identify with a religion. Also, it is likely that varying response categories (e.g., 'yes' versus 'agree/agree somewhat') explain discrepancies between surveys that included the same questions, such as #1 (comfort from religion) and #9 (confidence in religious organizations). The difference for others, such as #3 and #13 can be explained by the different questions (i.e., #3 is about 'confidence in politics' (*seiji* 政治) for the AVS and 'confidence in government decisions' (*seifu no kettei* 政府の決定) in the WVS).

Table 6. Opinions and attitudes towards religions and the religious

Response categories shown	AVS Yes*	AB Varies	ASES Varies	EAVS Yes	H&F Agree/ Somewhat agree	JGSS	WVS Yes*
1. I get comfort from religion	30.44%				25.27%		35.10%
2. Religion is an important part of my life (very/rather)							20.90%*
3. Religious leaders should not try to influence politics (AVS) / government decisions (WVS) (agree completely/ agree)	80.91%*						71.20%*
4. Religious leaders should not influence how people vote (strongly agree/ agree)							74.75%*
5. Politicians who don't believe in kami are unfit for public office (strongly agree/ agree)							7.60%*
6. It would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs were in public office (strongly agree/ agree)							5.25%*
7. Having religious authorities interpret the law is an essential part of a democracy (1-3, where 10 = not essential)							6.00%*
8. When you have a problem, whom would you most likely consult outside of your family? (religious figure)	1.20%*						

Table 6 (*cont.*)

Response categories shown	AVS Yes*	AB Varies	ASES Varies	EAVS Yes	H&F Agree/ Somewhat agree	JGSS	WVS Yes*
9. How much confidence do you have in religious organizations? (AVS, WVS: a great deal/quite a lot) (AB, JGSS: trust a lot/trust to a degree)	9.94%*	15.20%				14.03%	9.25%*
10. We depend too much on science and not enough on faith (8-10, where 10 = agree)							16.50%*
11. Is religious faith an especially important quality you want your children to learn at home?	4.80%						5.60%
12. Does religion give adequate answers to:							
a. Individual moral problems /needs	38.92%						21.75%
b. Problems of my family life	27.01%						16.60%
c. Spiritual needs	60.58%						27.35%
d. Social problems	13.90%						5.75%
13. What issue causes you great worry? (AB: religious fundamentalism) (ASES: religious conflict)		6.33%	60.41%				
14. How well do you think your government is dealing with religious conflict? (very well/fairly well)		13.40%	12.60%				

Table 6 (cont.)

Response categories shown	AVS Yes*	AB Varies	ASES Varies	EAVS Yes	H&F Agree/ Somewhat agree	JGSS	WVS Yes*
15. All religious teachings are the same				47.1%			

\* For the AVS and WVS, percentages reflect those who responded ‘yes’ unless noted otherwise (as in #2–10).

AB: #12, 16 figures from 2003 only.

WVS: # 1 is 2000 only; #7, 10 are 2005 only.

Percentages for the H&F are weighted.

One question that appears to be unreliable is #12. The language in the two surveys was not too different: the WVS asks about ‘this nation’s religious organizations’ (*waga kuni no shūkyō dantai* 我が国の宗教団体) and the AVS asks about religions (*shūkyō* 宗教). Both asked about the same four topics in the same format, and only ‘social problems’ was phrased somewhat differently: ‘the social problems our nation is currently facing’ (*waga kuni no genzai chokumen shite iru shakai mondai* 我が国の現在直面している社会問題) in the WVS and ‘our country’s social problems’ (*kuni no kakaeru shakai mondai* 国の抱える社会問題) in the AVS. Also, response categories in both cases were ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘don’t know’ (reported results are for ‘yes’ or ‘no’ only; ‘don’t know’ is omitted). Nonetheless, the frequencies in the AVS are substantially higher in all cases. In particular, over 33% more respondents in the AVS than in the WVS felt that religions give adequate answers to spiritual needs. The fact that there is some discrepancy between years of the 2000 and 2005 WVS (34.10% in 2000 agreed that religion offers spiritual support but only 20.60% agreed in 2005) also indicates questionable reliability. Some degree of variation is expected with different samples; however, considering that both surveys use strategic randomized sampling methods, more overlap should occur. Such lack of reliability confounds our ability to make any conclusions with these questions based on these data.

Table 7 focuses specifically on beliefs and attitudes concerning *kami*, *hotoke*, and other superempirical beings or forces. Similar to the findings in the tables above, these results reveal some interesting patterns. In the first question concerning the existence of *kami* or *hotoke*, frequencies are somewhat high, but the range is substantial. First, the WVS only asks

about *kami*. The two most divergent examples, the AVS and H&F, both ask about *kami* and *hotoke* together, and there is a 15-percentage point difference for the two samples. Most likely what is explaining this difference is the fact that the response choices for the AVS and WVS were ‘yes’, ‘no’, and ‘don’t know’ (as in the previous examples, percentages in the table omit undecided respondents). The H&F used a Likert scale, and many unsure respondents selected the middle category, ‘can’t say either way’ (*dochira mo ienai* どちらもいえない). On a scale of 1–5, where 1 is ‘disagree’ and 5 is ‘agree’, the results for the H&F were: 13.64% (1), 8.75% (2), 30.13% (3), 19.84% (4), and 27.64% (5). The figure shown in #1 is the combination of (4) and (5) for the H&F survey. If we include the ‘don’t know’ categories for the AVS and WVS, the figures are 54.9% (yes), 32.8% (no), and 12.3% (don’t know/didn’t respond) in the AVS and 35%, 31.6%, and 33.4% in the WVS, respectively. Although the percentages are widespread, in each case, those who believe that *kami* and/or *hotoke* exist outnumber those who are unclear or who disagree. Still, the statistical discrepancies among datasets are cause for concern with this question. It appears to be less reliable than other measures.

Other questions that merit greater scrutiny for similar reasons are numbers 2, 4, and 5. The question wording and answer choices for #2 were very similar in all three datasets, except that the AVS asked about importance of *kami* and *hotoke* and the WVS and AB asked about *kami* only. It is not clear, therefore, why the AB and WVS samples varied so much with this measure. The sample makeup and the slightly different wordings for the H&F and NSJE could explain the nearly 30-percentage point difference per survey on measure #4. The NSJE sample ages ranged from 56–99 (mean = 80.52), and the H&F sample ranged from 23–94 (mean = 50.52). It is highly plausible that older Japanese, more so than their younger counterparts, tend to rely on *kami* and *hotoke* to help them in times of need. Further, the NSJE question was ‘praying to *kami* or *hotoke* helps me overcome my stress and worries’ (*kamisama ya hotokesama ni inoru koto wa konran ya sutoresu wo norikiru no ni yaku ni tatsu* 神様や仏様に祈ることは混乱やストレスを乗り切るのに役に立つ), and the H&F was ‘when I am troubled or worried, *kami* or *hotoke* help me and give me strength’ (*komatta toki ya nayande iru toki, kami ya hotoke wa watashi wo tasuke tsuyoku shite kureru* 困ったときや悩んでいるとき神や仏は私を助け強くしてくれる). Though these statements are similar, they are not identical and we should not ignore these nuances. The same can be said for the different response categories (i.e., ‘agree’ versus ‘always think so’), even though both used 5-point Likert scales. Finally, as explained in the



Table 7. Beliefs and attitudes about *kami*, *hotoke*, and other superempirical beings/forces

Response categories shown	AVS Yes	AB Varies	H&F Agree/ Somewhat agree	NSJE Always think so/ Sometimes think so	WVS Yes
1. Kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup> exist	62.60%		47.48%		52.60%
2. Importance of kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup> in your life (8-10 on scale of 1-10)	14.35%	10.6%			18.55%
3. Kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup> protect me			40.59%		
4. Kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup> help me when I am troubled			28.55%	55.96%	
5. (Kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup> ) curse me*	41.67%		24.82%	39.15%	
6. My prayers are answered by kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup>			32.74%	34.65%	
7. When I pray to kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup> , I am purified and at peace			56.70%		
8. The dead become kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup>			16.91%		
9. There is a personal kami/hotoke <sup>‡</sup>	7.42%				
10. There is some sort of invisible life force	70.77%				
11. I don't really think there is any sort of kami/hotoke or invisible life force	21.81%				
12. I believe in something absolute, such as kami/hotoke, a heavenly power, or a source of all creation	39.44%				
13. I believe in souls/spirits	64.02%				70.90%
14. I believe in an unseen world that can influence events in the world we see around us (definitely/somewhat)		49.40%			
15. There's a mysterious power in Nature			71.99%		

Table 7 (*cont.*)

Response categories shown	AVS Yes	AB Varies	H&F Agree/ Somewhat agree	NSJE Always think so/ Sometimes think so	WVS Yes
16. There is something like fate that goes beyond human powers			71.64%		
17. Life is determined by fate (everything determined by fate)					9.20%**
18. When I think about it, I am here because of some mysterious forces			52.66%		

‡ *Kami* 神 are loosely translated as god(s), deities, or spirits; *hotoke* 仏 can be translated as ancestors or buddhas. Though *kami* and *hotoke* are not identical, it is common for surveys in Japan to ask about both simultaneously rather than in separate questions.

\* AVS: 'I believe in curses';

H&F: 'When something bad happens, it is a curse from *kami* and *hotoke*';

NSJE: 'A punishment or curse will be offered toward bad behavior or action'.

\*\* Percentages for those who chose 1–3 on scale of 1–10, where 1 = everything is determined by fate (2005 only).

AB: #2 asked about *kami* (only) and is from 2004; #13 percentages from 2006.

WVS: #1 is 2000 only; #13 is 2005 only.

Percentages for the H&F are weighted.

note at the bottom of Table 7, question #5 is worded differently for all three datasets, thus variation in frequency of agreement can be expected.

One general finding from Table 7 that is noteworthy is that Japanese are more likely to believe in abstract forces than *kami* or *hotoke* specifically. A strong, consistent majority believed in an 'invisible life force' (*mienai chikara* 見えない力, 70.77%), 'mysterious powers in Nature' (*daishizen no shinpiteki na chikara* 大自然の神秘的な力, 71.99%), and fate (*unmei* 運命, 71.64%)—though few (9.20% in the WVS) agreed that fate determines everything in life. A substantial percentage also believed in souls (*tamashii* たましい, AVS—64.02%, H&F—70.90%). These findings are important because they indicate that we need to give much more attention to these ideas—and, perhaps, less to *kami* and *hotoke* exclusively. These more researched entities remain important, though, as indicated by questions 1 and 7, in particular.

*Tracking Religious Rituals and Behaviors in Statistics*

This section moves from beliefs and opinions to frequencies of ritual behaviors and ownership of ritual objects. Also included is an elaboration on the contemporary usage of *butsudan* 仏壇 (ancestor/Buddhist altars) and *kamidana* 神棚 (Shintō household shrines). Specifically, based on data from the H&F it is apparent that *butsudan* are not just for ancestor veneration and *kamidana* are for more than just *kami*.

The first question in Table 8 (religious attendance) is perhaps the most commonly included 'religion' measure on surveys worldwide. Frequent, regular religious attendance has never been part of mainstream Japanese religiosity. Neither Buddhism nor Shintō, the two most culturally influential religions historically, hold group or private worship services with the same frequency and regularity as Abrahamic traditions. It is not surprising, therefore, that fewer than 15% of the respondents in four of the five surveys that included this question reported attending religious services (other than holidays and special ceremonies) once or more per month. The only exception is the NSJE, which includes primarily older Japanese (mean age = 80.52), and this age discrepancy is likely to explain the difference. Related to this, the NSJE also asked how often respondents participate in shrine, temple, or church activities (as opposed to shrine or temple visits or church attendance), and 62.17% said, 'never', while only 8.67% reported such involvement once a month or more (not shown in table).

Two frequencies that are highest among the measures in Table 8 are #6 ('thinking about the meaning of life': 79.62% in the AVS and 83.95% in the WVS) and #9 ('make offerings/pray at *kamidana* or *butsudan*': 80.53% in the NSJE). We also see that, despite a more recent trend to use secular funerary services (see e.g., Covell 2005; Onishi 2008), a strong majority reported in question #12 that it is 'important to hold religious services for funerals' (80.43% in the AVS and 83.60% in the AB). Frequencies for #13 are high; however, they represent those who responded 'never' to doing collective rituals such as meetings for prayers (85.20%), giving donations (84.10%), and attending festivals (77.80%). Again, these statistics reveal how rarely Japanese conduct group ritual practices, especially as part of an organized religion.

Concerning question #6 ('thinking about the meaning of life'), there is significant variance between surveys, and it is unclear why. In the H&F, only 25.45% claimed to think about meaning in life 'always' or 'often', yet

Table 8. Rituals and religious activities and attitudes

Response categories shown	AVS Yes	AB Varies	ASES Once/ month or more	H&F Always/ Often	NSJE Always/ Sometimes	WVS Varies
1. Attend religious services other than holidays (once/month or more)	14.70%*	7.80%	11.51%		25.87%*	11.10%*
2. Ancestor grave visits				23.94%		
3. Purchase amulets/ talismans for family or friends	64.59%			12.09%		
4. Go to shrines/ temples/ churches to pray for safety/ success				18.46%		
5. Participate in festivals				14.61%		
6. Think about meaning of life**	79.62%			25.45%		83.95%
7. Pray to kami/ hotoke	54.84%					3.90%*
8. Pray, meditate, or contemplate	27.87%	22%		19.82%		40.20%
9. Make offerings/ pray at home kamidana (Shintō altar) or butsudan (ancestor/ Buddhist altar)					80.53%	
10. Read sutras/ Bible in my home					30.41%	
11. Watch/listen to religious programs on TV/ radio					13.27%	

Table 8 (*cont.*)

	AVS	AB	ASES	H&F	NSJE	WVS
Response categories shown	Yes	Varies	Once/ month or more	Always/ Often	Always/ Sometimes	Varies
12. It is important to me to hold religious services for:		(very/ somewhat important)				
a. births	35.93%	31.80%				
b. marriages	47.92%	54.00%				
c. deaths	80.43%	83.60%				
d. festivals/ holidays	—	37.60%				
13. Which collective rituals do you participate in?		'Never'				
a. regular meetings for prayers		85.20%				
b. giving donations		84.10%				
c. fasting, attending festivals		77.80%				

\* For the AVS and WVS, percentages reflect those who responded, 'yes', except for #1, 6 (WVS = often/sometimes), and 7 (2000 only). For the NSJE, percentages reflect those who responded, 'always' and 'sometimes' except for #1.

\*\* Response categories for #6 were:

AVS and WVS: often/sometimes;

H&F: always/sometimes.

AB: #1 is 2003-04, #12 is 2006 only, and #13 is 2004 only.

WVS: #1 is 2005 only.

Percentages for the H&F are weighted.

almost 84% in the WVS and 80% in the AVS answered 'often' or 'sometimes' to this question. Answer categories are not too dissimilar, and because the H&F frequency is substantially lower than the other two, it might have been a less reliable question for this survey. Given the fact that many other questions are not as dissimilar, this variation among surveys is not immediately transparent.

There is also significant variation among survey frequencies for questions 7 and 8, both of which deal with prayer. The AVS frequency (54.84%) includes those who reported praying to *kami* and *hotoke* 'frequently' and

'sometimes', while the much lower WVS percentage (3.90%) represents those who claimed to pray to *kami* (only) 'outside of religious services at least once a month'. *Hotoke* includes ancestors, and because ancestor veneration remains common in contemporary Japan, the inclusion of praying to *hotoke* as well as *kami* may account for the difference here. Still, the gap is surprisingly high.

The next question (8) is about prayer more generally (not necessarily to *kami* or *hotoke*). The questions and answer categories are identical in the AVS and WVS, yet there is a 12-percentage point spread (27.87% and 40.20%, respectively). In the AB, this question is 'How often do you pray?' and the frequency shown (22%) represents an average for two years of data for those who answered, 'daily' or 'weekly'. It should be noted, though, that there was a substantial difference between the 2004 and 2006 samples for this question (17% in 2004 and 27% in 2006). The H&F question asked how often respondents 'pray for relatives' or friends' health and happiness', and 19.82% responded, 'always' or 'sometimes'. This question could be improved by specifying what is meant by prayer (*inori* 祈り). It is not clear whether this was limited to prayers at home or at religious institutions, whether they included memorized,<sup>7</sup> informal, or spontaneous prayers, or whether they also included ritual behaviors, such as bowing or joining one's hands together. Because 'prayer' can be interpreted broadly, it may be difficult for respondents to answer, and this likely explains much of the discrepancy.

The difference between the AVS and H&F for question #3 (the purchase of amulets or talismans) can be explained, in part, by the answer categories. Responses in the former were 'yes' or 'no', and the latter was 'always' and 'often'. If we include those who responded, 'sometimes' in the H&F, the percentage jumps to 46.24%, and if we add those who buy on occasion, it is 70.23%. The remaining 29.77% replied that they 'never' buy them, and this more closely resembles those in the AVS who replied, 'no' (35.41%). Further, while the AVS asked only about owning an amulet (*omamori* お守り) for 'things like travel safety, household safety, or easy childbirth' (*kōtsū anzen* 交通安全, *kanai anzen* 家内安全, *anzan nado* 安産等), and the H&F asked how often respondents buy amulets, talismans (*ofuda*

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<sup>7</sup> A typical example of a memorized prayer is the *nembutsu* 念仏—the single or repeated recitation of "Hail Amida [Amitabha] the Buddha" (*Namu Amida Butsu* 南無阿弥陀仏). When said in earnest, this mantra is believed to provide the 'immediate' expulsion of any wrongdoings to ensure one's well-being or the wellness of the person for whom one is praying (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 99).

お札), or prayer plaques (*ema* 絵馬) for family or friends. These questions are not identical, so the percentage difference is not unexpected—nor is it an indication of lack of reliability, necessarily.

Figure 2 displays rates of rituals and offerings at household altars based on the H&F data. *Kamidana* (literally, *kami* shelf) rites are most often associated with Shintō *kami*, though Figure 3 (below) indicates that this is not always the case. According to official Shintō manuals, these rituals begin with washing one's hands and mouth and freshening any floral or other decorative arrangements around the *kamidana*. This serves as a purification of the practitioner and the sacred space indicated by the *kamidana*. Next, one is to place an offering (typically uncooked rice, water, or salt) on the altar, make one slight bow then two deeper bows, and pray in silence. The ritual enactor then bows again twice deeply, claps his or her hands twice, and makes another deep bow then a slight bow. Food offerings are later added to a meal to be symbolically shared between the *kami* and family (Ono 1993). Despite these official instructions, actual practices tend to vary per individual, household, or region. According to recent statistics, the percentage of Japanese who owns a *kamidana* has declined slightly in recent decades. Still, approximately half of most national samples maintain *kamidana* in their homes (Ishii 2004: 31–32, 36), and in the H&F sample 39.70% reported owning one.

The other household altar discussed here is the *butsudan*. Common rituals at a *butsudan* include lighting candles on the altar, making offerings of certain foods, and saying memorized or informal prayers for one's ancestors (for recent reviews see Kawano 2005; Klass 2005; Nelson 2008; Traphagan 2004). In actual practice, there is a great deal of variation in ancestor veneration, and depending on the individual, focus may be on the most recently departed, other ancestors, one of many buddhas in the Japanese Buddhist cosmology, or others.

Today, ancestor veneration often includes a blend of Buddhist and folk beliefs and practices that center on a family's patrilineal ancestors. Typically, a Japanese main family (*honke* 本家) will have a *butsudan* in their home, and other branches of the family may also have one. Although the physical size of one's residence may prevent a nuclear family from owning a *butsudan* or the stem family may be too new to have lost any family members (Kawano 2005), most Japanese consider ancestor veneration as vital regardless of whether they own one (Kaneko 1990; Klass 2005; Roemer 2006). Recent community and nationwide surveys indicate that between 59 to 78 percent of Japanese households owns a *butsudan* (see e.g., Kawano 2005: 32; Kaneko 1990: 6, for a somewhat older example).

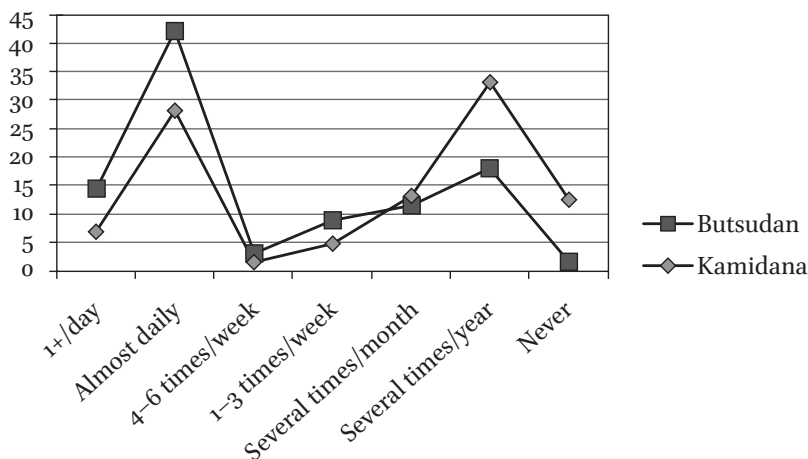


Figure 2. Household altars (Source: H&F)

Figure 2 illustrates how often Japanese make offerings, recite prayers, or conduct other rituals at their *kamidana* or *butsudan*. Concerning *kamidana*, a substantial percentage (34.90%) reported doing these rites at least daily, and only 12.51% said they ‘never’ do them, based on the H&F data. The frequency of *butsudan* rituals is even higher, with over 56% reporting to conduct rituals at their *butsudan* at least daily, and only 1.57% who ‘never’ do them. One explanation for this may be based on how Japanese view *kami* versus ancestors. For most Japanese, *kami* are abstract non-figurative mystical beings that can be punishing or helpful, and few consider these beings as intimately concerned with, or compassionate towards, their daily lives. On the other hand, there is a—generally positive—bond between the dead and the living (Traphagan 2004). Japanese who connect with their ancestors at a household altar are making offerings for and communicating with ancestors with whom they have had a closer connection. Especially in the case of the recently departed, they may be paying respects to and asking for general guidance or protection from spouses, parents, or close friends and other relatives who have died.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere (Roemer 2010b), I have discussed how the Japanese view of *kami* and *hotoke* may explain, in part, mental health effects. In a study using the same data, I found that those who own a *kamidana* are more likely than those who do not to report poor mental health symptoms, but those who own *butsudan* are likely to report fewer symptoms than those who do not own one. Such findings provide further evidence that Japanese view these objects of attention differently, and that they are affected by them differently.



The next figure challenges some of our previous understandings concerning who is being thought about at *kamidana* and *butsudan*. Figure 3, based on the H&F study, reveals percentages of whom Japanese are thinking about (*omoi ukabe* 思い浮かべ) when making offerings or doing rituals at their home or at their relative's altars. Respondents were allowed to choose as many options as applicable, and most selected more than one. While it is not surprising that the two most frequently selected categories for objects of attention at the *butsudan* were Ancestors (50.16%) and Dead relatives (63.75%), 26.85% named Living relatives as well. Only 16.46% selected the Buddha (*hotoke tatoeba oshakasama* 仏例えば、お釈迦様). Traditionally, scholars have connected the *butsudan* with ancestor veneration almost exclusively (indeed, to be consistent with other scholars I translate it here as 'ancestor/Buddhist altar', see e.g., Kawano 2005; Klass 2005; Nelson 2008; Plath 1964). These statistics indicate strongly, however, that there are others being considered in these rituals, and we need to be more aware of this when we ask Japanese about *butsudan*-related practices.

Similarly, the findings concerning *kamidana* rituals should make it clear that this household altar is much more than a Shintō altar for *kami*. Based on these data, only 44.04% selected *kami* as what they are thinking of during *kamidana* rituals. Twenty-three percent selected Ancestors, 21% selected Dead relatives, and 21.73% chose Living relatives. Combined,

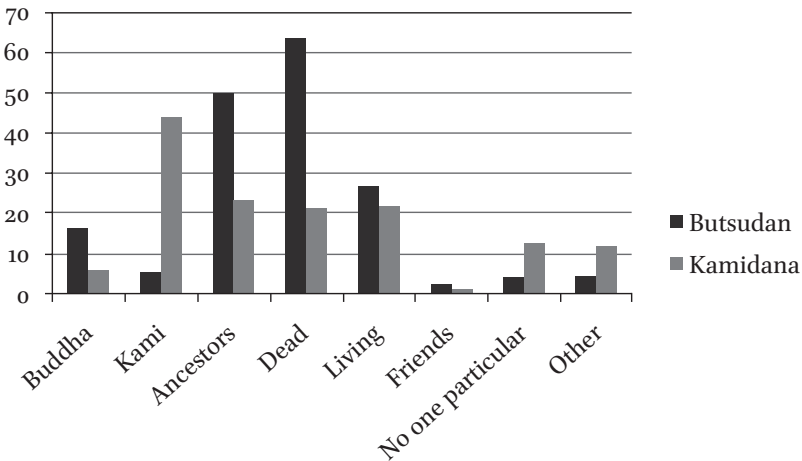


Figure 3. Objects of attention at household altars (Source: H&F)

these latter three categories surpass that of *kami*. Compared to *butsudan* rituals, a substantial number of respondents also indicated that they make these offerings and do these rites for ‘no one in particular’ (12.45%; compared to 4.21% for *butsudan*).

To my knowledge, this is the first question of its kind on a large survey, and its findings are noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is apparent that ancestors and the dead are not the only ones being thought about at *butsudan*. These data provide a new method of support for previous studies and nuance to this interpretation by focusing more on whom they are thinking about and less on with whom they are communicating. Concerning the living, in both cases it may be that Japanese view these altars as places where they can petition for living relatives (as opposed to friends, which was chosen by fewer than 3% in both cases). Such petitions might include expressions of gratitude or asking for personal or family success, health, or protection. A study by Tagaya and colleagues that surveyed almost 2,000 elderly residents of four small towns in Nagano Prefecture found that, of those who prayed, 86.50% reported praying for ‘family safety’ and 56.40% prayed for their ‘own health/safety’ (2000: 134). The wording for this question in the H&F was not restricted to the object of worship or veneration, or the one for whom offerings are being made. Rather, it asks whom the respondent thinks about when doing the rituals. The fact that it was not an overwhelming percentage that selected ancestors or the dead for *butsudan* or *kami* for the *kamidana* indicates that there is more going on at these altars than has been reported in the past (for further details on this topic with these data see Roemer 2012).

### *Concluding Discussion and Future Steps*

Until very recently, anyone who has tried to find survey data to support her or his research on Japanese religiosity has most likely been struck by the unavailability of data. The best option, in many cases, was for scholars to conduct their own surveys. This adds tremendous financial and time strains on a research project, especially if one aims to generate a random sample that extends beyond the local community one is studying. Fortunately, as this chapter has tried to reveal, this situation is changing. In the twenty-first century, we now have several datasets that include large randomly generated samples of Japanese adults from throughout the country.

This chapter relied on eight datasets that are freely accessible to the public and can be accessed at the individual-level. Here, I introduced descriptive statistics to provide a sense of Japanese religious identity, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors and to assess psychometric properties for a number of religiosity measures. Broadly speaking, these data provide support from national samples for what ethnographers have revealed based on, mainly, local samples: few Japanese identify with, or favor, organized religions. Tables 2–4 make this clear through several different measures of religious identification, and we see unfavorable attitudes towards religious organizations in Table 6. It is also evident that most Japanese continue to respect their ancestors and believe in souls, despite the fact that few firmly believe in an afterlife (compare Tables 5 and 6; see also Figures 2 and 3). Concerning the superempirical, most Japanese believe in fate or some kind of ‘invisible life force’ or ‘mysterious force in Nature’, yet they are less likely to believe in *kami* or *hotoke* (see Table 7). As Table 8 indicates, frequent prayer, attendance at religious sites, and other religious activities are also rare. Finally, the discussion of *butsudan* and *kamidana* practices reveals that rites conducted at the former are more common than the latter, in general, and that it is more than the dead, ancestors, or *kami* that are being considered when enacting these rituals.

Despite these contributions to the study of contemporary Japanese religiousness, it is important to note that there are still problems concerning these data. As discussed, in several cases substantial discrepancies between datasets indicate strongly that certain questions may be unreliable. All of these surveys rely on systematic random samples of Japanese adults, thus consistency is expected for the most part. Especially when question and answer categories are identical, if the question is reliable significant variations should not occur. At the least, we should be cautious about how we interpret those findings and consider revising the questions for future use on surveys.

Perhaps more challenging to this discussion is the concern for validity. International surveys that are designed primarily for European or American societies, such as the World Values Survey, tend to rely on Abrahamic interpretations of what is ‘religious’, and this includes a monotheistic, creator-God concept. It also includes a focus on organized religions. A good example of the potential irrelevance—or possible lack of validity—of such questions for Japan can be seen with the WVS column in Table 6, especially. The WVS is not alone in this predicament, however, because

many other surveys have followed suit and include the same questions ‘for comparative purposes’. In other words, even surveys that were created in Japan include the same questions (and often the same wording) so that scholars can compare their findings with those of the WVS. The WVS has become a benchmark for large surveys, and it appears from these side-by-side comparisons that future surveyors in Japan should reconsider how, and whether, we ask some of these questions.

A valid question is one that measures what one seeks to measure. With these questions, we are trying to learn about ‘Japanese religiosity’ or what it means to be ‘religious’ in contemporary Japan. What we see from these statistics is that Japanese are *not* religious. For instance, very few identify as religious, few believe firmly in ‘things religious’, few think religious leaders and religious organizations should dominate politics and the government, few believe in the superempirical as caring and concerned with their daily lives, and few frequently conduct rituals on behalf of these beings. *Does this make Japan a secular nation?* By these measures, it appears so.

Perhaps a more appropriate question is *are these accurate measures of Japanese religiosity, or are they based on understandings of religiosity that stem from Abrahamic traditions and are, therefore, invalid or problematic in the Japanese context?* I argue that, for the most part, these measures have low frequencies because they do not truthfully reflect contemporary Japanese religious consciousness. If we asked about ancestor veneration in the United States, for example, we would see similarly low (even lower!) levels of ‘religiosity’. Asking about religious affiliation and attendance at shrines and temples in a society in which such identities and activities have never been the norm misses the mark for most Japanese. Consequently, I argue that many of these questions, while interesting for comparative purposes, are invalid measures of the overall picture of contemporary Japanese religiousness.

#### *Possible Solutions to Issues of Reliability and Validity in Survey Research*

Several solutions to these issues of lack of reliability and validity include further research and discourse among scholars and to change the types of questions asked. One simple resolution would be to use Likert scale answer categories, rather than require people to answer in absolutes (e.g., yes or no). Another option is to reconsider using words such as *shūkyō* (religion) and *shigo no sekai* (afterlife), for example, because they are too problematic. In the case of *shūkyō*, especially, the term may carry too

much historical stigmatization, thus affecting the way Japanese perceive, and answer, the questions. In other words, since its inception, the word *shūkyō* has been closely connected with organized religions and religious teachings, and Shintō, Buddhism, Christianity, and many of the new religions that have emerged since the late 1800s have all suffered from social stigmas because of their associations with repressive governments, excessive recruitment strategies, or social violence or because of their foreignness (see e.g., Ama 2005; Isomae 2003; Ōmura 1996; Tamaru and Reid 1996). Indeed, this term ‘religion’ is also problematic in the English language, but the average citizen of Japan tends to associate it with organized religions and view it in a pejorative sense.

Another solution is for scholars to continue talking with Japanese to get a better sense of the emic, or ‘experience-near’ (Geertz 1983: 57), interpretation of this term and all that we assign to it (e.g., rituals, beliefs, attitudes, etc.). For example, one reason few Japanese identify with a religion may be because they are unsure where Shintō ends and Buddhism begins, or what entity is Shintō and which is Buddhist. For most, it likely does not matter. Japanese are very aware, however, of which religious institution to go to for life-stage markers, such as infant purifications, marriages, and funerals. On the other hand, they may not call these rites ‘religious’ but refer to them, instead, as ‘customs’ or ‘traditions’. For these reasons, it would also be helpful to get a better sense of what Japanese consider as ‘non-religious’, or secular (see Roemer 2010a; van Bremen and Martinez 1995).

Surveys rely heavily on respondents’ interpretations of the questions. If respondents are not answering as we ‘expect’—based on other research methodologies, we must reconsider the questions and question wording. It is also essential that surveys in Japan include more questions about religiosity that have to do with more common rituals, such as household rituals and shrine or temple visits. Further, rather than asking about frequency of these actions (which we know is not high), we should be asking about their impressions of these behaviors and their motivations, for example. It is more helpful to understand why Japanese go out of their way to visit a specific shrine or temple than to know how often they do this. Such questions are beginning to appear on surveys (see the NSJE and H&F), but they are scarce.

Less than a decade ago, Mary Brinton (2003) remarked that Japan was “fact-rich, data-poor.” As this chapter has shown, Japan is now more data-rich. However, we cannot accept this data unquestionably. The quantity has increased, but do we have more quality? While the reliability and validity of many of these survey questions remain debatable, no doubt most

would agree that it is important that we continue pressing for better questions; questions that truly measure what it is we intend to measure. Once we have achieved these goals and overcome some of these issues, survey data can be used more frequently alongside other methods of research to generate more comprehensive descriptions of Japanese religiosity.

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THE CONCEPTS OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN  
TRANSCULTURAL CONTEXTS, WITH A FOCUS ON JAPAN

ISOMAE JUN'ICHI AND TIM GRAF

*'Religion' in Non-Western Societies*

This discussion draws attention to religion as a Western concept turned global, and to the ways this concept is investigated and produced by the academic discipline of religious studies in both Japan and the West. Originating in the West, 'religion' as a field of study was early on employed by and imposed upon societies worldwide. Only recently, however, have scholars become aware of the profound effects of this transplantation, raising questions of analytic comparability as well as cultural and academic identity. By broadening the scope of this investigation to postcolonial contexts and those who do and do not practice a religious discourse outside Europe and North-America, we can better our understanding of non-Western concepts of religion and modernity. I will thus first introduce briefly recent scholarship on religion in non-Western societies, giving my impression of a set of intellectual and analytical tools that are needed in the study of religion. This is followed by an observation of Japanese religious studies and problems concerning the concept of religion that appear specific to Japan.

Considerations in Western religious studies concerning both the concept of religion as well as the formation of religious studies paved the way for self-criticism about the epistemological violence (*bōryoku* 暴力) of imposing a Western concept on non-Western societies. Pioneering achievements in this field are attributed to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, author of *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1991 [1963]), and Eric Sharpe, author of *Comparative Religion: A History* (1986 [1975]). Smith points out that the names Hinduism and Islam, that is to say the definitions of the objects of perception themselves, are manufactured by Westerners. He also notes that these definitions do not necessarily coincide with the self-awareness of the persons involved (Smith 1991 [1963]). Sharpe, on the other hand, demonstrates that early religious studies were established hand in hand with the expansion of colonies in the course of Western imperialism.

Religious studies inserted religious phenomena of other regions into the progress-ladder of evolution theory which put Christianity on top (Sharpe 1986 [1975]).

What is being problematized here is the forcible definition of the object of perception being determined unilaterally by the perceiver. The Western world is the superior perceiving subject, while non-Western societies, as the objects of perception, are merely being defined. As is commonly known, it was Edward Said with *Orientalism*, published in 1978, who examined with a critical eye these unilateral perception-relations. 'Orientalism' refers to the process of Western societies projecting an image on others that satisfies and supplements Western societies themselves. Said mentions that the conception of the 'orient' was imposed from the outside by the Western media, literature, and states, but it was also aided by the academic discipline called 'oriental studies'.

Moreover, regarding the problem of orientalism, it would not be sufficient to one-sidedly accuse the West of forcing these definitions. Non-Western societies were also motivated to internalize this view and to identify themselves with the Western subject. This self-identification with Western society is called 'occidentalism' and is present among indigenous elites who stand to gain from association with Western political or economic interests (see Carrier 1995 and Chen 1995). By taking the dynamics of orientalism and occidentalism into religious studies, the formation of conceptions of religion and religious studies are reconsidered as issues of cultural identity inclusive of political contexts.

The relevance and applicability of Western conceptions of religion for non-Western societies has been discussed in great detail since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to *Asian Visions of Authority* (1994) for example, editor Charles Keyes and the other authors point out that a Western concept of religion corresponding to Protestantism did not exist originally in East and South-East Asia. The concept of religion spread in the process of the modernization of these regions as something official while at the same time the traditional indigenous and local religions were looked down on as either pagan or non-religious.

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<sup>1</sup> Mention of this inadequate application of religion was already made by the South-Korean scholar Sung-hae Kim in the panel entitled "Retrospect and Prospect: The History of Religions" (Bianchi 1994). Volumes collecting work of this kind that should be mentioned are Keyes, Kendall, and Hardacre 1994; as well as Chidester 1996; King 1999; van der Veer and Lehmann 1999.

A similar observation is presented by David Chidester for a South African context. In *Savage Systems* (1996), he traces how the Western concept of religion and the comparative study of religion, in cooperation with colonial politics, intruded upon several parts of South Africa. In this context, Chidester pointed out that the debates inspired by the comparative study of religion as to whether or not the locals had a religion were used to solve the question if one should allow them human and political rights. This research should be highly valued for identifying concretely the close connection between the comparative study of religion and colonialism. However, Chidester discusses the process of oppression from the side of the conquerors; he does not really address the subject from the perspective of those who were colonized, or the question of what influence this oppression had on local people.

In view of the problem of cultural hegemony in the debates on orientalism and occidentalism or post-colonial theory, it is necessary to discuss not merely the compulsory political forces at work, but to note also how religion and other Western discourses were subjectified among local elites. Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion* (1999) as well as several articles in *Nation and Religion* edited by van der Veer and Lehmann (1999) deal with this issue. King's volume, combining the post-colonial research of Gayatri C. Spivak (1999) and others, takes up the matter of subject formation in non-Western societies which are made the object of orientalism. In his case study on India, he discusses how Indian religious leaders, falling into an imitation of the European subject, went so far that even religious ideas that discredited the traditions of India were copied.

The volume by van der Veer and Lehmann, on the other hand, deals with the ties between religion and nationalism and their influence on the colonization of the non-European world by drawing on Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism and on the theory of the concept of religion by Talal Asad. Asad (1993 and 2003) points out sharply the ties to Western modernity and imperialism seen in religious studies and in the concept of religion. Susan Bayly's article "Race in Britain and India" is an especially intriguing contribution to this volume because it highlights British views of race which were internalized among the elites of India in the course of British colonial rule.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There is also Balagangadhara (1994) dealing with the religion of India under colonial rule. This widely noticed book reconsidered the power relations between the West and the non-West from the position of the local elites. Viswanathan (1989), moreover,

It is the gap between belief and practice that plays a key role for understanding these issues, as Winston King (1987) showed by pointing out the Eurocentric quality of the concept 'religion'. While modern Western societies centered on Protestantism emphasized a belief in specific doctrines, practices mainly consisting of nonverbal ritual acts came to be considered as secondary. The same view was applied to the understanding of religious phenomena in non-Western societies. Religions other than Islam or Buddhism without a specific system of doctrine were therefore considered inferior. It is not unusual that the side which learned of this view also came to consider their own religion as inferior and thus implemented Western-style doctrine. We here can grasp the establishment of cultural hegemony which widens the gap between belief and practice.

We can also see a major difference between pioneering works on the concept of religion and religious studies by Smith (1963) or Sharpe (1975) and the research of later decades. Smith considered the concept of 'religion' as inappropriate for an analysis of religious phenomena in non-Western societies because it became established in Europe along with the Enlightenment from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. Instead, he proposed to emphasize the meaning of inner 'faith' as opposed to its outer organizational shell called 'religion'. This approach was severely criticized by Talal Asad and others who objected to the understanding of religion as an inner realm. They argued that religion as belief merely reflects a protestant understanding of 'faith' that does not necessarily match the social realities in different social and historic contexts. Along with Hent de Vries and José Casanova, Asad is looking for religion in the public realm (Asad 2001 and 2003; de Vries 2006; Casanova 1994).

By taking the point of view on cultural identity from Third World intellectuals such as Said and Spivak, discussions concerning the formation of the concept of religion and religious studies started to concretize from philosophical dimensions of poststructuralism to the historical and social dimensions which deal with colonialism and class problems. Anthropology was very responsive to intellectual trends, criticizing both the supposed neutrality and the conceptions of 'culture' of the anthropologist as a participant observer. This perspective played a catalytic role when scholars of religious studies took up discussions of this kind (see Asad 1993 and Saler 1993). The widespread term 'discourse' also reflects

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demonstrates how Great Britain's rule over India, via the literary education which belonged to the secular realm, aimed at public education in order to avoid tensions between all religions.

the ways in which perception-patterns relate to these kinds of historical constraints, as expressed in the so-called 'linguistic turn'. When combined under the rubric of 'poststructuralism', these complementary critiques of culture and society argue that we cannot really grasp independent objects with our limited modes of perception. We understand things only through the filters of society and history, as well as through language and the definitions it imposes.

The view on religion expanded from problems of reflexivity inside Western societies to the problem of relations between Western and non-Western societies in a globalized world.<sup>3</sup> However, the establishment of cultural hegemony is taking place not only between Western and non-Western societies but can also be seen between Western states, and inside non-Western countries. The movement of occidentalism—which adopts the view of Western orientalism while attempting to shake off this perspective—fosters a distinction inside non-Western states between groups that identify themselves with the West and those that are non-Western. We see here that the binary opposition between Western and non-Western societies is not satisfying. We need to notice the rifts which orientalism and occidentalism cause inside non-Western societies. As present-day Subaltern Studies show, one has to differentiate between indigenous elites and other natives instead of speaking of one homogeneous ethnic group of people. Between the two are power relations that must be evaluated critically (see Spivak 1999 and Chow 1993). In these ways, discussions on the spread of the concept of religion and of religious studies in non-Western societies also bear the possibility, not limited to religious phenomena, to bring a self-understanding concerning the social structures that came with modernization.

### *Modern Japan*

In the following discussion, I want to outline and contextualize the research on religion and religious studies in modern Japan. I will start with an introduction to Western research on concepts of religion in Japan and will then turn to some Japanese publications on the same subject. This is followed by a comparison of Western and Japanese scholarship

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding Marxist interpretations of history in relation to post-structuralism, see Morley and Chen 1996.

since the 1970s, with a focus on the influence of poststructuralist scholarship on Japanese academia since the latter half of the 1990s. Concluding remarks will address State Shintō and the emperor system as parameters specific to the formation of a local concept of religion and religious studies in Japan.

An early Japan-related work on concepts of religion and religious studies is the article “An Asian starting point for the study of religion” by Michael Pye (Despland and Vallée 1992).<sup>4</sup> In order to highlight similarities between Western research on religion and Asian trends, Pye compared the late Edo period thinker Tominaga Nakamoto’s criticism of Buddhist scripture with Western Deism. Similar comparisons between Western and Japanese approaches to the study of religion can be found in articles such as “Beyond Primitive: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity” (Olupona 1997), “A Critique of ‘Religion’ as a Cross-Cultural Category” (Fitzgerald 1997) or “Problems of the Category ‘Religion’ in Japan” (Fitzgerald 2000), as well as in Ivan Strenski’s “Religion, Power, and Final Foucault” (Strenski 1998).

However, discussions by Western scholars of religion are characterized by a strong tendency to refer to Japan as a means to rectify Western religious studies and conceptions of religion. Their final purpose after all is a self-criticism of Western society. In contrast, James E. Ketelaar deals with Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in his book *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and its Persecution* (Ketelaar 1990). He does not make the formation of religious studies or the conception of religion in general his subject matter. Instead, he takes up the contentious process of each Buddhist denomination and sect trying to reach a unified idea of ‘Buddhism’. Ketelaar gives a detailed description of the formation of this idea under the hegemony of Western conceptions of religion, while taking into account the social contexts in Japan at that time. One of the earliest and best-known examples of this transcultural dynamic appears in the work of D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966). According to Robert Sharf in “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism” (1993) Suzuki’s understanding of Buddhism was an imitation of the Western subject and that his work was welcomed because it catered to the self-projection of Europeans and Americans.

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<sup>4</sup> The publication of *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality* edited by Michel Despland and Gerard Vallée (1992), two pioneering European scholars of the concept of religion, indicated a turning point. The critical inspection of the formation of both the concept of religion and religious studies, although centered in America, extended Western religious studies into international academic circles.

Research on concepts of religion and religious studies was also conducted in Japan, starting in 1964 with an article titled “Meiji ikō no Nihon ni okeru shūkyō no gakumon-teki kenkyū no sui 明治以降の日本における宗教の学問的研究の推移” (Changes in the academic research on religion in Japan since Meiji) by Shinoda Kazuto. Shinoda explains that the formation of Japanese religious studies began around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, several decades later than in Europe and America. At the same time he emphasizes the necessity to examine this formation in its social, philosophical and historical contexts. Full-fledged research did not emerge until the latter half of the 1970s, starting with *Meiji shisōka no shūkyō-kan 明治思想家の宗教観* (Meiji Period Thinkers’ View of Religion, 1975) by the Hikaku Shisōshi Kenkyūkai (Society for the Study of Comparative Intellectual History). Risking blame for being too schematic, one can point out that this work resembles *The Meaning and End of Religion* by W.C. Smith (1991 [1963]) in that the former tries to grasp the ‘view’ of religion by Christians, Buddhists and thinkers of the Enlightenment at that time (1868–1912), while Smith shows the modern nature of the concept of religion.

The next important text is *Meiji shūkyō shichō no kenkyū: Shūkyōgaku no kotohajime 明治宗教思潮の研究—宗教学事始* (A Study of Religious Thought Trends in the Meiji Period: The Beginnings of the Scientific Study of Religion in Japan) by Suzuki Norihisa (1979). It is similar to Sharpe’s *Comparative Religion* (1975) in that its subject matter is the formation of religious studies in Japan, while Sharpe discusses the academic history of religious studies in the West. Finally, *Kamigami no Meiji ishin: Shinbutsu bunri to haibutsu kishaku 神々の明治維新—神仏分離と廃仏毀釈* (The Meiji Restoration of Gods: The Separation of Shintō and Buddhism and the Anti-Buddhist Movement that lead to the Destruction of Temples) by Yasumaru Yoshio (1979) can be said to resemble Chidester’s *Savage Systems* (1996). Yasumaru describes how the norms and values of Western civilization oppressed indigenous Japanese folk beliefs and religion, while Chidester analyzes the oppressive relationship between the West and non-Western societies.

Research of this kind was conducted by Japanese scholars in the distinct fields of intellectual history, religious studies, and historical science, even though many studies dealt with religious phenomena that took place during the Meiji period. Japanese research was therefore not focusing on religious studies or conceptions of religion per se, with the exception of the book written by scholar of religion Suzuki. In *Meiji Period Thinkers’ View of Religion*, the main focus of attention is on individual personalities and

their understanding of philosophy and ideas, while the volume *The Meiji Restoration of Gods* is based on the interest in a Marxist understanding of historical science which presupposes that state power oppresses people. After that, in the 1980s, Fujii Takeshi published two articles on institutional history that clarified the formation process of the Department of Religious Studies at Tokyo University (in 1982 and in 1985), but on the whole the discussions did not gain any clear direction.

In the latter half of the 1990s, the reception of criticism related to the discourse on religion gained momentum as part of the 'linguistic turn' in the West. Attempts were made in Japan to objectify and analyze historically the process in which conceptions of religion and religious studies emerged in the course of Japan's modernization.<sup>5</sup> Two studies in particular took the discussions beyond the borders of religious studies and started to have an impact on the fields of Japanese history and intellectual history. *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu: Shūkyō, kokka, shintō* 近代日本の宗教言説とその系譜—宗教・国家・神道 (Religious Discourse and its Genealogy in Modern Japan: Religion, State, and Shintō) by Isomae Jun'ichi (2003), and "Tokushū: Kindai Nihon to shūkyōgaku 特集—近代日本と宗教学" (Special Issue: Modern Japan and Religious Studies) edited by Isomae and Hayashi Makoto (2008). In discussing the relations between Japan as a Non-Western country and Western civilization, or in discussing State Shintō centered on the emperor system, these studies all show a tendency to grasp problems concerning concepts of religion and religious studies. Seki Kazutoshi points out in "Nihon kindai to shūkyō 日本近代と宗教" (Modern Japan and Religion, 1997) that the superiority of belief in opposition to practice in Western concepts of religion resulted in both scholars and the state oppressing folk belief and categorizing folk religion such as Shrine Shintō as non-religious. The same point of view is

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<sup>5</sup> Among these studies are "Shūkyō gaku-teki gensetsu no isō: Anesaki Masaharu ni tsuite 宗教学的言説の位相—姉崎正治について" (A Topology of the Scholarly Discourse on Religion: About Anesaki Masaharu) by Isomae Jun'ichi (1995), "Shūkyō no katarikata 宗教の語り方" (Narratives of Religion, 1996) and *Meiji kokka to shūkyō* 明治国家と宗教 (The Meiji State and Religion, 1999) by Yamaguchi Teruomi, "Nihon kindai to shūkyō 日本近代と宗教" (Modern Japan and Religion, 1997) by Seki Kazutoshi, as well as "Nihon ni okeru 'shūkyō' gainen no keisei 日本における「宗教」概念の形成" (The Formation of the Concept of 'Religion' in Japan, 1998) and "Shūkyō to 'Religion' 「宗教」と「Religion」" ('Shūkyō' and 'Religion') by Shimazono Susumu (2001b). Additionally, the republication of historical sources of Anesaki Masaharu (1873–1949), Inoue Tetsujirō (1856–1944), Katō Genchi (1873–1965), and other scholars of religion in *Shirizu Nihon no shūkyōgaku* シリーズ日本の宗教学 (Japan's Religious Studies Series) since 2002 provides historical research material of substantial quality.



taken by Ama Toshimaro in *Nihonjin wa naze mushūkyō na no ka* 日本人はなぜ無宗教なのか (*Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*, 1996).

When thinking about the relationship between concepts of Shintō and concepts of religion, as well as between Shintō studies and religious studies, problems arise that appear specific to Japan. Even though the discourse on State Shintō presupposes a Western idea of religion, it was quite successful in escaping from this Christian-based hegemony by emphasizing morality and ethics, both concepts familiar to the West but with different nuances in East Asia (morality/*dōtoku* 道徳, ethics/*rinri* 倫理).<sup>6</sup> Scholarly work in contemporary Shintō studies has shown how the concepts of ‘Shintō’ and ‘Shintō studies’ were influenced but not determined by a concept of religion that was essentially non-Western. Fujita Hiromasa emphasizes that modern Shintō studies bear a continuity from early modern Kokugaku 国学, the so-called ‘National Studies’ which preceded and contributed to more recent formations of Shintō (Fujita 2007). Inoue Kanji also demonstrates that the very concept of ‘Shrine Shintō’ (*jinja shintō* 神社神道), which notably formed the basis of self-assertion for modern Shintō studies, was historically established in a relationship to Western concepts of religion (Inoue 2006). It becomes evident that discussions concerning the modernity of Shintō studies and the concept of Shintō are not about whether their respective components show continuities or breaks with previous concepts of religion. Rather, the question is how the arrangements of these discourses, as well as the concepts that compose their significance, are changing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Studies that consider these points include the pioneering article by Haga Shōji titled “Shūkyō, rekishi, ‘shintō’ 宗教・歴史・「神道」” (Religion, History, and ‘Shintō’) in Haga 1994, as well as the aforementioned *Meiji kokka to shūkyō* 明治国家と宗教 (The Meiji State and Religion) by Yamaguchi Teruomi (1999), “Kokka shintō to kindai Nihon no shūkyō kōzō 国家神道と近代日本の宗教構造” (State Shintō and the Structure of Religion in Modern Japan) by Shimazono Susumu (2001a), and “Kindai shintō gaku no seiritsu 近代神道学の成立” (The Formation of Modern Shintō Studies, 1996) and “Kindai ni okeru ‘shūkyō’ gainen no keisei katei 近代における「宗教」概念の形成過程” (The Formation Process of Concepts of Religion in Modern Times, 2002) both by Isomae Jun’ichi, among others.

<sup>7</sup> The aforementioned scholarly publications show that one has to consider the close relation with the political context centered on the emperor system when discussing concepts of religion and religious studies in Japan. Of considerable importance is the theory of State Shintō, which has been researched by scholars of history and Shintō studies. The results of concept-analyses concerning the theory of shrines as non-religious (*jinja hi-shūkyō ron* 神社非宗教論) have to be taken into account, as Sasaki Seishi discussed in his article “Shintō hi-shūkyō yori jinja hi-shūkyō e 神道非宗教より神社非宗教へ” (From Shintō as Non-Religious to Shrines as Non-Religious, 1985). Studies incorporating these results are “Kindai Nihon ni okeru shūkyō to sezoku: ‘Dochaku-teki naru mono’ no

Studies on the formation of concepts of religion and religious studies in Japan referred to here were mainly done by scholars with an affiliation to religious studies. This is due to the fact that Japanese religious studies also followed general trends in poststructuralist scholarship, but it is not only that. The awareness to reevaluate religion in modern Japanese society also arose on the occasion of a series of cult problems beginning with Aum Shinrikyō in 1995. Up to then, however, discussions on concepts of religion and religious studies tended to be focused on intellectuals representing local elites and on religious specialists studying religion; in other words, those who employ a conceptual discourse that was directly influenced by Western society. For an understanding of the relationship between a non-Western society like Japan on the one hand, and Western society on the other, we have to problematize the cultural differences between the Western world and Japan. We also have to consider seriously a relationship of cultural hegemony between indigenous elites inside Japan who are oriented towards the world of Western concepts, and people outside of these circles.<sup>8</sup>

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bunsetsuka 近代日本における宗教と世俗—「土着的なるもの」の分節化” (Religion and the Secular in Modern Japan: Segmentation of the ‘Indigenous’) by Isomae Jun’ichi (2006), “Kokka shintō, kokutai shisō, tennō sūkei: Kōdō, kōgaku to kindai Nihon no shūkyō jōkyō 国家神道・国体思想・天皇崇敬—皇道・皇学と近代日本の宗教状況” (State Shintō, *kokutai* Ideology, and Emperor Veneration: ‘Emperial Way’, ‘National Studies’ and the Situation of Religion in Modern Japan) by Shimazono Susumu (2007), as well as “*Mura no chinju’ to senzen Nihon: ‘Kokka shintō’ no chūki shakai shi* 「村の鎮守」と戦前日本—「国家神道」の地域社会史” (Village Shrines’ and Prewar Japan: A Local Community-History of ‘State Shintō’) by Azegami Naoki (2009). For works discussing the relationship between State Shintō and Buddhism that refer to the concept of religion, see “Kindai bukkyō to kokka shintō 近代仏教と国家神道” (Modern Buddhism and State Shintō) by Hayashi Makoto (2006), and *Meiji zenki no kyōiku, kyōka, bukkyō* 明治前期の教育・教化・仏教 (Education, Enlightenment, and Buddhism during the early Meiji Period) by Tanigawa Yutaka (2008). A study that discusses how a Western concept of religion was implanted into a specific Japanese social context, with a focus on Shrine Shintō, is “Kindai ni okeru ‘shūkyō’ gainen no keisei katei” by Isomae Jun’ichi (2002). By the same author is “Marukusu shugi shi gaku to shūkyō: kindai Nihon ni okeru naimen-teki naru mono マルクス主義史学と宗教—近代日本における内面的なるもの” (Marxist Historiography and Religion: Internals in Modern Japan, 2004) which deals with the relationship between literature, history, and the discourse on religion.

<sup>8</sup> From this perspective it becomes a necessity to integrate the research on folk history into the discussion, works that followed the direction of Yasumaru Yoshio’s *The Meiji Restoration of Gods from the 1970s*. Widely noticed are especially “*Keimōka no tanjō, soshite minzoku no bunmeika: Bunmei kaika to minzoku no hen’yō* 啓蒙家の誕生、そして民俗の文明化—文明開化と民俗の変容” (The Birth of the Enlightenment Thinkers and the Civilization of Folk Culture: Civilization and Enlightenment and Transformations of Folk Culture) by Tsurumaki Takao (1996) for explaining how the power of the state and the indigenous elites who were connected with Western civilization oppressed the

A theory on what role these aspects played in society as a whole becomes possible by adding the factor of political connections with the Japan-specific emperor system to the previous analyses of cultural hegemony regarding Western and non-Western societies. This analytical viewpoint can also include connections between those who do and those who do not practice a conceptual discourse, such as local elites as distinguished from common people. 'The people', moreover, are not one homogenous fixed entity, but contain multi-layered and competing relations, as pointed out by Hiro Tamasaki with "the three-class structure consisting of wealthy farmers and merchants; the people at the base; and the people at the bottom of society and remote areas" (Hirota 1980: 93).

When scholars orient their research towards the social reality of the people, then research on religious discourses in Japan, without copying Western religious studies, should allow a refinement of the binary opposition Chidester showed in *Savage Systems* between Western and non-Western societies. In other words, a reconsideration of Western civilization from the perspective of non-Western societies could be achieved by addressing the problem of cultural hegemony. When research lacks this critical and comparative perspective, epistemological reflection gets misused as a tool in the struggle for intellectual supremacy among indigenous elites concerning the import of Western intellectual trends. In order to not fall into such a trap, it is necessary to be self-aware of both the standpoint one adopts and the reasons why one discusses the topic of 'religion in Japan'.

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realm of folk believes, and "Kyōha shintō no seiritsu: 'shūkyō' toiu manazashi no seiritsu to Konkōkyō 教派神道の成立—「宗教」という眼差しの成立と金光教" (The Formation of Sect Shintō: Konkōkyō and the Formation of a View of 'Religion') by Katsurajima Nobuhiro (1997) for demonstrating how folk religion was subject to a reorganization by the West. A similar point of view is also taken in "Meiji-ki ni okeru shakai to Tenrikyō 明治期における社会と天理教" (Society and Tenrikyō during the Meiji Period) by Hatakama Kazuhiro (1996) and "Ikigami no shisōshi: Nihon no kindaika to minshū shūkyō 生き神の思想史—日本の近代化と民衆宗教" (An Intellectual History of Living Gods: Japan's Modernization and Folk Religion) by Kozawa Hiroshi (1988) as well as "Genshi suru kindai kūkan: Meishin, byōki, zashikirō, arui wa rekishi no kioku 幻視する近代空間—迷信・病気・座敷牢、あるいは歴史の記憶" (Visions of Modern Space: Superstitions, Illnesses, and Prison Cells, or Memories of History) by Kawamura Kunimitsu (1997 [1990]).

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PART II

TRANSFORMATIONS WITHIN JAPAN'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS





## SHINTŌ SHRINES: TRADITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

BERNHARD SCHEID

When we speak of a 'shrine' in Japanese Studies, we usually refer to a religious site dedicated to a Shintō deity (*kami* 神). 'Shrine' corresponds to a number of Japanese terms (*jinja* 神社, *yashiro* 社, *jingū* 神宮, *miya* 宮, etc.) but all these expressions indicate that the religious site in question belongs to Shintō and not to Buddhism or to any other religion. By contrast, the various Japanese expressions for a Buddhist site (*tera* 寺, *jiin* 寺院, etc.) are rendered as 'temple'. Thus, there is a clear semantic difference in Japanese between 'Shintō' and 'Buddhist' religious sites, translated as 'shrines' and 'temples' in Japanese Studies. In practice, however, it is often difficult to distinguish them. Not only foreign visitors but also many Japanese are therefore at times unable to tell whether they are paying a visit to a Buddhist or a Shintō sanctuary. The issue is further complicated by the fact that larger religious sites in Japan tend to include both religions. More precisely, large temple compounds usually have an area reserved for shrines of the (Shintō) protector deities of the main temple, while many large shrine compounds are surrounded by small Buddhist temples related to their deities. This double functionality of religious sites corresponds to the fact that most Japanese pay regular visits to both Buddhist and Shintō sites.

This chapter tries to provide some basic orientation in this confusing area, mainly from the perspective of shrine worship. Starting with the distinct characteristics of shrine buildings the discussion also provides an overview of the history of shrine worship, its complex interaction with Buddhism and its political functions in the modern period.

### *Visible and Invisible Aspects of Shrine Architecture and Layout*

In a narrow sense, 'shrine' refers to a single religious building. A shrine building is typically a ground-level wooden structure with an ornate, gently curved roof, and can be of any size ranging from a miniature way-side shrine to an impressive hall. Small individual shrines can be found all over Japan at crossroads, scenic spots, in the middle of fields, in the

mountains, and nowadays even at the top of a modern skyscraper. In a wider sense, however, 'shrine' may also be used *pars pro toto* for a larger 'shrine compound' consisting of a main sanctuary and several auxiliary or branch shrines as well as a host of other religious buildings. Most Shintō activity takes place at such compounds and the main part of this article is therefore dedicated to these larger sites.

If we compare a shrine compound to a Catholic church, its different buildings can be likened to individual altars. Big churches usually comprise a number of altars dedicated to different saints, but there is one altar for the main object of worship that usually lends its name to the respective church. In Shintō (and also in Buddhism for that matter), the situation is similar. There is usually a main sanctuary and a number of side-halls for deities of lesser importance at a given site. However, in contrast to a Christian church, all these structures are scattered in an open area while the Christian altars are united in one big building. This reflects a functional difference between shrines and churches: while churches serve as meeting places of the religious community, shrines simply store the 'divine bodies' (*shintai* 神体) of their deities. If believers or casual visitors want to pay their respects to them, they do not attend a group ceremony but approach the sanctuary of the respective deity individually and perform a few ritual gestures of respect in front of it: bowing, clapping, offering small sums of money. Large scale celebrations are restricted to festivals, which are usually lively events in the open air. There is therefore no need for a big structure to shelter the whole community. The same is true, by the way, for most Buddhist temples in Japan.

Besides the main sanctuary (*honden* 本殿), a shrine compound also comprises buildings for ritual events, the so-called *haiden* 拜殿 or ceremony halls. Often, *haiden* are bigger than the main sanctuary of the respective shrine compound and may appear as the central building to the first-time visitor. In religious status, however, they are less important than the main sanctuary. They may be entered by anybody but usually ritual performers use them, while the common visitors remain outside. Only those who have paid for a particular ritual for their private benefit join the priests in the ceremonial halls.

Shrine compounds were typically built at the borders of a town or a village, ideally at the foot of a smoothly ascending hill. Halls and sanctuaries are scattered there in response to local topographic conditions rather than conforming to a strictly geometrical layout. Again, this is also true for many Buddhist sites. This 'marginalization' of religious sites accords

to an old tradition. In the remote past, it seems that shrines were not directly attached to the political center but were set up at some distance where transportation routes, the water supply, or distant views of the surrounding area could be controlled by the shrine. Shrines, therefore, seem to have provided a strategic (perhaps even a military) protection which turned into a symbolic protection from afar in later times. This pattern continued well into the Edo period (17th–mid 19th century) when the mausoleum for the founder of the ruling Tokugawa dynasty—the Tōshōgū 東照宮 Shrine built for the deified Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) in 1617—was deliberately situated in Nikkō at the northern border of the Tokugawa heartland, the Kantō plain, some 100km north of the new capital Edo. In a similar way, many other important Shintō sites including Ise 伊勢 and Izumo 出雲 are found at comparatively remote places in the countryside. At least for premodern shrines there seems to be the rule of thumb that the more important a shrine the farther away it is built from the worshipping community. I will discuss possible reasons for this phenomenon in more detail below.

A shrine deity is usually in possession of a *shintai* or ‘divine body’. The *shintai* is a concrete sign indicating the presence of the *kami* and is therefore the main object of worship in Shintō. In most shrines, nobody is allowed to look at the *shintai*, which remains hidden in the main sanctuary. Not even the priests would enter the sanctuary under normal conditions.

Typical *shintai* are mirrors (in ancient times bronze mirrors, then most prestigious and symbolic objects), swords, or curved beads (*maga-tama* 勾玉), but some shrines also contain statues of deities (as do Buddhist temples) or natural objects like rocks. Shintō practitioners may possess a miniature shrine at home, where a small paper strip with the name of a *kami* can serve as a *shintai*, while in a few famous cases, scenic landmarks like waterfalls (e.g. the Nachi Falls) or cone-shaped hills (Mt. Miwa 三輪山) are regarded as the ‘divine bodies’ worshipped at a nearby shrine. These shrines do not have a main sanctuary since the *shintai* is too big but the access to the *shintai* area is restricted by taboo regulations.

An alternative term for *shintai* is (*mi*)*tamashiro* (御)靈代, lit. ‘representative of the (august) spirit [of a *kami*]’. This indicates that the *shintai* is not regarded as the deity itself but as a representation or an ‘abode’ of the *kami*. The most essential ritual at the inauguration of a new shrine, therefore, consists of ‘calling down’ or ‘inviting’ the intended *kami* to dwell in

the 'divine body'. The same *kami* may, of course, dwell in a number of shrines. In these cases, a 'branch-spirit' (*bunrei* 分霊) of an existing shrine deity is invited to dwell in a new *shintai*, which then becomes the object of worship at the new shrine.

As already mentioned, *shintai* are generally shrouded in secrecy and can only be viewed if they no longer serve as 'divine bodies'. Even priests must not look at them and often do not even know what their *shintai* actually consists of (cf. Nelson 1996: 31). At times when a *shintai* has to be taken out of its shrine, it is transferred to a temporary shrine (in case of rebuilding) or to a portable shrine (at festivals). Also at these occasions it remains hidden in a box. Great ritual care and preparations in form of abstention rites by the priests are necessary to avoid any disturbance of the *kami* during such a process of translocation.

The main hall of a really important shrine is usually once more shielded from public access by surrounding corridors or fences that allow nothing but a glimpse on the roof under which the 'divine body' is placed. In these cases, worship to the deity is usually done in front of the gate leading to that innermost district. Some shrines, like Kamigamo 上賀茂 in Kyoto or Kasuga 春日 in Nara, however, open their inner compounds at special events such as the New Year's festival. There is, therefore, no iron rule regarding the secrecy of the main sanctuary but rather a subtle play of concealment and exhibition related to the religious calendar of the specific site.

### *Visual Markers*

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is often difficult to distinguish Shintō shrines from Japanese Buddhist temples if one merely regards their design and layout. Given the cultural importance and the long history of Buddhism in Japan, such architectonic similarities are indeed of no surprise. Nevertheless, the above mentioned semantic difference between 'shrines' and 'temples' is also expressed by a few distinctive symbols that indicate almost without fail whether a building is dedicated to a *kami* or to a Buddha.

The most characteristic of these visual markers is the *torii* 鳥居, a simple gate consisting of two pillars and two cross beams. There is virtually no Shintō site without this emblematic entrance. *Torii* are almost never adjacent to a wall or fence but stand free and merely indicate the symbolic passage from a mundane to a sacred space. Usually, one or several

*torii* are placed at the entrance of a shrine compound as well as in front of every individual shrine building.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this emblematic function, we may find *torii* also in some ancient Buddhist graveyards (for instance at Mt. Kōya 高野山, the spiritual center of Shingon Buddhism). There is, moreover, a famous *torii* at the entrance of Japan's oldest officially commissioned Buddhist temple, the Shitennōji 四天王寺 in Osaka (founded in 593). This suggests that the *torii* were not always an exclusive property of Shintō but may have served as general identifiers of sacred sites in early times.

A marker of similar symbolic value is the so-called *shimenawa* 注連縄 or divine rope. *Shimenawa* are simple ropes of straw and can be used to surround a sacred space or a natural object of awe-inspiring size or shape like a 'divine rock' or a 'divine tree'. More often, however, *shimenawa* are attached to a *torii* or hung below the entrance of a shrine building indicating the presence of a *kami*. Finally, Shintō sites can be identified by the famous zigzag streamers (*gohei* 御幣, or *shide* 紙垂), which are never used in a Buddhist context. They are usually made of white paper attached to a *shimenawa* rope, a ritual instrument, or a ceremonial offering.

Shintō architecture comprises a few other elements that may further serve to identify a shrine building. Most characteristic are the crossed wooden beams called *chigi* 千木. At the Grand Shrines of Ise and all other buildings following this type, they appear as extended rafters that project from either end of the roof, while in other cases they are X-shaped decorative elements riding on both ends of the ridgepole. Similar decorative symbols are the *katsuogi* 鯉木, ellipsoid bolts (their name is actually derived from the bonito fish, *katsuo* 鰹) placed between the *chigi* on the ridgepole. In contrast to the above mentioned *torii*, these roof ornaments are no unconditional requirements for a shrine building. In fact, shrines lacking *chigi* and *katsuogi* are the norm rather than the exception.

In addition to these identifiers of Shintō architecture and ritual, many other religious objects such as beautifully decorated wells or water basins (*temizuya* 手水屋) for the ritual purification of hands and mouths, stone lanterns (*tōrō* 燈籠), or entrance guardians in the form of 'lion-dogs' (*komainu* 狛犬), may be found at a shrine compound. While some authors list these objects also among the characteristics of a Shintō shrine,

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<sup>1</sup> In some cases, for instance at the Fushimi Inari 伏見稻荷 Shrine in Kyoto, countless *torii* donated by individual believers form virtual tunnels leading from one sanctuary to another.

they are rather general items of a Japanese religious site, since they may be equally found in a Buddhist temple and are often of Buddhist origin. The same is true for lucky charms (*omamori* お守り), talismans (*ofuda* お札), votive tablets (*ema* 絵馬), and divination slips (*omikuji* お神籤), which are sold at every bigger religious institution, Buddhist or Shintō, alike. This indicates once more that shrines share many characteristics with Japanese Buddhist temples, and that the basic pattern of worship is quite similar, at least from a lay visitor's point of view.<sup>2</sup>

If there is any morphological characteristic that sets the above mentioned shrine markers apart from more general religious items, it is their preservation of comparatively simple, apparently 'archaic' elements. The simplicity of the material used for ropes and zigzag streamers corresponds to the simplicity in the form of the *torii*, the *chigi* and the *katsuogi*, which are regarded as remnants of ancient Japanese architecture. We may find this fondness of simplicity and conservation also in the ritual rebuilding of the Ise Shrines every twenty years, which occurs at a few other important shrines as well. Originally a common feature of ancient palace architecture the destruction and rebuilding of shrines is now done in a ritualized fashion.<sup>3</sup> While the material is always new, the construction techniques remain exactly the same—a most efficient way to preserve a particular style of architecture. Nevertheless, these strikingly archaic elements are but one feature of traditional shrine architecture. The vast majority of shrines are characterized by the elaborate styles of later ages, which developed, as already mentioned, hand in hand with Buddhist architecture.

### *Quantitative Aspects of Worship at Shrines*

According to an ancient expression, the Shintō pantheon consists of *yao-yorozu no kami* 八百万の神, lit. 'eight-hundred myriads or eight millions of *kami*'. In other words, the number of *kami* is incalculable. No central authority exists to decide what may be actually called a *kami*. Every object of the visible world may be animated and any of these *animae* or spirits may be treated as a *kami*. Regarding shrines, however, it is possible to provide an approximate idea of their quantitative proportions.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent study that emphasizes the common approach to Shintō and Buddhism in Japan, cf. Reader and Tanabe 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The original function of this custom had quite practical functions to forestall the decay of wooden building, especially at times when stone fundaments were not yet in use (cf. Totman 1989: 13–18).

The government's Agency of Cultural Affairs notes there are about 80,000 shrines that are officially recognized as 'individual judicial religious persons' (*tan'i shūkyō hōjin* 単位宗教法人) (Statistics Bureau 2009). Only a small portion of these shrines have resident priests and constitute what has been called a 'shrine compound'. The vast majority are single, unmanned wayside shrines that may be compared to small chapels in Christian countries. Considering that compounds contain a multitude of side shrines, the total number of shrine buildings within or outside of larger compounds is sometimes estimated as about 100,000 or more.

Compared to Buddhism, the number of shrines is slightly larger than the number of temples (about 75,000), but temples are usually bigger and there are probably four times as many clerics in Japanese Buddhism than in Shintō.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the number of registered shrine priests is even less than the number of shrine sites. This suggests that many small shrines are maintained by lay believers. Organized religious activity is therefore much more developed in Japanese Buddhism, while the *kami* are often worshipped without professional guidance.

Most shrines belong to nation-wide networks headed by one of Japan's oldest and most prestigious shrines. In terms of prestige, the most representative shrine is the imperial ancestor shrine in Ise (actually composed of two sites, the 'Inner' and the 'Outer Shrine' and therefore usually rendered as the 'Grand Shrines of Ise'). Regarding the number of branch shrines, however, the network of Ise ranks significantly behind the networks of shrines dedicated to Inari 稻荷 or Hachiman 八幡.<sup>5</sup> The ties between the shrines in such networks are generally rather loose but their respective quantities reflect to a certain extent the popularity of shrine deities in present Japan.

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<sup>4</sup> Government statistics list 79,000 Shintō priests as opposed to 314,000 Buddhist clerics in 2006 (Statistics Bureau 2009). The same statistics indicate a dramatic shift in this relation. While Shintō priests decreased by about twenty percent from 1980 to 2006, Buddhists increased by about the same percentage. These numbers, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, since they are based on reports by the religious organizations themselves, not on independent research. For the general problems with statistics on Japanese religion see the article by Michael Roemer in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> According to *Shintō jiten* (Inoue et al. 1994), Inari Shrines, which can be identified by their fox guardian figures, comprise the largest network with 32,000 sites headed by the Fushimi Inari Grand Shrine in Kyoto. Hachiman Shrines follow suite with 25,000 sites. Shinmei 神明 Shrines, which belong to the network of Ise, only form the third largest group of some 18,000 sites (Inoue et al. 1994: 313; see also *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, s.v. "Shrine Names and Distributions"). Again, other sources arrive at slightly different estimations but the basic picture remains the same.



Figure 1. Grand Shrines of Ise, locked entrance to the “Inner Shrine” (Naikū). Largely disguised from public view, the main buildings of the Grand Shrines of Ise preserve ancient shrine architecture through ritual rebuilding every twenty years. (Photograph by John Nelson, 2006)

In addition, most shrines belong to the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁), which provides a different kind of nationwide network. It is an umbrella organization founded in 1946, immediately after the Second World War, in place of the governmental structures that oversaw shrines in the period of State Shintō (see below). For various reasons, several important shrines such as Fushimi Inari in Kyoto, the Tōshōgū in Nikkō, or the Yasukuni 靖国 Shrine in Tokyo, are not members of this organization.

### *Who are the Shrine Deities?*

To the foreign visitor it is striking that many shrines are referred to by their place names rather than by the names of their main deities. Often, the main deity’s name is not even known to the general populace. This indifference is not necessarily a phenomenon of modern secularism but can be observed already in premodern sources. It corresponds to the fact that shrine compounds tend to comprise so many different *kami*. Even the main sanctuary may be dedicated to two, three, or even more deities.



A good example is the famous Kasuga Shrine in Nara, originally the tutelary shrine of Japan's most powerful court aristocrats, the Fujiwara 藤原. Kasuga is simply a place name. In the eighth century, the Fujiwara turned this place into an ancestor shrine for four deities whom they regarded as their divine predecessors (Takemikazuchi, Futsunushi, Ame-nokoyane, Himegami).<sup>6</sup> The main sanctuary of the shrine therefore consists of four structures of almost the same size and layout dedicated to these ancestors. In the course of time, however, there emerged the 'Great Shining Deity of Kasuga' (Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神) as a distinct divine personality that figured prominently in several religious legends and paintings.<sup>7</sup> At the Kasuga site itself, however, we search in vain for a sanctuary or a *shintai* of this Kasuga deity. Rather, it seems to be a kind of super-*kami* represented by the whole compound.

The Fujiwara also erected ancestor shrines at other places including the Yoshida 吉田 Shrine in Kyoto. These sites contain the same set of deities as Kasuga. As the Fujiwara ancestor cult lost importance, however, these shrines came to be known again by their place names and assumed separate identities, e.g. Yoshida Daimyōjin 吉田大明神.

Thus, we can observe a strong inclination to localism. The unique character of a specific site can be emphasized to the extent that it becomes a *kami* of its own, while the names of the individual *kami* actually enshrined there tend to fall into oblivion. It seems as if the abundance of names that accumulated in the course of time at certain sites has led to an overkill of information and a tendency among lay visitors to regard all *kami* as more or less the same.

In addition, there are indeed many anonymous *kami* of the field (*ta no kami* 田の神), mountain deities (*yama no kami* 山の神) or road deities (*dōsojin* 道祖神) worshipped at single wayside shrines or in the form of rustic stone monuments. It is tempting to relate these phenomena to 'animism', often mentioned in the context of Shintō. According to this interpretation, *kami* are basically nature spirits and therefore—like nature itself—always the same and always different like the 'sacred rocks' and 'sacred trees' mentioned above.

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<sup>6</sup> I have refrained from rendering Chinese characters here since the writing of these names is highly inconsistent in different sources.

<sup>7</sup> Together with Amaterasu and Hachiman, Kasuga was arguably one of the most powerful deities in the medieval and early modern periods, as evidenced by the famous 'Oracles of the Three Shrines' (*Sanja takusen* 三社託宣). Cf. Bocking 2001.

On the other hand, shrines such as Kasuga or Yoshida were (and sometimes still are) run by priestly lineages purportedly related to their respective *kami* by ties of kinship.<sup>8</sup> Such kin relations between *kami* and priests can be found in quite a number of shrines that trace their origin back to the imperial court in the classical period. These claims are backed by minute genealogical tables that appear surprisingly reliable even after close historical inspection. The elites of Shintō priesthood are therefore intimately related to ancestor worship. Their anthropomorphic deities have little to do with ‘animism’. This indicates a fracture between popular notions of *kami* and specialist shrine Shintō. Shrine priests, however, do not insist that lay believers know the names of their *kami*. Rather, priests and lay people are united by the use and acceptance of the same symbolic and ritual signifiers leaving open the question what these signifiers actually represent.

#### *Historical Roots of Shrine Building: Palaces and Storehouses*

In pre-historic times, rock altars (*iwasaka* 磐境), some of which are still extant at certain shrine compounds, or simple groves seem to have served as sites of worship. The character ‘shrine’ (*yashiro*), by the way, was also read as ‘grove’ (*mori*) in ancient texts like the *Manyōshū* 万葉集 of 759 (Sonoda 2000: 42–43). It is not quite clear when shrine building began in Japan, but it is generally held that the practice does not go far beyond the beginnings of Japanese history. To some degree, the advent of Buddhism in the sixth century CE may have spurred this development. Japan’s earliest mytho-chronological texts, the *Kojiki* 古事記 of 712, and the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 of 720, contain stories about the first building of shrines. These stories suggest two paradigmatic types of buildings which are also reflected in early shrine architecture: a palace and a storehouse.

The first paradigmatic example from mythological texts concerns the Grand Shrine of Izumo. Even today, the main hall of this large compound is a massive structure but according to records from the Heian period (late 8th–12th century), it must have been twice as big, rising as high as 16 *jō* (48 meters) and therefore even surpassing the hall of the Great Buddha in Nara. While this has long been regarded as a legend, recent archeological excavations testify that the hall was formerly built on a huge platform

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<sup>8</sup> For the history of the Kasuga priests, cf. Grapard 1992; for the Yoshida priests and their relations to the Fujiwara, cf. Scheid 2001: chap. 3.

that may have been indeed of such a dimension. In any event, Izumo was certainly the tallest building of ancient Japan for many centuries.

This shrine was built, according to one legend, for the deity Ōkuninushi 大国主 who ruled the earth before the ‘Heavenly Grandson’ of the sun deity Amaterasu 天照 came down from the High Plain of Heaven (*Takama no hara* 高天原) to take over leadership on earth. This transfer of power was achieved by an apparently ‘unequal’ treaty, according to which Ōkuninushi yielded his rule to the imperial ancestor in exchange for a palace “with cross-beams [*chigi*] of the roof that soar high towards the High Heavenly Plain.”<sup>9</sup> This palace eventually became the Shrine of Izumo. Even if this report clearly belongs to the realm of myth and cannot be taken at face value, it illustrates the idea that a shrine is basically the same as a palace. The Japanese word *miya*, by the way, can indicate both a shrine and a mundane palace and is by extension also used as a title for an imperial prince.

The paradigmatic example of a shrine as storehouse can be found at the Grand Shrines of Ise, which both accord to the same architectural pattern. The founding legends of this shrine compound lead us back to the court of Sujin, traditionally regarded as the tenth emperor of Japan. The story takes place in a different region than Izumo—Yamato (today Nara prefecture), the heartland of the imperial dynasty—and in a much later time than the previous example. According to the chronicles, Sujin’s reign is tormented by a horrible plague killing half of the population. He begins to suspect that Amaterasu and another deity whom he worships regularly *inside his palace* may be responsible for the plague and *removes* them. In a dream revelation, a deity who identifies himself as Ōmononushi 大物主 (the Great Master of Things) confirms that the plague is due to him and that it will not stop unless a new lineage of priests is installed to worship him. As soon as this happens, Ōmononushi calms down and eventually becomes the already mentioned deity of Mt. Miwa in the Nara basin, where the whole hill is regarded as the *kami’s* ‘divine body’. This founding legend of the Miwa Shrine is the first concrete story referring to both a separate location of *kami* veneration and a separate lineage of priests in Yamato.

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<sup>9</sup> This phrase is taken from a eulogy (*norito* 祝詞) of the high-priests of Izumo, contained in the *Engishiki* 延喜式, a document from the tenth century (Philippi 1990 [1959]: 72).

The sun goddess Amaterasu, by the way, is somewhat overshadowed by the Miwa deity in the Sujin story. Under the next emperor Suinin, however, an imperial princess is charged with the task to look for a place for the sun deity. After a long journey, she finds a suitable spot in Ise, far removed from the imperial palace. The story is explicitly related to Sujin's relocating the *kami* from his palace even if it took about one century (according to the legendary chronology) to find Amaterasu's final abode.<sup>10</sup>

According to the chronicles, the reigns of Sujin and Suinin are marked by a few other religious innovations such as the separation of cults for heavenly and earthly deities and the establishment of a 'department for worship' (Aston 1972: 1:178) at the court. This 'religious revolution' (Ellwood 1990) under Sujin and Suinin is generally seen as reflecting historical facts.<sup>11</sup> We can therefore surmise that the early Yamato rulers acted as priestly kings who administered both their ancestor deities (Amaterasu) and the tutelary deities of the country (the Miwa deity). A plague attributed to divine wrath may have led to the fact that the king conferred the *kami* (i.e., his priestly functions) to a new guild of ritual specialists. The *kami* were removed from the palace and received 'shrines', which caused the end of their harmful actions.

In this case, shrines seem to be means to control the potentially dangerous and hostile energies of a *kami*. *Kami* have to be placed in a fixed abode where special ritualists take care of them in order to prevent them from mischief. The early shrine deities of the Yamato region were therefore not only symbolic representations of the ruling dynasty, but also representations of adverse natural or historical circumstances that should be 'stored away'. This notion may have had an impact on the architecture of early Yamato shrines, which can be still observed at Ise: Ise shrines represent a storehouse rather than a palace (Mori 2003: 16).

In historical times, i.e. from the sixth century onward, shrine worship continued to display both aspects. On the one hand, shrines were clearly built for clan deities (*ujigami* 氏神) probably representing a kind of ancestor worship for the founders of local elite families (*uji* 氏) or an entire ethnic group. On the other hand, *kami* were also seen as the proprietors of

<sup>10</sup> For the most detailed reports on Sujin and Suinin, see the *Nihon shoki* (Aston 1972: 1:150–87); the *Kojiki* contains similar reports (Chamberlain 1981 [1919]: 208–42).

<sup>11</sup> The traditional dates of Sujin's and Suinin's reigns (97 BC–30 BC and 29 BC–70 CE, respectively) are certainly mytho-historical projections. Most historians agree, however, that their stories reflect historical developments at some time between the third and fifth century. Cf. Ellwood 1990 and Kidder 2007: esp. 189–207.

land into which new human settlements intruded. The tillage of new land was therefore combined with the erecting of a shrine in compensation for the ground acquired by the agricultural community.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the *kami* represent forces with interests different from those of the worshipping community.

### *Plagues and Festivals*

The pattern that shrines originated from a time of crisis can be found again in subsequent periods of Japanese shrine history. As in the Sujin case, plagues, which occurred frequently in ancient Japanese history (Farris 1985), caused people to look for hitherto unknown deities as the culprits. These were often found in the vengeful spirits (*goryō* 御霊, *onyō* 怨霊) of historical personalities who had died an unjust death. The best known example is the case of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), a famous scholar, poet, and statesman who died in exile due to a political intrigue. After his death, Kyoto was tormented by a series of disasters. Eventually two shrines were built for him and the calamities stopped (or rather, were attributed to different *kami*). Today, Michizane is worshipped in some 10,000 Tenjin 天神 Shrines (the fourth largest shrine network) all over Japan. Owing to his reputation as a scholar he has become a deity of learning and is indeed particularly popular among pupils and students preparing for entry examinations at schools and universities. The original purpose of cults directed to Michizane, however, was the pacification of his wrathful spirit. Besides Michizane, there are also a number of less well known figures with similar fates who are collectively worshiped in so called Goryō (vengeful spirit) Shrines. Early examples date back to the ninth century and were always connected with the belief that these figures had caused others to die from unnatural diseases (Naumann 1988: 207–16).

The Yasaka 八坂 (formerly Gion 祇園) Shrine in Kyoto, is another famous shrine that was founded in the late ninth century to protect the city from epidemic diseases. It was dedicated to an obscure deity responsible for both the occurrence and the healing of plagues. Brought along

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<sup>12</sup> The *Hitachi fudoki* 常陸風土記, a regional chronicle of present-day Hibaraki Prefecture east of Tokyo written in the early eighth century, contains a very interesting story in this respect: the local *kami* appear in the form of horned snakes that attack all people who try to cultivate the land. An emissary of the central government eventually kills several of these snake *kami* but also sets up a shrine for them as a visible sign of a new contract regarding ground rights. This measure settles the issue (Aoki 1997: 50).

from India by Buddhism it was called the Ox-headed King (Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王) and is sometimes identified with the Medicine Buddha (Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来) or with the mythological deity Susanoo.

A most striking common feature of these deities is the fact that shrine worship was accompanied and sometimes even predated by gorgeous festivals (*matsuri* 祭) for these *kami*, including the performance of musicians, dancers, and clowns that attracted the whole population of the city. This tradition has been continued ever since. Festivals to former plague deities are still among the most popular religious events of all Japan including the Gion Matsuri in Kyoto (organized by the Yasaka Shrine) or the Tenjin Matsuri in Osaka (organized by one of the biggest branch shrines dedicated to Michizane).<sup>13</sup> Thus, these shrines not only share a common feature in the fact that they originated from times of crisis, they were also designed with the purpose to delight their deities—and thus to prevent them from harmful action. This paradoxical intention probably reflects the religious thinking of early Japanese urbanism, which was accompanied by plagues of hitherto unknown dimensions.

The painter Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889), a satiric commentator of the political and social turmoil at the beginning of Japan's modernization/Westernization in the nineteenth century, has illustrated this mechanism very vividly in a sketch of a *matsuri* of mice. Like humans at a *matsuri* we see the mice carrying a heavy float along the street. Instead of a portable shrine, however, the float consists of a gourd on top of which a cat has taken seat. The cat is wearing a hat or 'crown' (*kanmuri* 冠) that not only Shintō priests but also statues of the *kami* are adorned with and is therefore clearly an object of worship. However, the cat's facial expression reveals that there are still some dangerous thoughts lingering in its mind. Nevertheless, the ritual jamboree of the mice waving Shintō wands (*harai-gushi* 祓串) and dancing furiously around the float manages to keep the cat quiet for the time being. The relationship between dangerous deities and joyous festivals could not have been more adequately expressed than in this sketch by Kyōsai.

<sup>13</sup> The most popular festival in Edo, the third metropolitan area in premodern times, was organized by the Kanda 神田 Shrine dedicated among other deities to the spirit of Taira no Masakado (?–940), a rebel warrior who was eventually defeated by imperial forces but remained a local hero in eastern Japan. Although the history of his shrine is less well known than the histories of shrines in Kyoto, it seems that he was also regarded as a vengeful spirit (Sonoda 1975: 130).



Figure 2. Festival of Mice (Kawanabe Kyōsai, 1879, colored sketch on paper, 37.7 × 52.5cm—© Courtesy of the British Museum)

### *Buddhism*

As the above examples illustrate, Buddhism cannot be ignored in the history of shrine building. Buddhist temples not only provided the models for several aspects of shrine architecture, Buddhist monks also propagated certain *kami* and erected shrines for them. The rationale behind such syncretistic action was that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas may choose to appear in the guise of a *kami* in order to reach the Japanese more effectively. Technically, the identification of *kami* and Buddhas was based in most cases on the so-called *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 pattern according to which the *kami* formed the ‘trace’ (*suijaku* 垂迹) left behind on earth by the ‘original form’ (*honji* 本地) of the Buddhas. By this rationale, which emerged slowly between the eighth and the thirteenth century, *kami* such as Hachiman, Kasuga, and later even Ise (Amaterasu), were used to propagate faith in the Buddha. Naturally, general concepts of the *kami* were fundamentally affected by this process.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For recent studies on the history of this concept see Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003.

Similar developments also occurred in other Asian cultures where Buddhism took root side by side with indigenous traditions. In China, Buddhism triggered the emergence of religious Daoism while Daoist concepts trickled into Chinese Buddhist texts. In Tibet, the Bon religion was formed largely according to Buddhist paradigms while Buddhism included indigenous mountain deities in its pantheon. In Japan, however, we do not see two traditions taking similar shapes in a process of ‘accommodating to the weapons of the enemy’. Rather, Buddhism became the dominating factor while ‘Shintō’ did not even exist as a tradition outside a Buddhist universe. Concepts of Shintō as an independent, non-Buddhist religion appeared only at the end of the medieval period and were largely confined to intellectual and priestly circles. On the other hand, the Japanese always believed in the *kami* (even Japanese Buddhist monks who regarded these *kami* as ‘traces’ or emanations of the Buddha). Moreover, they were also convinced that *kami* must be worshipped in rituals that were at least outwardly different from orthodox Buddhist ritualism. Thus, the syntactic and symbolic difference between *kami* and Buddhas, or shrines and temples, was always maintained, while ideological conflicts between these traditions were virtually nonexistent up until the Early Modern (Edo) Period. Together, temples and shrines formed one religious system that was characterized by a syncretic discourse and a ritual division of labor.

In the classical (Nara and Heian) period, the central government did everything to promote the spread of Buddhism which was more or less synonymous with continental civilization. On the other hand, the court managed to keep a set of ceremonies dedicated to the *kami* under the direct authority of the Tennō and a few leading aristocratic families. They also extended this ritual system to the provinces where—with the exception of Kyushu—Buddhist temples took root much later than in the center.<sup>15</sup> Imperial court ranks were bestowed not only on local strongmen but also on the shrines of their tutelary deities. Thus, shrines served to define and legitimate status hierarchies between the center and the periphery. This is most accurately documented in the *Engishiki*, a document from the tenth century which not only contains a list of some three thousand imperially recognized shrines but also minute details about the give and take of offerings between these shrines and the imperial court. It appears, therefore, that the spread of shrines and the spread of Buddhist

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<sup>15</sup> This can be verified, for instance, in regional chronicles (*fudoki* 風土記) from the eighth century (cf. Aoki 1997).



temples developed side by side in order to strengthen the central government of the country.

While the hierarchy of center and periphery dwindled with the loss of actual imperial power in the medieval period (12th–16th century), shrines remained important for the representation of local leadership. At the same time, the court retained some authority in the field of *kami* ritualism, since court ceremonies remained the model for shrine rituals all over the country. Even shrines that rose to prominence as ‘guardians’ of Buddhism and were under strict supervision of Buddhist temples (as for instance the Hie Sannō 日吉山王 Shrine serving the temple complex on Mt. Hiei 比叡山), employed a non-Buddhist shrine clergy for most of their rituals. Thus, the charisma of the imperial court formed the backbone of a certain ritual, ‘Shintoist’ autonomy.

Interestingly, there was hardly any dogma or ideology supporting the ritual dichotomy of *kami* and Buddha worship. Questions whether Buddhist or *kami* rituals were appropriate in a given situation were either solved by taboo regulations or by reference to historical precedence. One of the strongest taboos separating *kami* and Buddhist ritualism was, and still is, the notion that *kami* must be kept away from pollution (*kegare* 穢) by death, blood and illness. Thus, mourning rituals but also exorcism and healing came to be dominated by Buddhists, while ‘Shintō’ was and is reserved for the more this-worldly concerns in life.

### *Patterns of Shrine Kami*

As we can gather from this however incomplete overview, shrines at the end of the premodern period were dedicated to a wide range of quite diverse deities. While some originated from times immemorial, others were regarded as the spirits of human figures who are very well documented by historical sources. The creation of shrine *kami*, therefore, did not end at some point in history but was and still is an ongoing process.

In order to arrive at some kind of systematization, I would like to arrange shrine *kami* according to their myths of origin (*engi* 縁起) which reveal the major motivations for shrine building. In doing so, I have arrived at four groups: (1) deities of mythological origin, (2) wrathful spirits, (3) deities of Buddhist origin, and (4) deified historical rulers. In the following, I will explain the characteristics of each group. I will moreover show that (5) many shrine deities combine two or more of these types. In the next subchapter, I will explain types of shrines that originated in the modern era.

(1) The first group of deities can be found in the imperial chronicles and a few other early texts that form something like a ‘canon’ of Shintō. The most prominent example is of course Amaterasu, the female ancestor deity of the imperial house who has her main sanctuary at Ise in Mie prefecture. Like Amaterasu, other mythological deities such as Ame-no-koyane or Takemikazuchi were the object of ancestor worship (in this case by the Fujiwara) and were enshrined in places like Kasuga in Nara or Kashima 鹿島 in the Kantō region that still belong to the most representative religious sites of the country. Interestingly, some prominent shrine sites of the ancient period such as Matsunoo 松尾, Fushimi Inari and probably also the Kamo 賀茂 Shrines in Kyoto started as the ancestor shrines of immigrant families from Korea, in particular the Hata 秦 whose mythical origins are also recorded in the chronicles.<sup>16</sup>

Other mythological deities may have been the ancestors of regional chieftains whose individual names were replaced by more generic names like Ōkuninushi (‘Great Lord of the country’), Ōkunitama 大国魂 (‘Great Spirit of the country’), and others. Shrines for Ōkuninushi, for instance, can be frequently found in Izumo and other regions that posed a certain threat to the central government in prehistoric periods.

Finally, Japanese myths also mention nature deities like (again) Amaterasu (the sun), Watatsumi 海神 (the sea), or Toyouke 豊受 (grains). This list, however, is not very long and highly inconsistent since the combinations of deities and elements of nature vary according to the respective sources. Generally it can be said that ancient *kami* were believed to have an influence on weather, harvest, illness, war, and many other aspects affecting the whole society. But they were not necessarily associated with one aspect only, as for instance the gods in the Mediterranean Ancient World. Rather, they were tutelary deities for a certain territory or a group of people and were held responsible for their particular concerns. Moreover, genealogical relations to the imperial house were clearly most important when a deity was enshrined in early historical times.

(2) The belief in vengeful spirits of persons who died an unjust death—my second category of shrine deities—is probably a universal phenomenon and has become the source of gruesome ghost stories all over the world. In Japan, however, some of these stories have been taken seriously

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<sup>16</sup> The importance of Korean immigrant cults is emphasized in a recent study by Michael Como (2008). For the Kamo Shrine and its relations to Korean immigrants, cf. Nelson 2000.

enough to attribute the status of a *kami* to such spirits and to devise shrines and rituals in order to ‘pacify’ them. The most famous examples were already mentioned above, i.e. the Kitano Tenmangū 北野天満偶 Shrine or the Yasaka Shrine, both in Kyoto. Suffice it to add that the fear of vengeful *kami* was a persistent feature from mythological times all through premodern Japanese history and is still a factor in *kami* worship. The apex of the belief in this in this category of deities, however, seems to have been the Heian period (late 8th–12th century).

(3) A surprisingly large group of shrine *kami* derives from Buddhism. Besides the above mentioned Yasaka Shrine dedicated to the Buddhist ‘Ox-headed King’, the best known examples include four of the Seven Lucky Gods (Hotei 布袋, Benzaiten 弁財天, Bishamonten 毘沙門天, and Daikoku 大黒) worshipped today at both Shintō and Buddhist sites.<sup>17</sup> Other types of Buddhist deities derive from Buddhist temple lore. Famous examples include the seven main deities of the Hiyoshi (or Hie Sannō) Shrine, which guard the spiritual center of Tendai Buddhism on Mt. Hiei near Kyoto, or Hachiman at the Tamukeyama 手向山 Shrine at Tōdaiji 東大寺, the site of the Great Buddha in Nara. There are also *kami* deriving from very specific founding legends, as in the case of the Asakusa Kannon 浅草観音 Temple (Sensōji 浅草寺) in Tokyo, which traces its origins to the miraculous discovery of an image of Kannon 観音 by three fishermen. These fishermen are now worshipped as protecting *kami* of the temple in the Asakusa Shrine 浅草神社 attached to the temple compound.

(4) While the heroic ancestor deities already mentioned were turned into shrine deities only after the ‘living memory’ of their deeds had already vanished, there are also rulers of exceptional actual power and influence who were turned into *kami* immediately after their demise. This seems to be a comparatively late pattern originating from the end of civil wars during Japan’s medieval period and may have started with the self-idolization of Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), the first ‘unifier’ of the early modern Japanese state.<sup>18</sup> The most famous example, however, is Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa dynasty of military rulers enshrined

<sup>17</sup> The ensemble of the Seven Lucky Gods appears in the late medieval period and seems to derive from a conscious attempt to unite different religious traditions. Besides the four deities mentioned, it comprises two Daoist deities of long life (Fukurokuju 福祿寿, and Jurōjin 寿老人) and only one, Ebisu 恵比寿, of Japanese origin.

<sup>18</sup> In a recent study, Jeroen Lamers (2001) doubts the purported self deification by Oda Nobunaga, which is based on contemporary Christian sources. Nevertheless, Nobunaga certainly introduced new dimensions of self aggrandizement that became step stones for his predecessors Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu.

at the Tōshōgū Shrine in Nikkō. Most scholars agree that his enshrinement was done according to Ieyasu's personal will.<sup>19</sup> This seems to have inspired a kind of deification boom among several leading military houses of the Edo period (1600–1867). In the countryside, there are quite a few shrines dedicated to feudal lords (*daimyō* 大名) all from this period (Roberts 2009). In this case, the characteristic ambiguity which we have observed in shrine worship so far is replaced by a blunt ideology of dynastic power. This sets this group of deities apart from the spirits of historical persons who became dreadful *kami* against their will.

Incidentally, humans may turn also in Buddhist icons of worship, as for instance Kōbōdaishi Kūkai (774–835) worshipped in his mausoleum at Mt. Kōya, and a few other Buddhist 'saints'. In these cases, their apotheoses are explained by their exceptional virtues. When rulers were turned into *kami*, on the other hand, political power seems to be the decisive criterion. The relative ease by which the rulers' souls could be turned into *kami* indicates that the difference between *kami* and other spirits is mainly a question of ritual practice, not of fundamental theological or philosophical consideration. A spirit becomes a *kami* when it is treated like a *kami*.

(5) Some of the most 'successful' *kami* in Japanese religious history combine several elements of the above mentioned groups: Hachiman (often misleadingly labeled the 'Japanese god of war') is a deity of obscure origin in Japan's most western part, Kyushu. In the eighth century, he became important for both Buddhists and the imperial court. On the one hand, he was identified with the mythological emperor Ōjin and was declared an imperial ancestor deity while at the same time he was regarded as a Buddhist Bodhisattva (enlightened being) and was therefore represented in the form of a Buddhist monk (Kanda 1985). Later, he was also worshipped as the ancestor of the leading military ('samurai') houses and thus became one of the most popular shrine deities in Japan. In spite of his fame among military houses, he retained his Bodhisattva title until the so-called separation of *kami* and Buddhas (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) legally enforced in 1868 at the very beginning of the Meiji period. Hachiman is therefore a most successful combination of Buddhist and ancestor deity.

Inari commands even more shrines than Hachiman but they are usually rather small. This deity is equally of obscure origin, but one trace is leading to Korean immigrant groups (see above). Sometimes represented

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<sup>19</sup> For details see Boot 2000 and Scheid 2003.

as a young woman, sometimes as an old man, Inari is associated with prayers for abundant rice and with fox belief (Smyers 1999). In the founding legend of its main shrine, the above mentioned Buddhist monk Kūkai plays a leading role, so Buddhism may be again responsible for the spread of this particular form of *kami* worship. These examples may suffice to show that shrine deities can be of very diverse origins and cannot be confined to local deities of Japanese origin let alone to deities mentioned in the classical myths.

*Shrines in the Modern Era: Creating a New Paradigm  
of Service to the State*

As is commonly known, Japan's rise as a modern nation state started in 1868 with an ultimately successful attempt to re-establish the imperial institution as the political center of the country. The *coup d'état* initiating this process, generally known as Meiji Restoration, is literally the restoration of imperial power under Emperor Meiji. Nevertheless, this 'restoration' initiated a vast number of innovations and returned to old traditions only in name. The representation of the emperor himself is one of the most striking examples. Not only were images of the emperor publicly displayed—a breach of the century old 'iconography of absence' (Screech 2000) surrounding the figure of the ruler—in these pictures Emperor Meiji appeared in two radically different forms: first, in the traditional courtly garb that is also used by shrine priests, and secondly in Western style military uniform. The figure of the emperor, therefore, represented both the nominal 'restoration' of the antique court and the adoption of Western institutions, above all the military.

At the outset of the Meiji period, 'Shintō' was supposed to play a leading role in spreading the new image of the emperor. This role of Shintō had been prepared by various groups of intellectuals during the latter half of the Edo period. Yet, in order to fulfill this role, religious institutions with a distinct Shintō identity were necessary. However, in spite of the symbolic characteristics of Shintō shrines mentioned above, almost all shrines were institutionally intermingled with Buddhist temples. In some cases, shrine priests (*kannushi* 神主) were completely lacking and even the shrine rituals were performed by Buddhist monks, while in most other cases shrine priests were supervised by a Buddhist institution.

This situation led to the legal enforcement of 'separation of *kami* and Buddhas' already in the first year of Meiji (1868). In the following short

but violent wave of anti-Buddhist resentment a large number of religious institutions (mostly Buddhist, but also some shrines) were physically destroyed. Many Buddhist clerics were forced to return to lay life, or to change their confession and enter into the employment of shrines.<sup>20</sup> Shrine lands, on the other hand, were declared national property and their priests were defined as government officials. Hereditary priesthood and individual possession of shrine land was (in theory at least) abolished. Shrine worship became standardized.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Shintō priests were forced to divert from their family traditions, lost their traditional sources of income, and were—initially at least—supposed to act as ‘evangelists’ of a national ideology centering on the modernist emperor.<sup>22</sup> When this initial phase of ‘State Shintō’ calmed down after a few years the official ideology of the state shifted towards the model of a European constitutional monarchy. The constitution enacted in 1889 contained among others the principle of freedom of faith (Article 28), while there was no mention of any state religion, let alone of ‘Shintō’. Shrine priests, therefore, could not have been happy with this course of events at all.

‘State Shintō’, as it was later called, eventually gained momentum after Japan’s first military successes against China and Russia in the first decade of the twentieth century. Gradually, emperor worship and shrine worship were brought in line. Public ceremonies honoring the Tennō became compulsory in schools and at universities. New national holy days in the form of shrine festivals were introduced. Shrines were defined as sites of Tennō worship that should be attended by all loyal Japanese subjects. According to official phrasing, this kind of shrine worship had nothing to do with ‘religion’ but was simply a patriotic ceremonial act.

This so-called ‘doctrine of the non-religious nature of shrines’ (*jinja hishūkyōron* 神社非宗教論) is generally regarded as a facile subterfuge to reconcile the nationalist use of shrine traditions with the constitutional

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hirose 1997 for an interesting case study. Hirose Kazutoshi, retired head of Mitsumine Shrine, reports in this autobiographical essay that his ancestors were turned from Buddhist into Shintō priests when the predominantly Buddhist site of Mitsumine was forced to become a shrine after the Meiji Restoration. Consequently, the family obeyed orders and faithfully continued their religious duties under a different confessional affiliation.

<sup>21</sup> For studies on the effects of *shinbutsu bunri* at local sites see for instance Thal 2005; Antoni 1995; Grapard 1992: chap. 5.

<sup>22</sup> The term ‘national evangelists’ translates *kyōdōshoku* 教導職, lit. ‘agents of the way of the teaching’. The English term was coined by Helen Hardacre in her seminal study *Shintō and the State* (1989).

principle of religious freedom.<sup>23</sup> It is not as outrageous as it may appear to a Western observer, however. As we have seen, imperial court 'Shintō' was indeed primarily a ritual tradition without any dogma or belief system. If 'religion' is defined as a system of beliefs and dogmas as is the case for Christianity, Shintō could be indeed regarded as a non-religious ceremonial practice. While such a definition of 'religion' would be rightfully criticized as Eurocentric, it was—and still is to some extent—the predominant Japanese understanding of the term *shūkyō* 宗教 ('religion'), a neologism coined in the Meiji period. Ironically, the prewar doctrine of the non-religious nature of shrines makes some sense, if it is based on a narrow, Eurocentric definition of 'religion'. In the case of State Shintō, such a Eurocentric concept of religion not only accorded to the view of many contemporary Christian observers, it was also adopted by the government in order to propagate Tennō worship in spite of the principle of religious freedom.

The idea that Shintō is a religion in each and every aspect comparable to, for instance, Buddhism or Christianity, is largely a post-war argument in reaction to State Shintō.<sup>24</sup> It is found already in the famous *Shintō directive* drafted at the beginning of the Allied occupation (1945), which stipulates that "Shrine Shintō, after having been divorced from the state and divested of its militaristic and ultra-nationalistic elements, will be recognized as a religion if its adherents so desire."<sup>25</sup> According to the principle of separation of state and religion, 'religion' is further defined as an entirely 'private' matter where the state has no right to interfere. Conversely, the state must not support any religion by public means.

These stipulations were taken over by the postwar constitution and still determine the judicial reality in present-day Japan. Owing to the experience of State Shintō, the sphere of religion (including shrines) has been completely separated from all state institutions. Not even classes on comparative religions are allowed at public schools.

In spite of the official rejection of State Shintō, shrines created during the prewar-period are still in existence and continue to function as popular places of worship. The most prominent example is the Meiji Shrine built for Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) and Empress Shōken (1849–1914) who were enshrined there posthumously in 1920. Considering the millions of

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Antoni 1998: 211.

<sup>24</sup> This point is stressed among others, by Isomae Jun'ichi (forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> Article 2e(2). Translation by Helen Hardacre (1989: 169).

Japanese who visit the shrine at the New Year's celebration (*hatsumōde* 初詣) every year, it is certainly Tokyo's most popular Shintō shrine today. At first sight, this imperial mausoleum (*jingū*) differs little from premodern shrines and does not show the monumentalist features of contemporary nationalist architecture in Europe. It was not only deliberately modeled after the Kitano Tenmangū Shrine in Kyoto (the so-called *gon-gen* 権現 style applied also at the Tōshōgū in Nikkō), it also avoided the use of modern construction material such as concrete and steel. Even the fact that a historical person was elevated to the status of a shrine deity was not without precedence, as we have seen.

On the other hand, Meiji Shrine also introduced a range of innovations in the history of shrine worship. It was the first imperial ancestor shrine (*jingū*) designed for mass worship. "Never before had people from every area and social station been invited to think of themselves as having a rightful connection to a national cult center" (Hardarce 1989: 94). Consequently, the shrine was not situated in a remote area like Ise or Nikkō but as close as possible to the center of the city. New customs like *hatsumōde* (New Year's shrine visit) developed hand in hand with this new concept of mass participation in national religious events that replaced the premodern 'iconography of absence'.

Yasukuni Shrine in the immediate proximity of the imperial palace in Tokyo is another representative of shrines created by State Shintō. Initially, it was erected for the spirits of loyalists who died for the emperor in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. Later, all Japanese war dead were equally worshipped there. Eventually, even persons that were executed as war criminals after the war, as for instance Tōjō Hideki (1884–1948), sometimes called the 'Japanese Hitler', were included among the *kami* of Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>26</sup> This makes Yasukuni Jinja a highly controversial political issue. China and Korea as well as oppositional political circles in Japan regard it as a symbol of Japanese war crimes and demand its abolition. Leading right-wing politicians, on the other hand, deliberately provoke uproars from these critics by paying semi-official visits to the shrine, thereby indicating implicit sympathies with the prewar regime and criticism of the postwar Japanese Constitution.

From a religious historian's point of view, this kind of war memorial is indeed an innovation of State Shintō that did not exist before the modern

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<sup>26</sup> For recent studies on the religious and political controversies regarding Yasukuni Shrine, see Nelson 2003, or Breen 2007.



era. It could therefore be defined as an element of political ideology, not of 'genuine religious' function. On the other hand, it would be difficult to dismantle Shrine Shintō of all relations to political power. As we have seen, shrines have a strong tradition as religious sites directly supervised by political rulers. It is this tradition, which makes the 'separation of state and religion' extremely complicated in the case of Shintō.

After the Second World War, shrines shifted from a radically 'public' into a radically 'private' sphere. While they were formerly defined as governmental institutions, they are now private religious enterprises. Any support from stately institutions is strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether this change in judicial status really marked an ideological breach as well. An interesting case in point is the Hokkaidō 北海道 Shrine in Sapporo. This shrine was founded under name of Sapporo Jinja 札幌神社 at the beginning of the Meiji period (1871) with the explicit aim to help the 'colonization' (*kaitaku* 開拓) of this region that was mostly inhabited by the native Ainu people. The shrine, however, remained rather modest until the postwar period, or more precisely until the 'Olympic year' of 1964.<sup>27</sup> In this year, Emperor Meiji was included among the shrine deities and the name of the shrine was changed into Hokkaidō Jingū 北海道神宮, lit. 'Imperial Ancestor Shrine of Hokkaidō'. The compound was greatly enlarged and is now regarded as a protective shrine for the whole region of Hokkaidō (Inoue et al. 1994: 680–81). At least on a regional scale, the strategies of State Shintō are still working with amazing candidness.

### *Ritual Changes and Continuities*

Apart from obviously political agenda, modern Shintō adapted to the dramatic changes in everyday life under Western influence and the corresponding religious needs. One of the most striking innovations among Shintō-specific customs is the already mentioned New Year visit at shrines (*hatsumōde*), which most Japanese perform no matter whether they are actually 'believers' in Shintō or not.<sup>28</sup> While the New Year has always been an important date in the Japanese calendar, mass worship at shrines at this occasion did not exist in premodern periods. In addition, many

<sup>27</sup> 1964 saw the Summer Olympics in Tokyo and became an economic and cultural turning point in postwar Japan. 1972, Winter Olympics were held in Sapporo.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, however, that *hatsumōde* is also quite popular at Buddhist sites as for instance at the already mentioned Asakusa Temple in Tokyo.

modern Japanese consider the *hatsumōde* of a newly born baby as a *rite de passage* comparable to baptism in Christianity. A more specific ceremony for small children can be held at the so called *shichigosan* 七五三 (lit. seven-five-three) festival performed at most shrines in mid-November when children of the respective ages receive a *harae* 祓 ceremony.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, both traditions do not go far beyond the modern era, at least as regards the ubiquity of their performances. This indicates a successful attempt of modern Shintō to monopolize the formerly secular field of childhood rituals. A similar trend can be observed in the field of marriage, which increased in importance when polygamy was legally forbidden in the Meiji period. On the level of ritualism, shrine ceremonies meet fierce competition by Christian style weddings. Today, Japanese Christian weddings are neither performed nor consumed by Japanese Christians only but have become a trans-religious standard. They appeal to a romantic image of marriage à la Hollywood and are moreover cheaper than a full fledged Shintō wedding. The latter is, by the way, again a modern invention influenced by Christian customs.<sup>30</sup> Finally, there has also been an initiative to establish Shintō funerals at the beginning of the Meiji period, in spite of the mentioned death taboo. This initiative has not met with general acclaim, however. Today, only a small minority of the Japanese employs funeral rites according to Shintō while the vast majority adheres to Buddhism in this respect. Thus the famous expression “born Shintō, married Christian, buried Buddhist.”

Another comparatively new field of ritual activity monopolized by shrine priests is the purification of the soil (*jichinsai* 地鎮祭) before the erection of a new building. Most Japanese who intend to build a new house would ask a shrine priest to perform such a rite. More traditional functions of shrines include dramatic performances of Noh or *kagura* 神楽, a specific form of religious dance and drama usually visualizing mythological topics. Finally, certain shrines may serve as the centres of specific ‘brotherhoods’ usually related to mountain ascetism (*shugendō* 修験道) or similar ‘cults’ (*shinkō* 信仰) that can be neither defined as a religion of their own nor as a mainstream form of Shintō practice.

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<sup>29</sup> *Harae* means lit. ‘to wipe out’ and is done with a so-called Shintō wand (*haraigushi*) waved by a priest above the object that has to be purified.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ōbayashi 1997 who points out the crucial precedence of an imperial wedding ceremony invented for prince Yoshihito (later Taishō Tennō) and princess Sadako in May 1900.

In spite of all ideological and institutional changes within the world of Shintō shrines, patterns of individual, everyday worship to the *kami* do not seem to have changed fundamentally since the end of the pre-modern period. They are, by the way, basically the same patterns that people also apply at Buddhist sites. In both cases people perform simple gestures of respect, offer small amounts of money or sometimes food, and may recite a short formula or an individual prayer. As indicated by the votive tablets (*ema*), where people write down their wishes at shrines and temples, worshipers are mostly concerned with immediate this-worldly problems. Shrines and temples alike serve the need to express these wishes by specializing on various areas of benefits such as health, success at entrance examinations, traffic security, easy childbirth, finding a partner, and so on. Perhaps the most striking example of this pragmatic approach is the consecration of individual cars usually performed by Shintō priests. Another, quite peculiar example is the Kanamara Shrine festival (*kanamara matsuri* かなまら祭) in Kawasaki, where homosexuals pray for protection from Aids (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 57–58).

This broad range of ritualistic activity has been aptly described as ‘freedom of expression’ (Nelson 2000) by which shrines adopt to the ‘ecological niches’ of their environment. Moreover, freedom of expression refers to the fact that it is up to the individual ‘customers’ to decide which shrines they would like to visit, which kind of ritual service they want to have employed, and which personal relations connect them with the respective *kami*. This rather relaxed stance towards religious traditions is not only compatible with a modern consumer society, it is also positively received by foreign observers who can easily participate in modern Shintō. Nevertheless, this openness is not necessarily an enduring characteristic of Shintō. Rather it may be seen as a specific response to the crisis shrines faced at the abolishment of State Shintō at the end of the war. The still undecided functionality of Shintō in postwar society is reflected by the above-mentioned fact that ultra-nationalist legacies are equally present and exist side by side with liberal forms of religious engagement.

### *Conclusion*

In concluding this discussion, let me sum up the most important factors that have led to the present situation of Shintō shrines. The question of how shrines can be distinguished from Buddhist temples has led us into what might seem to be a confusing discussion of religious institutions and

concepts. As we have seen, shrines always served the worship of deities (*kami*) that were different from Buddhist entities. This difference has been expressed semantically in language as well as visually in architectural symbols. If we ask in what respect *kami* differ from Buddhas, and shrines from temples, however, the answer is no longer simple and changes according to the historical period under consideration.

In pre-Buddhist times, a pattern of sacred kingship seems to have led to the identification of rulers with *kami*. Thus, buildings for the *kami* were and still are regarded as 'palaces'. At the same time, 'storing away' potentially dangerous deities seems to have been an important incentive to build up permanent structures for the *kami*. This aspect long survived in the notion that harmful spirits could be pacified by building shrines for them. Early Buddhism contributed to the pacification of *kami* by converting them to Buddhism and at the same time retained their fearful nature by employing them as guardians of Buddhist temples. Gradually *kami* were seen as specific manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas but a certain symbolic and ritual difference between the two categories of higher beings remained. This differentiation resulted in a syncretic discourse and a ritual division of labor that prevailed for the most part of premodern religious history in Japan. The peaceful coexistence of *kami* and Buddhas differed not only from Europe where Christianity displaced almost all other forms of religion, but also from other Buddhist countries such as China or Tibet where Buddhism was at the same time challenged and emulated by competing religious traditions.

The question why shrines did not fuse completely with Buddhism but retained at least some ritual autonomy is intimately related to the imperial institution. Although the early imperial court was largely based on the model of China, the *kami* were administered by institutions that did not exist on the mainland. Thus, pre-Buddhist and 'pre-Chinese' forms of worship survived, or rather, mainland Buddhist and Chinese rituals were combined with the existing ritual traditions and eventually became the core of shrine worship. While this tradition served the maintenance of imperial power in the classical period, the imperial court itself was reduced to a kind of priestly institution in later times. In spite of a strong element of localism in shrine worship and the fact that most shrines were supervised by Buddhist temples, shrines generally acknowledged the court as an authority in ritual questions and looked for patronage by the court. Thus, the idea to use shrines as ideological strongholds for the project to re-establish the Tennō as the political center of a modern nation state, was actually quite natural from a historical point of view.

Nevertheless, the modernist innovations of the new Meiji-government were anything but compatible with ancient shrine traditions. Therefore, it took some institutional and ideological trial and error until the system of 'State Shintō' gained momentum. In fact, it is still a matter of academic debate whether State Shintō can be regarded as one ideological system, or whether different ideological approaches counterbalanced each other until the end of Japan's ultra-militaristic regime. In any event, the nationalist use of Shintō and the attempts to abolish it have led to a new situation of shrine worship in terms of institutional history, but also in terms of religious conception:

- After the Meiji Restoration, governmental institutions replaced Buddhist temples as supervisors of shrines. After 1945, these institutions were abolished and shrines remained as private religious corporations.
- Modern 'Shintō' was regarded as different from Buddhism, which raised the question of the religious nature of shrine worship. The official answer that 'Shintō' (or rather Shrine Shintō) was purely 'ceremonial' and therefore 'non-religious' was unsatisfactory for most scholars of religion both in Japan and abroad. After World War II, Shintō was officially declared a religion but the question of "religion according to which definition?" is still unsolved.
- The potentially dangerous nature of *kami* is no longer a dominant characteristic feature. *Kami* may be asked for peace and safety but their potential to create just the opposite is no longer emphasized. Conversely, even the most elevated centers of national cult have become accessible to the common people.

Despite all these changes, the common people's approach to the *kami* seems to provide a stabilizing factor in shrine Shintō. For most Japanese, shrines are symbols of local identity. By extension, this localism may include patriotic pride but nationalism does not seem the primary motivation to pay a visit to a Shintō shrine. Rather, shrines are places to pray for this-worldly benefits and protection from immediate risks and dangers. By taking seriously the immediate needs of the populace and adapting ritual service accordingly, shrines have managed to survive in an increasingly consumist, market-oriented society. Seen from a wider perspective, this pragmatic combination of more or less ancient ritual elements and new religious demands appears as a most persistent feature of Japanese shrine worship.

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## CONTEMPORARY BUDDHIST PRIESTS AND CLERGY

JØRN BORUP

Zen monks absorbed in deep *zazen* 座禪 meditation. Family fathers in priest robes next to their wives and children or with their colleagues in annual temple ceremonies. Part-time ascetics on spiritual pilgrimage in remote mountains, 'Mercedes priests' enjoying prestige and the fruits of tourist temples and funeral industry. Tonsured monks on periodic almsbegging in front of humbly bowing *danka* 檀家 members. Wives of priests serving tea and culture to the local community. Renunciate nuns living an isolated and quiet existence. These images of Japanese Buddhist priests identify them as individuals and yet they share many roles, interests, images and functions, the differences of which depend on sects and institutions. This article introduces aspects of the ideal and living realities of the contemporary Japanese Buddhist priest and clergy. Though mainly based on research on the Rinzai Zen branch Myōshinji 妙心寺, it also attempts to make generalizations, reflecting priesthood beyond sectarian divisions (Borup 2008).

### *What is a Buddhist Priest? Terminology and Typology*

Generally, a *priest* is understood to be a person with a certain authority within a religious organization, being part of an overall group of specialists with religious authority and functions, the *clergy*. Both words are of western (Greek) and Christian origin, and apart from the challenges of transplanting such concepts from one linguistic and cultural sphere to another, it is difficult to delimit a Japanese concept to comprise the Buddhist priest as an occupational group. The Agency of Cultural Affairs collects statistical data on religions in Japan and characterizes the clergy this way: "For the most part it refers to people who belong to a particular religious organization and devote themselves full time to its activities" (1989: 235). However, the Agency acknowledges the fact that religious organizations have their own set of criteria for concepts of 'priest' or 'clergy'. The terminology of the religious individuals and institutions has also changed throughout history, and contemporary terms suggesting the variety of institutional roles

and statuses (such as *jūshoku* 住職, *jizoku* 寺族, *kanchō* 管長, *rōshi* 老師, *danka*, *shintō* 信徒, and *monto* 門徒) were not in use in medieval Japan and thus reflect both the conceptual and the institutional development of Buddhist history.

Methods of counting the clergy differ from sect to sect and are seldom precisely defined. Traditional Buddhists groups usually use and distinguish between the generic concepts for teacher, priest and clergy, namely *kyōshi* 教師, *jūshoku*, and *sōryo* 僧侶. An official and juridical terminology as defined by the Agency of Cultural Affairs uses *kyōshi* to designate the 'religious instructor' as a person qualified within a religious organization (or 'juridical person', *hōjin* 法人) to teach. *Kyōshi* is also part of individual ranking systems in Buddhist sects. It thus designates not only an either/or status, but also a specific rank in a hierarchical grading system, which gives certain status and symbolic capital in the clergy and the institution. Using such a yardstick to measure statistics of the Japanese Buddhist clergy would leave us with 281,054 of such Buddhist religious instructors, half of which are women and less than 150 are of foreign origin (Bunkachō 2009). Such figures comprise those having been qualified to teach but not, for instance, those having been ordained or those employed as priests without such teaching qualifications.

*Jūshoku* is the term most often used to describe the priest, a title and function being part of the overall, generic term for clergy, *sōryo* (or in its abbreviated form *sō* 僧) comprising both priests, monks, nuns, retired and assistant priests. Within some organisations *sōryo* also includes the wives of priests. It is a major characteristic of Japanese Buddhism in general, that temples and clergy are part of a family tradition. Most Japanese priests are married, and the majority have taken over their fathers' office due to the widespread temple heritage system (*shūsei* 世襲制), being the clerical parallel to the lay supporters' *danka* (family patron) system, both underlining Buddhism in Japan as a family religion.

*Sōryo* in monastic Buddhist organizations is, however, also often interchangeable with the concept of monk (*shukke* 出家, see below), or distinguished from this category, understood as a member of the educated clergy, having semantic affinity to other concepts and titles of honor with the same connotations: *shūkyōsha* 宗教者 (religious specialist), *bukkyōsha* 仏教者 (Buddhist priest), *oshō* 和尚 (virtuous monk), or to underline the institutional affiliation, *zensō* 禅僧 (Zen monk/priest). Thus for instance, within the Rinzai Zen Buddhist Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai Zen sect, there are approximately 7,000 *sōryo*, 3,300 of which are religious teachers

(*kyōshi*), and 2,500 full-time *jūshoku*.<sup>1</sup> In the largest Buddhist group registered with the Ministry of Education as a ‘comprehensive religious juridical person’, Rishhō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, there are no less than 83,184 religious teachers (75% of whom are women) (Bunkachō 2009: 75).

Different terms for religious leaders, masters, clergy, or specialists furthermore depend on the sect—and in a broader sense—the type of Buddhism. New religions (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教) and new religious groups (*shin shin shūkyō* 新々宗教) have equivalent but also different terminology to describe their religious specialists and religious agents, the rationale of which is also to distinguish themselves from established (*kisei* 既成), traditional (*dentō* 伝統) or ‘Temple Buddhism’ (Covell 2005). Thus for instance, apart from being a generic and honorific term, *sensei* 先生 is often used among new religions to underline status as non-clerical and non-monastic Buddhism. The largest of these groups (with the status of ‘independent religious juridical person’), Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, probably has up to one and a half million teachers (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1989 [1972]: 236), since all having completed their curriculum have the right to use this title. Neither Rishhō Kōseikai nor Sōka Gakkai have clergy and temples since they define themselves as lay Buddhism—though mostly classified by others as a new religious movements.

To get an idea of such typological distinction, it might be helpful to approach the topic through some (again, Western-derived) phenomenological parallels. Max Weber (later modified by Pierre Bourdieu) distinguished between three types of religious specialists—the priest, the prophet and the magician—representing different positions in the religious landscape. In this scenario, the priest is the epitome of a person acting within and by the office of institutionalized religion, to which the prophet, coming from within or outside the religion with his or her promises of new times, is a rival. The magician, being the spiritual joker from the folk religious universe ‘beneath’ the great traditions and institutions, is in opposition to both. While the magician and the prophet in the Japanese context may be embodied structurally in folk religious shamans (magician) and the new (new) religious leaders (prophets), both of whom may have acquired personal charisma and/or status from being outside the dominant system, the priest is typically connected with

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are based on written and oral information from the Myōshinji main office in Kyoto.

established religions and traditional Buddhist institutions. He is thus part of 'Temple Buddhism', or perhaps even more precisely, 'clergy Buddhism'. Clergy Buddhism is thus a generic concept comprising those established Buddhist groups having well defined clerical offices in hierarchical religious institutions.

In traditional Japanese clergy Buddhism, two other important types encapsulate historical and doctrinal differentiations: Buddhists sects that base at least some of their institutional identity on monks and a monastic system (the epitome of which are Zen, Tendai, Shingon sects) and those who do not (the epitome of which are the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin sects). While the latter in many ways has clerical ideals parallel to Protestant Christianity, the former in one sense idealizes the monk as a 'virtuoso', who has authority because of personal achievements and insights from monastic training and yet (as opposed to the prophet and magician) is 'domesticated' into the institutionalized system of a Buddhist clergy.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, such types and linguistic differentiation are themselves Weberian ideal types and in reality they overlap. Buddhist clergy (still) do participate in folk religious 'magic'. Austere practices of Tendai monks on Mt. Hiei or the *yamabushi* 山伏 in northern Honshū mountains have throughout history been renowned for their magic powers and 'shamanistic' potentialities. Popular guidebooks write about sacred sites and austere Buddhist monks and priests from all kinds and sects, whose practice endows the temple with spiritual power "and thus makes prayers said there especially potent" (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 9). Even Jōdo Shinshū priests have been engaged in practicing something that in their traditional theology would be classified as heretic folk religiosity (such as spiritual healing, divining, selling amulets), but which none the less has been legitimized as postmodern 'true Shin belief' (ibid.: 94ff.). Priests might be 'prophetic' and in opposition to prescribed norms of the organization. Singular, charismatic persons in priestly robes with an interest and competence in challenging the religious organization can be as much in the grey zone of institutional belonging as the prophets of the sects. Despite the plasticity of the concept, the best linguistic and generic equivalent of the concept 'priest' in a Japanese Buddhist context is *jūshoku*, characterized here as the resident (head) priest of a temple (*tera* 寺, or *jiin* 寺院) with an ascribed religious role and function within a religious organization.

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<sup>2</sup> See Silber 1995 on the Weberian concepts of virtuosity and charisma in relation to (Theravāda) Buddhism.

*Ideal Clerical Authority, Authenticity, and Family Terminology*

While it is relevant to record the horizontal differences between different Buddhist sects and clergy types, a more general vertical relationship and hierarchical distinction of agency has always been important in Buddhist history. Non-monastic groups such as Pure Lands sects distinguish between the clergy and laity (*zaike* 在家) or 'householder',<sup>3</sup> whereas the monastic Buddhist sects distinguish the latter from those 'leaving home', *shukke*, the equivalent to which is 'monk'. While there are degrees of 'being in the world' and renunciation, the distinctive structure is ideally symbolized physically in the renunciate's dress codes (the Buddhist robe,<sup>4</sup> tonsure), food codes (vegetarianism), dwelling place (temple, monastery), practice (meditation, rituals), doctrinal knowledge (wisdom and scholarly insight) and status (the monk and clergy being above the householder, internally being differentiated in a ranking system). Though modern-day realities have altered traditions and ideals, many sects still identifying themselves as renunciate (*shukke*) Buddhism uphold ideals of tradition, transmission and sacred kinship to legitimize the *raison d'être* of contemporary priests and clergy.

Zen Buddhist sects see themselves as the epitome of renunciate Buddhism. Although iconoclasm and negation of symbolic rank is often praised, symbols and rules of 'face to face' (*menju* 面授) and 'mind to mind' (*ishindenshin* 以心伝心) transmission remain important aspects of Zen authenticity ideals. They are described metaphorically as lighting a candle with a flame, or as water being carried and transmitted from one container to the other, and signal master-disciple lineages belonging to the sacred lineage of the Buddha and subsequent patriarchal Zen masters. The clerical tradition thus waits for patriarchs, but it is equally true that these are "patriarchs in search of a tradition" (Faure 1993: 12) having realized the truth to teach it or teaching the truth "because, having been socially defined as Chan masters, what they teach has the performative power of being the truth" (Faure 1991: 22). The sacred patriarchy is thus both, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, a model *of* and a model *for* the institution and tradition. Each of the masters has the same attribute of being transmitter of the sacred blood lineage (*kechimiyaku* 血脈), 'blood' being

<sup>3</sup> Other concepts designating this status as lay include *zaizoku* 在俗 (layman), *taishū* 大衆 (general public), or simply *hisō* 非僧 (non-clergy).

<sup>4</sup> On the symbolism and ritual act of sewing Buddhist robes in order to gain merit (and thus underlining the authority of the priest), see Riggs 2004.

the metaphor of both the dharma and the mind receiving it. The spiritual line of transmission is thus ascribed the same authority and authenticity as biological inheritance, guaranteeing orthodoxy and orthopraxy and embodying both the original Buddha/Buddhahood, the dharma, and the institution (*sangha*). Each figure has a particular quality and role in the Zen puzzle. Retrospectively it combines the units in a kaleidoscopic whole. This combination finds its ritual manifestation in temples and monasteries where lineages are chanted to identify past and present in a performative unity.

All Buddhisms claim a relationship to the 'original' Buddha/Buddhism, often considering the different Buddhist religions as alternative approaches to the same goal and origin. Zen lineages see themselves as branches of the same trunk, beginning at the same root. While institutional rhetoric and ideology have also claimed exclusiveness, uniqueness, and evolution, family terminology is and has been a major model for explaining and promoting intra- and inter-institutional belonging to such lineage (*kei* 系), transmission (*den* 傳), branch (*ha* 派), or stream (*ryū* 流). The patriarchs (*so* 祖, also 'ancestor' or 'founder') are the fathers, and their successors in the dharma (*hassu* 法嗣) are their heirs. In monastic life, the master is the father, the disciples his spiritual children, who themselves are dharma brothers, and all Buddhists are the children of Buddha.

This vertical Zen dharma lineage (*hōkei* 法系, or *hōmyaku* 法脈) is counterbalanced by a related kinship between temples (*hōrui* 法類), whose horizontal relationship is equivalent to the relations among the monks, and whose vertical relationship as branch temples to the main temple (*honzan* 本山) is equivalent to the monks' relation to their master—a relationship further reflecting the social structures of kinship in Japanese society. The master is part of a large institution, as are the subtemples, and have several units below them (disciples and local temples belonging to the temple lineage). Both of them are the result of, and themselves generating, the lineage. The monks in the training halls have the same teacher, and the branch temples have the same mother-temple, and both monks and branch temples are on the same 'level' as part of the same dharma relation (*hōrui*). Just as the masters of different training halls share the same *hōrui* with other masters, so do subtemples which might be from different lineages (*hōkei*) within the main temple (*honzan*) share the same dharma relation. Dharma relations naturally can vary in intensity and significance. All priests know which temples they are affiliated with since recognition is necessary when applying for a new rank (*hōkai*), especially during significant rituals, the dharma related priests will assist and join

the celebrations. Vertical and horizontal hierarchical relations are often counterbalanced by ideals of family symbolism, an intimate relation not all individuals necessarily approve of. Some far away countryside temples might not feel closely related to either their lineage mother temple or the central mother temple complex.

Whereas intrasectarian relationships are guarded and honored, inter-sectarian and interreligious relationships are usually also kept to at least a polite level. For example in family terminology and from a Myōshinji perspective, Myōshinji priests are considered to be close brothers (*hōru* related brothers being even closer), Rinzai priests are more distant brothers, priests from other Zen lineages are cousins, and priests from other Buddhist religions are related family. On the other hand, priests from most of the new (Buddhist) religions are usually considered (at best) remote or even fallen relatives whereas Sōka Gakkai and the Nichiren sects among the other traditional Buddhist sects often have an image of being the 'black sheep' of the family. Especially in the local communities, sectarian affiliation of the temples has less importance, with some priests co-operating in ritual contexts. Clerical ideals are sanctified through tradition and hagiography, but also shaped by contemporary social and religious contexts. Such is also the case with the clerical positions when complementarily seen as ritualized and institutionalized processes.

Whether institutional identification should be based on the vertical and spiritual model (*ninbō* 入法, 'personal transmission'; in which temple lineage affiliation is defined by the monastic master's lineage) or on the temple lineage model (*garanbō* 伽藍法; in which temple lineage determines personal affiliation) has resulted in some debate among Zen clerics, including accusations of heresy and broken transmission lines. However, temple affiliation based on blood ties (the son inherits his fathers temple and position) has become the most widespread in all clergy Buddhist groups since the Meiji period (1868–1912).

### *Monk and Priest; Shukke as Returning Sōryo*

Leaving home to go to the monastery marks a real separation and beginning of an irreversible process of initiation into the role and life of monkhood and later clergy. Also in modern Japanese monastic Buddhism, it functions as an ideal type of being religious, semantically emphasized in dichotomous pairs: *shukke*, being a monk practicing religious austerities (*shugyōsō* 修行僧) as distinguished from *zaike*; *hizoku* 非俗 (non-lay)

distinguished from *hisō* 非僧 (non-clergy); the other world (*shusseken* 出世間) being distinguished from this world (*seken* 世間). *Shukke*, however, also denotes a symbolic *movement*, a wandering between two worlds, two family domains, as well as between two personal statuses and identities. Leaving is a liminal process, a sphere of being betwixt and between two worlds in which the novice-to-be is neither a person of the social world nor yet of the monastic world (Turner 1989 [1969]: 95). Earlier it was common for the novice aspirants to travel on foot (*angya* 行脚) from home to the monastery, making the *shukke* movement a pilgrimage. Leaving is also an event in the ritual process of leaving one domain, the life of the householder or temple family, in favor of another, its conceptual other-part, the monastery taking over the space of being the new home. Already in the ordination ceremony at an early age, the family symbolically says farewell to their son, transferring him to the new spiritual father, Buddha.

In modern Japanese Buddhism, monastic life is only a transitional and temporary affair. Though highly praised in all literature as the most perfect expression of true Buddhism—especially Zen, being a ‘*shukke* religion’ (Nishimura 1983)—monastic life functions only as an important phase in the ritual process, which ideally is itself an endless process of religious education. There is a certain prestige and respect in staying many years in the *sōdō* 僧堂, but most are only *shukke* monks for a few years—and in modern times it is even possible to stay only six months or even less. A Myōshinji survey showed that half of the responding priests had spent less than two years, and 10% not even one year in the *sōdō* (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 65). In practice the length of the stay is decided in agreement between the monk and his sponsor and/or father, who both have an interest in securing a proper monastic education for the young priest-to-be. Contrary to most Theravāda Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia, monastic life in modern Japanese monastic Buddhism is primarily, just like the pastoral seminars (*shuren*) of the non-monastic Jōdo and Jōdo Shin sects, a necessary step in the institutional process of becoming a priest, *jūshoku*, the ritualized events of which are celebrated and consecrated in large ceremonies.

Though the status and meaning of the monastery has changed significantly in modern times, the system of leaving home in order to come back is not only a result of historical change; both traditional Mahāyāna Buddhist sources as well as contemporary voices insist that the proper *shukke* must return to social life. The return, however, is ideally not a return to ‘basics’, but a return to life outside the monastery with a different mind, status, and social and institutional capacity. Before entering the



*sōdō*, most monks today have been to school and even graduated from a university, typically a Buddhist one, and—as opposed to most other Asian Buddhist monks—they are generally very well educated.<sup>5</sup> In the *sōdō* the monks learn the more ideal and ritual side of the life of a monk and priest. They are being spiritually, ritually, and institutionally educated, and when ‘returning to life’, the newly educated *sōryo* have ideally incorporated these aspects into their mind and body, ready to become priests capable of transferring *shukke* power into the *zaike* life.

Often a young *sōryo* will return to his father’s temple, functioning as assistant priest under his father’s guidance until the latter’s retirement. The temple inheritance system still being the standard in Japan affirms and continues the religious genealogy of the temple family, and the majority of those entering the monk’s training halls of a Buddhist monastery are from temple families and will take over the same temple in which they were raised. The returning *sōryo* has thus come full circle in his educational, ritual process. Pragmatic reasons for returning to the social world, however, are equally important. Eighty-eight percent of the priests from the Myōshinji sect are married. Though 72% of the priests and 69% of their wives think tonsure important for *sōryo*, only 50% in 1985 kept polished tonsure—46% of those not shaving their heads because they had a part-time job alongside being a priest (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 98, 223; Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 12, 19).

### *Clerical Offices*

There are few alternative possibilities within the institution for those *sōryo* not becoming priests in local temples, each office and term dependent on the Buddhist sects and branches. The *shike* 師家 within the Zen Buddhist sect is the teacher (師) in the monastic household (家), somewhat equivalent to the senior monk *ajari* 阿闍梨 of the Tendai and Shingon sects. He is the ‘true’ *shukke* who has—ideally, but not necessarily—gone through all the *kōan* of the particular monastic *kōan*-system, and who stays permanently in monastic life leading the monastery and guiding the monks, thus also referred to as the ‘elder teacher in the monk’s hall’ (*sōdō*

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<sup>5</sup> 58.7% of the Myōshinji priests have graduated from university (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 64), a number presumably increasing in the years to come; 23.5% had gone to school with Buddhist affiliation, and 30.9% were in a school with religious relations (*shūmon kankei*; *ibid.*: 65).

*rōshi* 僧堂老師). He has received the certificate of enlightenment (*inka shōmei* 印可証明) just as he himself can transmit this to his successor. Unless returning to lay life, or taking up a position as priest in a temple, a *shike* within the Myōshinji sect is not allowed to marry but must keep the strict rules of renouncement. As such he has the prestige and generally owns the respect of being a true Zen master, a living symbol of the Zen monastic tradition, the quintessence of Zen virtues ideally incarnating wisdom, spirituality, strict discipline, individuality, and yet gentle social personality. He is, in a certain sense, the main religious figure.

The *shike* office also qualifies him to be eligible as *kanchō*, chief abbot of the sect. The *kanchō* is the formal and institutional leader of each of the Buddhist sects (the ‘political’ representative being the administrative representative, the *shūmu sōchō* 宗務総長), and as such he is the highest priest and still has the status of “semi-government official” (Ikeda 1998: 17). He is in a position to appoint and dismiss the priests and to appoint the titles in the ranking system, and he promulgates and ratifies the rules and regulations of the sect. The abbot is the ritual main figure in larger ceremonies in the main temple, and he also represents the institution on his periodic visits to the local temples (*shinke*). Monks or priests ‘turning academic’ as ‘scholar monks’ (*gakusō* 学僧) is one way of using the capabilities earned in the religious career system. Scholastic-minded monks are part of all Buddhist societies, profiling the institution as a Great Tradition. Some scholar monks are also represented at the headquarters, or in the Buddhist universities as teachers and researchers. The position as missionary teacher (*fukyōshi* 布教師) is a separate office within the framework of the headquarters, mainly as a side position of the most common office within all Japanese Buddhist sects, the common priesthood (*sōseki* 僧籍, or *sōshoku* 僧職).

### *The Priest*

*Jūshoku* is the most widely known term for priest. He is qualified to achieve his title by educational efforts, comprising both secular and religious education. In monastic Buddhism he is required to undertake some years of monastic life and practice, although modern developments and the lack of priests have opened up achieving authorized certificates to become a priest through part-time religious training and education (Borup 2008: 59–60). The priest is also chosen and appointed by the old *jūshoku* of the temple, often his own father, because of the widespread Japanese

inheritance system through genealogical family. Having registered at the main offices of the sect, the national and the local government, he is legally considered a religious juridical person, the official caretaker of a religious body (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人).

A priest might have employed an assistant priest (*fuku jūshoku* 副住職). The position as an assistant priest is ideally only temporary, a stepping stone to the permanent office as priest. Most often the assistant priest is the son of the priest, and after returning from the monastery he will be a priest-in-training under his father's guidance. Both of them typically live in the same temple and often with their families, even after the son has taken over the official office and his retiring father has become a 'former priest' (*zen jūshoku* 先住職). When rural temples have no permanent priest and are uninhabited (*mujū jūin* 無住寺院), they can get assistance from a priest from another temple, who is thus also holding an additional position as priest (*kenmu jūshoku* 兼務住職), carrying out an additional office as assisting part-time priest. A *kenmu jūshoku* will typically be in charge of several temples, and often he is a permanent priest in a large, prestigious, and rich temple. Though the position as *kenmu jūshoku* can be a rather profitable business, the majority within the Myōshinji branch (76.2%; Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 129) earn less than a million yen per year by this side job. The empty temples might still have adherents, and thus sources of income, but no active community, and investment of time and energy is often moderate (see Covell this volume). Almost all (97.7%) *kenmu jūshoku* from Myōshinji are male (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 118).

As a social, religious, and private person the priest must live up to the expectations of the institution and the local society. The duties (*ninmu* 任務) of the *jūshoku* are listed in the 'essential points' (*shūkō* 宗綱) in the constitution of the Myōshinji branch:

The priest of the sect's temples and churches must serve the Buddha(s) and patriarchs, observe the rules of the sect, work for the propagation of the Buddha dharma [*buppō* 仏法], conduct religious services [*hōyō* 法要], devote himself to missionary education [*fukyō kyōka* 布教教化], work for the believers [*danshinto* 檀信徒] to take the refuges, keep the dignity of the clergy [*sōryo*], not scorn or look down upon society, always measure and improve his own nature [*shishitsu* 資質], work for the maintenance and prosperity of the sect [*honha* 本派], the main temple [*daihonzan* 大本山], the temple(s) [*jūin*] and church(es) [*kyōkai* 教会], and train and educate his children [*gakuto* 学徒] and wife [*jizoku*]. (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 8–9)

A handbook describes “the mottos of the sect’s priests”:

He must take pride in the clergy [*sōryo*] and priest wives [*jizoku*] of the sect.

He must work hard in understanding the doctrines of the sect and investigating the essentials of the Rinzai sect.

He must live in harmony with the believers [*danshinto*] and correct his own life.

He must bring up his descendants.

He must work hard for the propagation of Zen. (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1970: 167)

Another guidebook for Rinzai Zen priests lists three main missions, or duties (*shimei* 使命), for the priest to realize and manifest (see Kōno et al. 1995: 12–17): (1) He is a person with a special profession (*senmonteki shokugyōjin* 専門的職業人), but although he does receive respect as a somewhat honored person, he is not to think of himself as an isolated individual looking down on the world from above. (2) The priest should, however, not forget that the Rinzai sect defines itself as being a *shukkeshū* 出家宗, a religion for and of renunciators. This begins with the ordination and naturally reaches its utmost peak in the monastic period, continuing the rest of one’s life as a never-ending process of cultivation. (3) The last point is to make clear that the priest is the responsible administrator and representative of the temple, of which he is to take daily care.

But although his personal ‘*shukke* character’ is often idealized as a necessary requirement, it also seems that even without ‘inner qualifications’ a priest serves well and acquires his symbolic power as a ritual specialist. The priest is the practical and daily representative of the temple for which he must deal with anything from cleaning to taking care of financial affairs. He is identified with the temple and is often called ‘Mr. Temple’ (*oterasan* お寺さん) or ‘Mr. So-and-So Temple’ (*-jisan* 寺さん). He reads, understands and controls the sacred texts to which only academics and the educated clergy have access, and in conducting the correct performances of rituals, his power of being an orthodox mediator to the other world makes him a living signifier of institutional power.

However, it is underlined again and again that this special profession is not to be an isolated, other-worldly existence and profession, but must be rooted in and encompassed by a this-worldly community and life. He should, in Weber’s terminology, remember that he is a priest, neither a prophet nor a magician. A priest must reject the attitude of being an arrogant and superior religious specialist (*shūkyōsha* 宗教者) feeling superior to the common people (Kōno et al. 1995: 207). Even a religious specialist

is also a seeker (*gudōsha* 求道者) on the Buddhist path, and as such on the same level as the lay adherents. The *sōdō* life must not be a permanent way of life, but must be applied to a social life (*shakai seikatsu* 社会生活; *ibid.*: 12).

This dilemma and dynamic paradox of being within and outside the social world has always been important in Buddhist history. Telling stories about the hardships of monastic life is a popular aspect of both dharma talks and books. In general, however, only a minority seems actually to be interested in the 'spiritual' capacities of the priest or in isolated individuals renouncing the social world and thus not repaying their part of the socioreligious exchange. The ideal priest is a *shukke* of mind and heart, but a social person with his body. He is a person having gone the Buddha way but who also guides and assists others in their religious lives. The ideal is to be what could be termed a 'social *shukke*', walking the thin line between being neither too 'religious' nor too 'secular', being both *shukke* and *zaïke*, a monk living *in* the world with a 'homelessness of the heart' (see also Jaffe 2001).

A survey from the Sōtō sect saying that most (73%) believers (*danshinto* 檀信徒) are interested in having a married priest expresses well the social role of the priest and his family in especially small rural communities (Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 1995: 93). Criteria such as age, family, children, and personality naturally play important roles in the images of the local priests, as does the extent to which they seem to be engaged in motivating the members toward religious or social activities. The social personality of the priest is very important for his 'success' in the reciprocal relationship with his surroundings. His personality might attract members to meditation or study groups, or he may join members of the parish in playing golf or singing *karaoke*. His popularity and status depend on many variables and factors and can be of an intellectual, social, or religious character, of an inherited or acquired competence.

The way priests identify themselves with their profession naturally depends on their personal, social, and institutional interests and relations. Some are deeply interested in practicing 'true' Buddhism, perhaps integrating the profession with secular professions, while others might consider the office as priest as just a job. In a Myōshinji survey (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 26), 89% of respondents were generally satisfied with being priests—half of them because of the close contacts to people and 41% because of enjoying the role of being religious specialists (*shūkyōsha*). Those unsatisfied with the clerical position (9%) gave as reasons lack of personal religious consciousness (46%), financial matters

(35%), lack of confidence in being a religious specialist (28%) and the ignorance of the believers (18%). The greatest worry (for the whole group of respondents) was missionary activities (*fukyō katsudō* 布教活動; 24%), finding a successor (20%), financial matters (10%), while only 2% listed 'believers' (*danshinto no koto* 檀信徒のこと; *ibid.*).

In another survey from 1996 on the theme of changes from ordination until present, a third of the 1,360 respondents answered that they had generally experienced the positive expectations they had in the beginning, 4% felt that reality had not lived up to their expectations (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2004: 53–74). Thirteen percent were unsatisfied in the beginning, but had learned to accept the conditions as 'fate' (*unmei* 運命), while a third were unsatisfied in the beginning but later had positive experiences. Four out of five, however, did feel pride in being religious persons (*shūkyōsha*) from the Zen sect (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 98). These figures of course cover and overlap with other problems, and the fact that 69% have a licence to teach (at public schools etc.) suggests that the office of being a priest does not in itself bring absolute satisfaction (*ibid.*: 20).

The priest and his family live in and are representatives of the temple, but they do not own it themselves, and they are not alone in decision making. All changes in the temple—from painting and restoration to deciding the wages of the priest—are (ideally) to be discussed and decided by the priest and three lay representatives (*sōdai* 総代, or *sekinin yakuin* 責任役員), who are usually, but not necessarily, members of the sect. The priest has 40% and each of the lay representatives 20% of the votes in these decisions, and if for some reason the latter in unison have some interests in controlling temple policy, they can do so. Also, if a new priest is appointed to a temple, the community might feel 'their' temple to be taken away by a private 'owner', who might even be from a distant metropolitan city, and thus a 'stranger'.

A similar source of conflict is the relationship between the old priest and his assistant priest, the latter taking over the responsibilities and thus the power of the former. The priest decides himself when he wants to give over his position. He might promise the young assistant a period of three years of training before he can take over the office, but this period might in reality be extended for many more years, even until the old priest dies. This power play naturally can be a hard challenge for the priest-to-be, economically (he is not guaranteed any wages), psychologically (living in constant uncertainty), socially (probably with a family to share his own

situation) and institutionally (his career being in the hands of another). Such kinds of problems are most often related to situations in which an outsider acquires the position of assistant priest.

*The Wife of a Priest and the Temple Family*

Marriage among the clergy was not officially accepted until early Meiji, but both Buddhist families as well as blood transmission from father to son was an old custom often accepted and legitimated in Buddhist Japan. Although today it is the norm rather than the exception that priests are married, women in Japanese Buddhism in general have been underprivileged because they are seen both as impure and as hindrances to male enlightenment. Especially in monastic Buddhism, they constitute an ambiguous role; not really being lay, not really being clergy, and especially within ideal monastic Buddhism, they are not really supposed to be there.

Though recognized as legitimate parts of the temple family by the lifting of the ban on clerical marriage (*saitai kaikin* 妻帯解禁) in 1872, being a priest's wife has long been problematic. The fact that the priest's wife and temple family were not officially recognized until 1919 and 1925 by the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin sects, and not until 1961 in the Rinzaï constitution, indicates the difficulties and the struggles of the women in a rigid patriarchal system. In the Pure Land sects marriage has become a legitimate part of the social reality, and female priests (*bōmori* 坊守) are accepted as part of the overall clerical and institutional family. In monastic Buddhism, even though only few Japanese today would prefer ascetic monks in the temples, the priests' wives still somehow have to adjust to former categorizations of temple women being taboo. Even today priests' wives are sometimes referred to as 'aunt' (*obasan* おばさん)—rather than the more common *okusan* 奥さん (wife)—emphasizing the institutional and social, rather than the marital, status of the wife. Female acquaintances of young unmarried priests have to be even more camouflaged in the terminology of biological or social relationships.

The word used for temple family is *jizoku*, defined in Rinzaï Buddhism as "person(s) other than priest, assistant priest, retired priest, or retired assistant priest who is/are registered at the temple or in the organization" (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 306). The priest wife is termed *jitei fujin* 寺庭婦人 (temple wife), defined as "the spouse of a priest, an

assistant priest, a retired priest, or a retired assistant priest who is registered in the temple or church" (ibid.). Although never officially mentioned as the wife of a priest, *jizoku* is often identical to *jitei fujin*. Eighty-five percent of the priest wives in the Myōshinji temples are married to the priest, while 10% are married to the former priest (ibid.: 208). The majority (65%) are more than fifty years old, and 23.8% were themselves born in a temple (ibid.: 209).

The constitution of the Myōshinji branch defines the role of the temple wife and family as follows:<sup>6</sup>

... the *jizoku* and the *jitei fujin* must together with the priest work hard for the Buddha way, always protect the graves of the ancestors, worship the departed souls of the believers, work devotedly for the prosperity of the temple, and always strive to be a model for the believers. (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 306)

The temple wife in many respects is locked into the traditional virtues of a mother and a wife, representing family values and social status quo. In a guidebook for Rinzai priests' wives—a supplement to the larger book for the priests—her duties, responsibilities, and identity are explained in a normative way (Kōno et al. 1995). Correct institutional *habitus* is seen to be a proper exchange for being a *jitei fujin*—an office carrying more than half of the adherents' trust on her shoulders, and an office that some would place above the position of an assistant priest. She is first of all the priest's wife, and therefore represents him, being his assistant and the 'person behind' him and the temple. While both Jōdo and Jōdo Shin are much more liberal and egalitarian, and the Tendai sect has even established special ordinations for *jitei fujin* (Covell 2005: 133ff.), in Rinzai Zen she cannot take over the position and official responsibilities of her husband if he dies or is out traveling. In such cases she has to apply to the headquarters for help in finding an assisting priest, if she does not have a son to take over. She has to identify herself with the atmosphere (*fun'iki* 雰囲気) of the temple, its peace and tranquility. According to the guidelines, she should avoid being dirty as well as being too bright, avoid wearing fashionable dress, and avoid using too conspicuous a lipstick. She should not speak too fast or one-sidedly nor too loud or too quietly, but with a gentle and obliging voice. The book also has chapters on styles

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<sup>6</sup> On the roles and ideals within the Tendai sect, being very similar to the Zen sect, see Covell 2005: 109–39.



of walking, sitting, bowing, opening the slide doors and answering the phone, on styles of welcoming guests, arranging sitting positions, serving tea, and social conversation, on cooking devotional food (*shōjin ryōri* 精進料理), on cleaning, and on the general responsibility of the family's well-being.

That women and wives also want to live their lives as such and not merely as married to the temple, the institution and the community are also potentially troublesome domains with which many have to struggle. Priests' wives often have to give up their own career to live with their parents-in-law, and even have to regard their home as the (shared) property of the community, which is another argument of many young women for refraining from saying yes to temple life. Though 57.8% to some extent feel pride in being temple wives of a Zen temple (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgaku 2002: 222), several women would never dream of becoming a *jizoku*, "racking their brains for ways to apply the Buddha-dharma to the current situation" (Kumamoto 2004: 480). For many, it is a burden to live up to the expectations of the priest wife's quintessential *raison d'être*; producing and bringing up a boy as a future priest-to-be.

### *Temple Sons*

The heritage system is the most common way of transmitting and securing temple life in Buddhist Japan. The priest has to live according to the sayings "before being a parent for his children, he is a teacher for his disciples" and "before being a husband, he is a teacher" (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 59). The (eldest) temple son, on the other hand, is expected to be the successor inheriting his father's temple in the clerical generation shift (*sedai kōtai* 世代交代). A child in a temple within monastic Buddhism is sometimes called *kozō* 小僧 or *hinasō* 雛僧, a 'child monk' not yet registered in the institutional ranking system. A more common (and modern) inclusive term is *gakuto* 学徒. A *gakuto* is a *sōryo* who potentially is an assistant priest, and in practice the status is often used as designation for the temple son in general, the father often being the teacher and sponsor priest who also takes care of the ordination and the daily training of the boy.<sup>7</sup> In Myōshinji defined as "a person who

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<sup>7</sup> According to a survey (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2004: 57) 53% had their own father and 45% had a person outside the family as teacher.

has received robe and bowl and a Buddhist name from his preceptor, having the rank below *shuzashoku* 首座職” (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 264).

Securing this institutional succession based on biological bonds is one of the major problems for all temple families. Within the Tendai sect, 74% of male priests are from temple households (Covell 2005: 82), and an earlier Myōshinji survey showed that 53% had inherited their position, while 62% had successors and 35% had not. On the other hand, though most priests are worried about finding a successor (*kōkeisha* 後継者), preferably his own son, the latter survey also showed that 62% did not feel the heritage system to be positive (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 18). This paradox is often discussed, revealing both emotional sentiments and open critique of a system tasting too much of the diminishing *danka* (family patron) system, the conviction of the ideological truth of the latter perhaps being the excuse of practicing the former. Another survey showed that 32% of the priests would prefer their son enter a sect-oriented university (*shūmon daigaku* 宗門大学), while 38% would respect the child’s own choice of education (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2004: 63).

Securing the transmission of the temple to a son is of utmost concern to the (duties of) priests’ wives. If the son does not want to become a priest, the above-mentioned guidebook encourages her to tell him of the real qualities of the temple life as not only a place and profession for conducting funerals but as a sincere and important lifestyle involving happiness for both the family and the community (Kōno et al. 1995: 49). If there is no son in the family, an option could be to find an interested son-in-law to take over. In the same way as the son might feel a pressure of responsibility, so might the young girl in having to become a priest’s wife for the sake of keeping the temple in the family. Especially for a prestigious temple, it is a problem if the son does not want to take over the temple, or if he does not spend the expected time in the training hall required from such a high-ranking temple. Though not voiced in public, it can be a point of criticism that the person in charge is not really qualified (“that guy is no *shukke*”). Most parents in the temple therefore take measures to educate and socialize the son into the temple life as well as in other educational institutions. Whereas the Pure Land sects and a few Sōtō temples have acknowledged the need and positive aspects of also daughters taking over temples, the Rinzaï sect continues a traditional system in which becoming a nun is the only option for women to institutionally continue the temple lineage.

### *Nuns*

Paula Arai is probably right when she finds an androcentrically inherent hierarchy implicit in the vocabulary distinguishing monks and nuns. The generic term for monastic people, *sō* 僧, is also the term for (male) monks, whereas the term for nun, *nisō* 尼僧, is derived from this, perhaps suggesting that “monks are the ‘real’ Buddhist Community and nuns are a sub-Buddhist Community” (Arai 1999: 14)—which is why, according to Arai, in female monastic vocabulary *sō* is translated monastic, *nisō* as female monastic, and *nansō* as male monastic (ibid.: 15). In Japanese reading the *ni* 尼 of *nisō* is read *ama*, simply meaning ‘nun’, in daily speech often adding a honorific *-san* to it.

Although the Meiji government in 1872 issued a law allowing priests—and in 1873 also nuns—to eat meat, get married, and have free choice of tonsure, in reality for a nun to marry and not be tonsured means a return to the secular world. Postwar Japanese Zen nuns have in some ways officially achieved equality, having the same ranking system as the male clergy. But apart from a few famous individuals, Buddhist nuns live a life in the shade of the patriarchal majority. Nuns generally have the image of being non-feminine, true opposites to the general female ideal in Japan where hair, makeup, female dress, and female behavior are some of the means to express gender.<sup>8</sup> This, however, also gives them the image of being strict followers of ‘true’ Buddhism. They live, contrary to their male partners, an ascetic life in which religious practice generally takes up more time than when living as parents in temple families. Sincere practice, however, is not always enough to follow a successful career. Though being qualified and interested in taking over her father’s temple, biological and social hierarchical orders automatically make the eldest son the new priest. Stories of priests-to-be not at all being interested in religious affairs, but who—true to tradition, their father’s wishes, or their own financial ambitions—end up taking over the management in spite of having a much more qualified sister, are not unheard of, even in contemporary Japan.

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<sup>8</sup> Although the same to some extent is true for male priests, they do, however, have greater freedom to act in codes of behavior less strict than the codes of the nuns. The asexuality of the nuns of a former Rinzai (now independent) Zen temple in Kyoto is twice a year recognized and complemented during a memorial service for dolls, in which a *geiko* and two *maiko* 舞妓 perform as very feminine ‘living dolls’.

Not being married and having children, combined with the lack of monasteries and of possibilities of training new nuns, naturally results in the sincere problems of continuing the tradition. In a survey, 70% of the nuns said they had no successor, 93% of the respondents being fifty years and older (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2002: 154). In a research report from the Kyōka Sentā of the Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai sect, the problems of the lack of nuns were discussed, suggesting possible introduction of lay training courses (*ango-e*) for women and, acknowledging the implied lesser status of contemporary nuns of monastic Japanese Buddhism, devising more positive images (*imeiji appu* イメージアップ) of nuns and nun's life (ibid.: 157).

### *Modern Challenges to the Buddhist Clergy*

When Shinran (1173–1263) married and described himself as neither monk nor lay (*hisō hizoku* 非僧非俗), he not only paved the way for a further step in non-monastic Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, but also expressed one way of solving the challenges of being an ideal priest and yet a real social person. The Pure Land and the True Pure Land schools today have abandoned the ideal of renunciate priesthood and, like other Buddhist sects, institutionalized the clergy as an office of educated and most often also married priests. Transgressing the boundaries of 'other worldliness' and 'this worldliness' in Mahāyāna thought has legitimized mixing the categories. Especially within Chan/Zen hagiography, both the enlightened layman (such as Vimalakirti, Pang, D.T. Suzuki) and the master as non-virtuoso and ordinary (the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, Linji) or eccentric (Hanshan, Shide, Ikkyū) have expressed the overlap and deconstruction of religious classes and dogmas. These, however, have mostly been illustrating a 'rhetoric of immediacy' (Faure 1991). The real challenge towards the sharp division between *shukke* and *zaike*, between patriarchal clergy and lay Buddhism, was not seriously challenged until modernity.

In the wake of the Meiji restoration in 1868, the Japanese Buddhist priesthood underwent dramatic changes. Tens of thousands of temples were destroyed and Buddhist rituals (such as *obon* お盆) prohibited or turned into Shintō ones (such as funerals). In the name of modernity and with slogans such as "exterminate the Buddha and destroy Śākyamuni" (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈), priests became symbols of what was considered an old fashioned, superstitious and imported religion. Many were branded as heretics (especially from monastic Buddhist sects) and publicly ridiculed.

With the decriminalization in 1872 for priests to eat meat and marry, the status and idea of the temple as an institutional and social ‘family’ changed dramatically, giving way to a new (and now officially approved) institution based on the nuclear family structure bound together by biological and sexual relations. Other rules were later made to ‘humanize’ the clergy. They were ordered not to abandon their civil surname, permitted to let their hair grow and wear civil clothes, and were told to follow the same mourning procedures as ordinary citizens. Buddhist priests were classified as citizens (*kokumin* 国民) belonging to a household (*ie* 家) and incorporated into the registration (*koseki* 戸籍) system, thus considered on the same level as other citizens. Degradation of the clergy thus further leveled the distinctions between clergy and lay, being different only in degree and not in kind. Some gave up their professions, some turned into Shintō priests or saw clerical authority being transferred to charismatic leaders of new religious movements.

Many of those remaining in the traditional Buddhist clergy fought to change status in constructing a reformist New Buddhism (*shin bukkō* 新仏教) with ideals of a clergy being both modern and original, rational and spiritual, enlightened and humanized, truly Japanese and somewhat international, religiously robust and yet ‘this-worldly’. Such attempts of ‘protestantizing’ Buddhism were part of an overall process of modernizing Buddhism (most clearly expressed in Ceylon/Sri Lanka) and were the results of historical contexts and networks of individuals from both East and West (Borup 2004). What is most characteristic of these events, with Japan paralleling post-war history, is the lay orientation and individualization ideals. In Zen circles, people such as D.T. Suzuki and Shin’ichi Hisamatsu became this-worldly ascetic ideals of the true non-clerical lay Buddhist, mastering both scriptures and meditational experiences, being uncorrupted of what was seen as institutionalized and ritualized religion.

### *Contemporary Challenges to the Buddhist Clergy*

Though major themes (such as individualization, rationalization and humanization) of Buddhist modernity, in Japan as elsewhere, were mostly isolated among intellectuals and urban elites, lay Buddhism (*zaike bukkō* 在家仏教) and the degradation of the clergy have remained challenges of contemporary Buddhism. When an institutional organ within the Myōshinji branch was established to write a small guidebook on general education, a “chapter on peace of mind for the lay members” (*zaike anjinshō* 在家安心章) was included, the title soon being changed to “chapter

on peace of mind for our sect” (*Shūmon anjinshō* 宗門安心章). The people behind the project simply found the concept of *zaïke* (‘lay’) too narrow, and the distinction between *shukke* and *zaïke* too superficial. This institutional dilemma of present-day priests was expressed, in another publication, in one of the main ‘problem points’: “Originally, we were an organization of *shukke*, but how shall we explain to our successors the fact that many do not live a life different from lay people [*zaizoku* 在俗]?” (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 19).

Such reflections are relevant and the objects of discussions in all contemporary monastic Buddhist institutions. Modernity has challenged clergy Buddhism not just with alternatives from new religions, but perhaps more so from secularization (Reader 2012; Nelson 2012). Urbanization, individualization, democratization, laicization, pluralisation, and de-traditionalization have changed the social landscape for the priests, even having the funeral industry threatening the major income source of the local temples (Bernstein 2006). The clergy of the traditional Buddhist temples have lost authority. Already in 1959, a survey showed the social status of the Buddhist priest to be ‘only’ between that of a policeman and a school teacher (Norbeck 1970). Surveys today show that only a small number of people use and visit temples and priests apart from engaging in funeral services or religious and cultural festivals.

Such ‘deprofessionalisation’ (Horii 2006) is seen not only in attempts to educate lay personnel to counterbalance the diminishing priesthood in especially the countryside; it has also been described as a process of degeneration within the priesthood, the authenticity of which is questioned in a widespread ‘corruption theory’ (*sōryo no daraku* 僧侶の墮落). This discourse accuses the priests of being corrupt because they marry, drink alcohol, eat meat and earn money (some of them as ‘Mercedes priests’ in wealthy temples), primarily because of a ritualized funeral industry and a still existing *danka* and temple inheritance system. Especially within Buddhist groups with monastic institutions and ideals, the critique has caught on. When few Japanese Buddhist priests actually meditate after their period in the monasteries, when only very few are actually renunciate and ascetic, and when many Japanese can hardly distinguish a Pure Land priest from a Zen or Tendai priest, how is it possible to uphold as a symbol and ideal the concept of *shukke*? Accusations of such ‘fake world-renouncerism’ (*gisō shukkesugi* 擬装出家主義) (Covell 2005: 118) illustrate “one of the greatest difficulties the sects of temple Buddhism face today [being] that of bridging the gap between rhetoric and reality” (ibid.: 19). In general, “most Japanese Buddhist priests themselves will

admit that the Japanese Buddhist world is very inward looking and lacking in confidence to confront mainstream society” (Watts and Okano this volume) from which especially young priests feel increasingly isolated and alienated (Covell 2005: 8).

Religious rhetoric of a degenerated contemporary reality as opposed to an original, pure ideal is of course neither new, nor restricted to Japanese or Buddhist discourses. In a sense, without such ideals and dichotomies, no religion would probably survive. Seeing such critiques as normative and as ideological discourses (from both outside and within the clerical and institutional world itself) helps us to put them into perspective. Such a discourse is neither neutral nor objective and, although universally detectable, is also part of a certain understanding of (true) religion being inspired by Western (Protestant) ideals of texts and origins as opposed to living and practiced contemporary religion.<sup>9</sup>

Whether constructed or not, such a critique has functions and effects within Buddhist institutions. Different strategies in different fields are embarked upon within different institutions. The brand of an exclusivist *shukke* religion is still being upheld within monastic Buddhist groups and promoted in written materials as well as performed through rituals, patriarchal lineages, and symbolic ranking systems. The ritual power transference of the lay Buddhist symbolically dying as an ordained, tonsured monk does not only transgress but also underlines the essential status hierarchy between the true ideal achieved upon death as opposed to the real (and less ideal) status of the *living* lay Buddhist.

From one perspective, funeral services and ancestor worship might be an image problem for Buddhist sects, but they remain important economically and symbolically to stress the need of continued expertise and authority of the clergy. Also non-monastic Buddhism keeps ideal images of the true priest being in somewhat direct relation to a pure (*junsui* 純粹) and original (*konpon* 根本) Buddhism and thus legitimates deviations by referring to the necessity of transmitting and re-evaluating Buddhism and Buddhist priesthood to a modern and contemporary context. Identifying and constructing new roles and functions for the Buddhist priest can be seen in supplementing a (full or half time) clerical office with counseling, school teaching, spiritual or social welfare activities.

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<sup>9</sup> On these matters related to the Japanese Buddhist context, see Reader and Tanabe 1998 (especially the introduction); Covell 2005: 11ff.; Borup 2004.

All Japanese Buddhist sects have engaged in institutionalized educational (*kyōiku* 教育) and ‘cultivating’ (*kyōka* 教化) programs for both priests and the laity. Such activities serve to make the priests better priests and turn the *danka* laity into more engaged members and Buddhism-conscious believers (*shintō, monto*), as well as making both parts better representatives of their institutional roles. Such initiatives, including study assemblies, teaching courses, publications, religious practice (*katsudō*) and missionary activities (*fukyō* 布教, or *dendō* 伝道)—some of the more media-conscious of the kind bringing Buddhism to fashion shows and night bars—underline and affirm hierarchical relations between the clergy and the general populace (*taishū* 大衆), between the priest and the *danka*, between *shukke* and *zaike*. Such educational and other institutional initiatives serve to preserve a status quo, but they also reflect and affirm an opposite direction of equalization. When meditation programs for lay people are offered, the ideal of the meditating *shukke* monk is consecrated as a significant part of the (monastic) Buddhist tradition, but it also reflects possibilities of transgressing the hierarchy by a very small number of ‘truth seekers’ engaging in practice traditionally isolated for the monastic world. The Jōdo Shin Buddhist ideal of ‘oneness between clergy and lay’ (*sōzoku ittai* 僧俗一体) might be a rhetorical slogan, but it does reflect another attitude, which established Buddhism in contemporary Japan also has to acknowledge. A somewhat inclusive umbrella strategy of including ideas and practices in the Grand Narratives, to a certain extent, also accepts hybrid voices from modern members and society not automatically accepting the authority of a Buddhist clergy and institution. Demands from a contemporary, modern world also resonates with necessary reflections from within the institutional realities. Though still to a very high degree being characterized by conservatism, also voices from active Buddhist individuals and NGO’s in recent years have contributed to change. A new generation of more socially and environmentally engaged priests have thus attempted to transform the image of a dark, ritualized and traditionalized religion to a green, environmentally and socially engaged modern Buddhism (Williams this volume; Watts and Okano this volume).

As such, the role, function and status of the Buddhist priest encapsulates overall challenges and dilemmas of both the person and the office of priest and clergy. The contemporary Japanese priest has to balance between being both bearer of an ideal tradition, and yet being willing to adapt to modern society. He has to live up to being both a social family father without being too ‘human’ and yet being a professional caretaker of



a religious office without being too 'religious' in a religion which is necessarily associated with death while also proclaiming also to be a 'religion of life'. Monastic Buddhist priests must uphold to some extent an ideal of being a renunciate virtuoso *shukke* distinguished from the lay *zaike* Buddhist, but without overdoing the role that only a few of the lay society actually wants him to play. The priest thus quintessentially expresses the dilemma of Buddhism and religion in contemporary Japan, both being relics from a long history yet remaining robust symbols of a living tradition.

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# CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY

MARK R. MULLINS

## *Introduction*

The cross-cultural diffusion of religions, particularly the missionary expansion of Christianity, has long been a field of scholarly research. A review of the literature indicates that many studies have been framed by a Euro-American ‘master narrative’ and focused largely on the history of the Western missionary enterprise. In recent decades, however, it has become increasingly clear that attention must also be given to the non-Western sources of this foreign-born religion, including independent Japanese initiatives and indigenous movements. The decline of the old ‘centers’ of Christendom and the more recent growth and vitality of Christian communities in many post-colonial contexts indicates that the established approach and orientation are no longer adequate. In 1900, for example, Christianity was predominantly ‘Western’ or a ‘white man’s religion’ and 80 percent of the world’s Christians lived in Europe and North America. A century later, the composition has shifted to a non-white and non-Western majority—Africans, Hispanics, and Asians—of almost 60 percent.<sup>1</sup> Today the largest and most rapidly growing Christian communities are in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Although the small number of Christians in Japan has not been a significant demographic factor in this twentieth-century shift to a non-Western majority, several important contemporary developments within Japanese Christianity are closely related to these recent global trends. New cultural expressions of Christianity that developed in former colonial domains (Brazil, Philippines, and Korea) are spreading across the globe as a part of transnational religious networks and are contributing to the pluralism and heterogeneity of religion in various receiving societies. Japanese Christianity is also being transformed in this new global context in ways that cannot be understood within the familiar Eurocentric framework as mere extensions of the Western Churches.

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<sup>1</sup> For a helpful overview of this demographic shift, see Jenkins 2002: 22–27.

Christianity in contemporary Japan consists of a wide-range of phenomena. It includes the most obvious mission churches, denominations, and related institutions established by Western missionaries, numerous indigenous movements (churches or sects established by Japanese which are organizationally independent of Western churches), as well as the personal beliefs and ritual practices of Japanese influenced by Christianity but unaffiliated with any of its organizational forms. The challenge of studying Christianity in this context is how to make sense of these diverse expressions of what began as a transplanted foreign religion. Following a brief historical sketch, this essay will review the main lines of research on Christianity in Japan and consider some recent trends and developments.<sup>2</sup>

### *Historical Orientation*

Although there is some evidence that Nestorian Christianity may have reached Japan as early as the thirteenth century, the first well-documented encounter between Christianity and Japanese culture began in the mid-sixteenth century with the Roman Catholic mission to Japan. Accompanying the colonial expansion of the Portuguese and Spanish into Asia, the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in Japan in 1549. Missionaries from several other Catholic orders arrived later in the century. The Catholic mission to Japan met with considerable success, so much so that this period has been referred to as ‘the Christian century in Japan’, with the Christian percentage of the population reaching a proportion several times higher than what it is today. This first encounter between Christianity and Japan ‘officially’ ended by the mid-seventeenth century when the Tokugawa authorities unified the country. Government decrees prohibited Christianity as an evil religion (*jakyō* 邪教), ordered the expulsion of European missionaries, and mandated the systematic persecution of Japanese converts. In spite of the widespread persecution, arrest, and execution of Christians, as well as effective methods of social control instituted by the bakufu government (the *danka seido* 檀家制度 and *terauke seido* 寺請制度, for example), pockets of Christians managed to survive and transmit the tradition to

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter is based on an earlier publication entitled “Japanese Christianity” in Chilson and Swanson 2006. It has been updated and adapted with material from a paper entitled, “Globalization and the Cross-Cultural Diffusion of Religion: The Case of Christianity in Contemporary Japanese Society,” presented at the conference on “Negotiating the Global with the Local: Translating Christianity in Modern East Asia,” Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California, 26–27 February 2010.

successive generations. Although the success story was thereby brought to an abrupt end, the encounter with Christianity continued ‘unofficially’ for the next two centuries as the ‘hidden Christians’ (Kakure Kirishitan 隠れキリシタン) sought to survive in the hostile environment and secretly carry on the faith they had received.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the Tokugawa period, when Westerners were once again admitted to the country and Catholic missionaries were able to resume their activities and hold religious services, a number of these Christians rejoined the Roman Catholic Church. Many others, however, felt that they could not abandon the tradition that had been passed down to them directly from their ancestors.

The second encounter between Christianity and Japan began in 1859 (only six years after Commodore Perry persuaded Japan to open its doors to the West) with the return of the Roman Catholics and the arrival of the first Protestant and Orthodox missionaries. This was a time of widespread confusion and chaos. The feudal order was disintegrating rapidly by the end of the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) and the new Meiji government had not yet begun to build the new social order. It was during this difficult transition period that this second phase of mission began. Since the mid-nineteenth century over two hundred mission societies, representing scores of churches and denominations as well as numerous national cultures, have been transplanted to Japanese soil. The missionary impulse has been especially strong in North America, with the United States and Canada being the home base for approximately one-third of all missionary societies that have been active in Japan.<sup>4</sup>

Christian missionary efforts in Japan finally began to meet with some success after the Japanese government rescinded the edict prohibiting Christianity in 1873. After two long decades of anti-Christian sentiment and resistance, Japan entered a brief period of *seiyō sūhai* 西洋崇拜, or ‘worship of the West’. The persistent efforts of missionaries suddenly began to pay off in this new social climate of openness. Even missionaries were overwhelmed by the positive response and rapid growth of mission churches and institutions in the 1880s. The optimism was so great that at the second Conference of Protestant Missionaries of Japan held in 1883 it was almost taken for granted that Japan would become a Christian nation in the near future. As Otis Cary observed in his history of this early period

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<sup>3</sup> For helpful studies of this first phase of Christian mission to Japan, see Boxer 1951, Higashibaba 2001, and Miyazaki K. 2003a.

<sup>4</sup> The literature and major developments of this period are reviewed by Ballhatchet 2003.

“some went so far as to say that, if the call sent out by the Conference asking for reinforcements was heeded by the churches at home, the work of evangelizing Japan could be accomplished within ten years, or at least before the close of the century.”<sup>5</sup> Even some non-Christian Japanese leaders and politicians were advocating that Christianity be adopted as the state religion of Japan. This was understood as an effective strategy for making Japan a recognized member of the international community as quickly as possible.

The ‘honeymoon’ was not to last. As the Meiji government stabilized and began to recast a national identity based upon State Shintō and the emperor system, the initial growth period for Christian churches and institutions came to an end. The leaders of the Meiji government established an alternative ideology to control the process of Japan’s modernization: Western technology and learning would be adopted without Christianity. As the strong arm of the state took control of Japan’s modernization, an environment was created which put a damper on the growth of Christianity. This is not to say that Christian churches did not record modest growth from time to time over the next century, but the ‘success’ of missionary efforts and the Christianization of Japan anticipated in the 1880s turned out to be a mirage and a case of wishful thinking.

The development of Christianity in postwar Japan has been framed by the fundamental changes in the political and legal system that resulted from Japan’s defeat on August 15, 1945, and the arrival of the Occupation Forces. The postwar Constitution of Japan (1947), with its principle of religious freedom and separation of religion and state, led to the disestablishment of State Shintō and created a free-market religious economy for the first time in Japanese history. These legal and political changes, accompanied by demographic changes related to postwar industrialization, helped to create a more favorable environment for Christian missionary activities. Responding to General MacArthur’s call for missionary reinforcements to join in building a new Japan, over fifteen hundred new missionaries arrived in Japan between 1949 and 1953. While churches have continued to report baptisms and membership increases throughout the postwar period, for decades annual statistics have indicated that less than one percent of the Japanese are church members. Many of the older denominations, in fact, are now reporting decline in most indicators

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<sup>5</sup> This is reported in Otis Cary’s summary of the Conference in his *A History of Christianity in Japan* (1976 [1909]: 166).

of religious vitality (the number of baptisms, church attendance, church school enrolments, and the number of clergy). About the only forms of Christianity recording modest growth today are the newer evangelical, pentecostal, and independent churches.

### *The Contemporary Situation*

In spite of substantial missionary investments over many decades, Christianity remains a small minority religion. According to the latest national statistics provided by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō 文化庁), today there are 182,310 religious bodies registered with the government.<sup>6</sup> This number includes Shintō shrines (46.7%), Buddhist temples (42.5%), Christian churches (2.3%), and New Religions (8.9%). In addition, there are close to 25,000 propagation centers across the country (roughly 80 percent belong to one of the New Religions). The older established Shintō and Buddhist institutions still clearly dominate the religious landscape and the 'late-comers'—both Christianity and new religious movements—represent only a small portion of organized religion in contemporary Japan.

While these figures indicate a strong institutional presence of religion, it should be noted that there is a serious discrepancy between the membership statistics claimed by these institutions and the self-understanding of the vast majority of Japanese. The total number of religious adherents for all of these religious bodies exceeds the population of Japan (127 million) by some 84 million people. Individuals are clearly being counted by more than one institution, which reflects the fact that many Japanese are at least loosely affiliated with both Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines and typically participate in annual events, festivals, and family rituals associated with multiple religious traditions. Survey research over the past several decades has consistently discovered that only 30 to 33 percent of the Japanese population claim to have a 'personal faith'. The vast majority profess to be 'without religion' (*mushūkyō* 無宗教), which essentially means that they are without an exclusive commitment to one particular organized religion. While some 30% may claim a personal faith of some kind, survey research also reveals that that less than 10% of the population claims to actually 'belong' to a religious organization (Ishii 2007 [1997]:142).

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<sup>6</sup> These statistics are for 2007.

Table 1. Christian church membership in Japan (2008)

	Churches	Religious Professionals	Membership
Roman Catholic	978	1,581	482,518
Protestant	7,246	11,104	617,457
Orthodox	72	42	25,929
Total	8,296	12,727	1,125,904

The number of Japanese that hold a clearly defined creed and are committed to a religious life as a part of organized religion or a congregation tend to be members of one of the New Religions or a Christian church of some kind. This would probably be no more than one in ten Japanese.

The statistics on Christianity in Japan tend to be regarded as generally more reliable since the notion of ‘membership’ is defined more clearly in relation to baptism and confession of faith. According to the latest figures (see Table 1), the combined membership of all churches is just over one million—over three times the number in the early postwar period—but still less than one percent (0.891%) of the population (*Kirisutokyō nenkan 2008*). Survey research presents a slightly more optimistic picture than church membership statistics. The NHK Survey (1985) reported that 2 percent of the adult population identified Christianity as their personal religion and a more recent Gallup Survey (2001) reported an increase to 4 percent. The gap between the findings of survey research and church statistics indicate a serious dropout rate or an aversion to organized religion. The hard reality is that the rate of defections and the increase in the Japanese population have kept Christian churches from gaining a larger share of the market in Japan’s religious economy. Membership in both Christian churches and many New Religions appears to be short-lived. Just over a decade ago, in fact, one astute observer estimated the average length of church life for Japanese Christians after baptism “is only 2.8 years” (Matsunaga 1999: 299).

#### *Transplanted Christian Traditions and Their Impact on Japanese Society*

The study of Christianity in most cultural contexts begins with the documentation of the missionary enterprise—the transplantation of mission churches, biographies of early missionary pioneers, and early ‘native’ leaders. This has also been the case in Japan. In fact, much scholarship has been based in institutions related to the mission churches and focused



on the preservation and study of the early history of their respective traditions in Japan. Given the investment in education by the mission churches, we should not be surprised to find that Christianity in Japan has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention and research, in spite of its minority status. The image and reputation of Christianity as a religion for 'intellectuals' has been created in part by this emphasis on education and research. Many Christian universities in Japan maintain research institutes, departments of theology or Christian studies, and special library collections and archives, which preserve many of the documents of various transplanted mission churches. Sophia University (Jōchi Daigaku 上智大学), for example, maintains the Kirishitan Bunko キリシタン文庫, which focuses on the collection of materials related to the Jesuit mission in the sixteenth century. Similarly, Dōshisha University, an institution with roots in the Congregational Protestant tradition, has collected and published many important materials documenting the Protestant mission churches and denominations. The list could go on.<sup>7</sup>

As a review of extensive bibliographies will reveal, Christianity is probably the most documented and studied minority religion in Japan.<sup>8</sup> The scope and range of scholarship is apparent in the massive reference work, *Nihon Kirisutokyō rekishi daijiten* 日本キリスト教歴史大事典 (Historical Dictionary of Christianity in Japan), a volume of over 1,700 pages, which draws on the expertise of over 1300 scholars and writers from diverse denominational traditions, movements, Christian institutions, as well as scholars working outside of Christian churches and institutions (Ebisawa 1988). In the context of these denominational histories and collections, considerable attention has been given to the study of 'great figures', the significant missionary pioneers and Japanese Christian leaders who played central roles in the transplantation and development of various Christian traditions in Japan. In a review of the literature one will quickly come across studies of such prominent figures as Francis Xavier, Alessandro Valignano, Leroy Janes, William Clark, James Hepburn, Guido Verbeck, Archbishop Nikolai (Ioan Dimitrovich Kasatkin), Channing Williams, Uchimura Kanzō, Uemura Masahisa, Nijjima Jō, Yamamurō Gunpei, and Kagawa Toyohiko. These figures continue to attract attention and research.

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the archival resources on Christianity in Japan, see Yoshida 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Ebisawa 1960, Ikado and McGovern 1966.

Although missionary efforts have only achieved minimal success when measured in terms of the number of converts or church membership, Christianity has nevertheless been a highly influential minority religious tradition that has had a significant impact on Japanese history, institutions, and even other religious traditions. A great deal of research has also considered the impact of the 'missionary carriers' of Christianity on the receiving society—giving attention to evangelistic work, church planting, contributions in the fields of education and social welfare. Important studies in this regard include Sumiya Mikio's *Kindai Nihon no keisei to kirisutokyō* 近代日本の形成とキリスト教 (The Situation in Modern Japan and Christianity, 1961), Morioka Kiyomi's *Nihon no kindai shakai to kirisutokyō* 日本の近代社会とキリスト教 (The Modern Society of Japan and Christianity, 1976), and Ikado Fujio's *Sezoku shakai to shūkyō* 世俗社会と宗教 (The Secular Society and Religion, 1972), which consider the social background and class connections of early converts to the Protestant missionary movement, the formation of churches in Japan, conflict between Christians and local communities, and the contribution of the Christian missionary movement to the modernization of Japan. A useful sociological and comparative study of variations in church growth is Yamamori Tetsunao's *Church Growth in Japan: A Study in the Development of Eight Denominations, 1859–1939*, which examines contextual and institutional factors related to growth.

The formation of new religious communities or groups is only one aspect of the impact of Christianity in Japan. The disproportionate role of Christians in the field of education, for example, is readily apparent when one compares the number of private schools associated with the major religious traditions in Japan. By the early 1960s, the number of Christian schools exceeded the number of Buddhist and Shintō related institutions combined. While there were 652 Buddhist-related schools, and only 92 Shintō-related schools, there were 840 Christian-related educational institutions (the numbers for each religious tradition include universities, junior colleges, high schools, junior high schools, elementary schools and kindergartens).<sup>9</sup> The significance of mission schools, particularly in pioneering in education for women, has been widely noted. In addition to the field of education, there are many studies documenting the impact of

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<sup>9</sup> Reported in *Kirisutokyō Gakkō Kyōiku Dōmei* 1961: 133.

Christians in medical work, in social reform movements and the development of labor unions, social welfare, and politics.

*Alternative Japanese Responses and Patterns of Appropriation*

It is undeniable that Christianity has had a significant impact in various spheres of Japanese society. The encounter between cultures and religious traditions, however, results in change in more than one direction. Christianity has also been transformed through its encounter with Japanese society and culture. The study of the transmission and cultural diffusion of Christianity in Japan requires that we give attention to a wide range of responses and patterns of appropriation; in short, we cannot confine our concerns to the history and documentation of its most obvious organizational forms (i.e., the churches and institutions established by Western mission societies). Japanese were not passive recipients of transplanted Christianity, but active agents who reinterpreted and reconstructed the faith in terms that made sense to them.

Here the focus of our concern shifts from the intentions of the 'missionary carriers' to the perception and reception of the 'natives' and the impact of the receiving culture and society on the imported religion. In other words, we must consider how Christianity—its beliefs, rituals, and institutions—has been appropriated and transformed through its encounter with Japanese culture and religious traditions. The process whereby 'foreign' and seemingly irrelevant religions become meaningful and rooted in local culture is referred to by such terms as indigenization, inculturation, contextualization, or syncretism (choice of nomenclature largely depending on one's academic reference group or theological commitments).<sup>10</sup> In the social sciences, indigenization has been defined as the process whereby foreign-born religions are transformed through contact with native religion and culture. Notwithstanding the popular image of the homogenous Japanese, Miyazaki Akira noted years ago that "Japanese culture is not a single unified culture, but a complex of cultures." Given this pluralism, Miyazaki argued that we should expect Christianity in Japan to appear in diverse forms as a result of its dynamic encounter with the native traditions of Shintō, Shugendō, Bushidō, Confucianism,

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<sup>10</sup> Roman Catholics tend to use the term 'inculturation' while Protestants usually prefer 'contextualization'.

and Buddhism (1965: 62). Any simple caricature of 'a Japanese Christianity' is quickly confounded by the diverse patterns of appropriation that have appeared over the course of Japan's modern century.

A number of studies have appeared in recent years that shift attention away from the efforts and intentions of the missionary carriers and focus more on the Japanese perceptions and appropriation of Christianity. A recent study of the earliest period of Roman Catholic mission in Japan along these lines is Higashibaba Ikuo's *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*. The author notes that most studies of this period have either focused on the political and economic dimensions of Christian mission or have been detailed studies of the well-known Jesuit missionary leaders, such as Francis Xavier or Alessandro Valignano. Higashibaba's study, however, explores the "popular religious life and culture of ordinary Japanese followers . . . whose existence has been so often ignored in the traditional histories of the Christian century" (2001: xiv).

Another area that has received particular attention is the study of the Kakure Kirishitan, those Japanese who continued to practice Christianity after it became a proscribed religion in the early seventeenth century. The 'hidden Christians' denied their faith in public by stepping on a *fumie* 踏み絵, but continued to practice their Christian religion in private. This indigenous tradition of Christianity evolved during the Tokugawa period as Japanese struggled to preserve their faith without the continued support and guidance of the Jesuit missionaries. Much to the surprise of both Japanese officials and Western Church representatives, a sizable Kakure Kirishitan community reappeared in 1865, some meeting with the Roman Catholic missionaries who had returned to Nagasaki. Many of these Kirishitan rejoined the Catholic Church, but others continued to practice the religious tradition as it had been handed down to them. The government's removal of the notice boards proscribing Christianity in 1873 essentially eliminated the *raison d'être* for the Kakure Kirishitan. Over the past century, their history has been one of steady decline. Miyazaki Kentarō, the foremost researcher in this field, estimates that today only 1000 to 1500 followers remain (2003b: 23). This fascinating indigenous tradition of Christianity has attracted a considerable research attention in recent years—perhaps, in part, because the Kakure Kirishitan represent an 'endangered species' and many are concerned to document this phenomena before it disappears entirely. Historical and anthropological studies have analyzed their social organization, considered how the transplanted Christian tradition was reshaped by Japanese cut off from the control and ongoing instruction of the Jesuit missionaries, and analyzed

to what extent the Kakure actually preserved elements of sixteenth century folk Catholicism transmitted along with orthodox Christian teaching (what Turnbull compares to a 'time capsule'). The sacred text of the Kakure, *Tenchi hajimari no koto* 天地始之事 (The Beginning of Heaven and Earth), has been helpfully introduced and translated into English by Christal Whelan.<sup>11</sup>

Considerable research has also been devoted to the study of indigenization within the transplanted mission churches in the modern period, particularly in relation to the needs of many Japanese to show special care and respect for the ancestors. In the Japanese context, proper care and respect for the dead involved not only taking part in a number of rituals surrounding the funeral itself, but also the performance of annual festivals and memorial rites over the course of many years. It is well known that most mission churches regarded the Japanese ancestral cult as something incompatible with the Christian faith and ritual care of the dead beyond the funeral was clearly not a part of the Protestant tradition transplanted to Japan in the late nineteenth century.

In spite of their early stance, many of the Christian churches related to denominations from Europe and North America have instituted a wide range of post-funerary rites over the course of the past century. There are a number of helpful studies documenting these ritual developments and the Japanese Christian understanding of the place of the ancestors in religious life. David Reid has analyzed the manner in which members of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 日本キリスト教団) have adapted Christian practices to indigenous ancestral rituals. Similarly, Nishiyama Shigeru's study of the Anglican-Episcopal Church in Japan (Nippon Seikōkai 日本聖公会) revealed that the ancestral cult has significantly transformed the practice of Christianity within this denomination. David Doerner's survey of a Roman Catholic parish likewise showed that numerous accommodations have been made to indigenous beliefs and practices related to the dead. Mark Luttio has similarly shown how the Lutheran Church has created a funeral rite that is more compatible with Japanese sensibilities and concerns. Luttio's study provides an analysis of the rite developed by the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) in 1993, comparing this ritual not only with the JELC's first funeral rite of 1897 but also with traditional Buddhist rites for the dead.

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<sup>11</sup> On the Kakure Kirishitan, see Harrington 1993; Miyazaki K. 1996; Turnbull 1998; Whelan 1996.

Faithful to the early missionary tradition, the 1897 rite consisted of only a funeral and burial (on the same day). The 1993 rite has adapted and incorporated many elements found in the protracted process of ritual care provided by the Japanese Buddhist tradition (see Reid 1991; Nishiyama 1985: 17–61; Doerner 1977: 151–82; Luttio 1996: 18–29).

*Independent-Indigenous Movements and Postdenominationalism*

The process of indigenization is even more apparent in the independent Christian movements that have appeared over the past century in response to the mission churches. For many years these movements were largely ignored in the study of Japanese Christianity because established churches regarded these movements to be heretical or problematic for numerous reasons. The Spirit of Jesus Church (Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai イエス之御霊教会), a Japanese pentecostal movement with some twenty thousand members, for example, was not considered a legitimate research topic for decades because of its rejection of trinitarian formulations of the Christian faith. Rather than excluding such movements prematurely on the basis of theological criteria, it is instructive to examine all groups that define themselves as Christian and consider how they reinterpret and reshape the faith in light of native concerns and traditions when they become independent of the control of the Western churches. It is also important to place these Japanese innovations within a larger context and see them as part of a worldwide proliferation of postdenominational religious movements over the past century.

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001), a massive volume of statistics, provides some important comparative data that reveals significant changes in world Christianity over the past century. One important finding of this volume is that the most rapidly expanding ‘global megabloc’ of Christianity is that of the independent church, which refers to new Christian movements that reject the historic denominationalism rooted in the European experience (see Table 2).<sup>12</sup> “By A.D. 2025,” the editors explain, “the independents, who numbered less than half the size of Protestants in 1970, will have nearly 115 million more members than Protestants” (Barrett et al. 2001: 24).

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<sup>12</sup> The megabloc referred to as ‘Marginal Christians’, which includes such movements as Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Science, is not included here.

Table 2. Strength of Christian denominations in 1900 and 2000

Denomination	1900	(Adherents in millions)	2000	(Adherents in millions)
Roman Catholics	50.8%	266	50.2%	1,057
Orthodox	22.1%	115	10.2%	215
Protestants	19.6%	103	16.2%	342
Anglicans	5.8%	30	3.8%	79
Independents	1.5%	7	18.3%	386

These 'postdenominational' independent churches are an important part of the global response to the modern missionary movement from Western Europe and North America. Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans have organized over 20,000 independent church movements in an effort to disengage Christianity from its Eurocentric orientation and relativize the transplanted 'vernacular' forms of Western Christianity. In some countries, these newer churches have come to represent a major component of the Christian population. In South Africa, for example, some 4,000 independent churches constitute 40% of the Christian population. This is significant in a country where the total percentage of the Christian population is almost 80% (see Hendriks 2003). One of the largest churches in the world today is also a part of this rapidly expanding 'megabloc': the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, which claims over 700,000 members and a Sunday attendance of over 200,000.

Although on a much smaller scale than in South Korea or various countries in Africa or Latin America, this independent stream of Christianity has also developed in Japan over the past century. While we should be careful not to exaggerate the importance of independent and indigenous movements, they deserve serious consideration if we are to understand the diverse ways in which Christianity has been received and reshaped by Japanese.<sup>13</sup>

Carlo Caldarola's *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (1979) represents a pioneering work in the study of independent and indigenous forms of Christianity in Japan. This book focused on Uchimura Kanzō and the Nonchurch movement (Mukyōkai 無教会), the first independent expression of Japanese Christianity founded in 1901, which subsequently functioned as the fountainhead of indigenous Christian movements in Japan. Uchimura's version of Christianity was a Confucian one, grafted on to *bushidō* 武士道, and had particular appeal to educated members from

<sup>13</sup> This section adapts material from my earlier study (Mullins 1998).

the samurai class. While Caldarola's monograph provided an important beginning in the study of indigenous Christian movements, his misleading subtitle—*The Japanese Way*—implied that there was one authentic Japanese version of Christianity. The successive appearance of indigenous movements over the past century, however, indicates that there are other ways to be both Japanese and Christian.

In *Christianity Made in Japan* (1998) I attempted to provide some basic documentation of some of these alternative movements, which were also founded by charismatic individuals who accepted the Christian faith (on their own terms) but rejected the missionary carriers and their particular 'Western' and 'denominational' understanding of religion.<sup>14</sup> The prominent role of charismatic leaders and the manifestation of various charismatic phenomena are important features of these movements, which distinguish them from most transplanted churches as well as Uchimura's Nonchurch movement. The independent churches in Japan can be broadly divided into 'native-oriented' indigenous movements and 'foreign-oriented' evangelical churches. In fact, it is possible to divide all Christian religious bodies in Japan according to their basic orientation or dominant reference group. Transplanted religious organizations, including the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran denominations, and the United Church of Christ in Japan (the largest Protestant religious body in Japan, which incorporated Methodist, Reformed, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches) are still 'foreign-oriented' in many respects. The denominations still receive foreign missionaries—though the number have declined steadily over the past several decades—and their understanding of theology and models for church polity and organization are taken primarily from Western churches. Similarly, the dominant reference group for the postdenominational independent churches that have proliferated in the postwar period tends to be American evangelicalism. While these independent churches are indigenous in terms of the standard criteria of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation, their 'foreign-orientation' is still apparent in their literature, tracts, and theology, which largely remain translated material from North America.

Indigenous movements, on the other hand, are 'native-oriented' and do not measure their perception of religious truth by the standards of

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<sup>14</sup> For a bibliographical guide to indigenous Christian movements, see the appendix in Mullins 1998: 201–16. For an in-depth case study of an independent charismatic movement in Okinawa, see Ikegami 1991.



orthodoxy defined by Western theology or ancient church councils. Most of these groups produce their own literature, which includes the founder's writings and lectures as well as numerous monthly magazines. If not revealing radically new truths, these indigenous movements at least share in common the conviction that God is calling them to develop Japanese cultural expressions of the Christian faith that are at least as legitimate as the national churches and denominational forms that have emerged over the centuries in Europe and North America.

During the first half of the twentieth century, a number of new 'native-oriented' movements were launched by charismatic Japanese leaders who could not abide by the individualistic and denominational understanding of religion advocated by many Western churches. The Japanese founders were indebted to various Protestant missionaries and transplanted traditions of Christianity, but serious tensions and conflicts emerged over time as a result of basic differences in their understanding of the relationship between the Gospel and Japanese culture and religion. These Japanese leaders felt that Christianity was unnecessarily bound to Western organizational and cultural forms, denominational politics, and missionary control. In their view, most missionaries operated as though their transplanted theologies and traditions (both Protestant and Catholic) were the normative expression of the biblical faith and felt it was necessary to re-create their own denominational traditions on Japanese soil.

In contrast to the position of Protestant mission churches, the founders of these movements usually affirmed that truth and goodness are found not only in the Bible and in theological affirmations of the ecumenical councils of the Western churches, but also in the religious traditions of Asia and in post-Biblical revelation and religious experience. The religious experiences of a number of charismatic leaders and their unique combination of foreign (pentecostalism, Unitarianism, dispensationalism, reformed theology) and native religious and cultural elements (Confucianism, Shamanism, bushidō, ancestral cult), led to the creation of multiple 'ways' to be both Japanese and Christian. What these movements most clearly reveal is that Japanese were not passive recipients of transplanted Christianity, but active agents who reinterpreted and reconstructed the faith in terms that made sense to them.

The current membership of these groups varies widely, ranging from small groups of several hundred to over twenty thousand. In most cases, the movements experienced significant growth while under the leadership of their charismatic founder many decades ago and have struggled with steady decline ever since. While these indigenous Christian groups

are certainly 'minor' and the combined membership constitute no more than 5 to 10 percent of the Christian population in Japan, they nevertheless represent alternative ways in which Japanese have responded to and reinterpreted the Christian tradition. With the exception of Uchimura's Nonchurch (Mukyōkai) movement, most of independent churches have not been taken seriously. This is not a surprising response since they were organized in response to what they perceived as inadequate and deficient versions of transplanted Christianity.

In addition to the 'native-oriented' indigenous movements, the postwar period has seen the proliferation of postdenominational evangelical churches. In contrast to the earlier wave of indigenous movements, most of these churches are 'foreign-oriented' and continue to look toward American evangelical (non-denominational) churches as their primary reference group. While in the early postwar period (1947) there were only 18 churches in this category, today there are 930 churches, 1,335 clergy, and 46,116 members affiliated with one of the independent churches. Even though most of these postdenominational churches represent rather small congregations, their combined membership is almost twice that of the Orthodox Church (25,929) and approaching the size of the Anglican-Episcopal Church (55,466).<sup>15</sup> It is clear that these postdenominational forms will need to be taken more seriously in future studies of Christianity in Japan.

#### *From a Western to Non-Western Missionary Movement*

While the Christian missionary enterprise has been widely understood to be a Western one, this is a characterization that can no longer be sustained. The number of missionaries from Europe and North America related to the older established denominations has steadily declined over the past few decades. In the mid-1960s, for example, the Protestant mission boards related to the mainline churches in the United States and Canada supported approximately 400 missionaries to work with the United Church of Christ in Japan and related institutions. The steady decline of the mainline churches and new budget constraints has meant that the number of missionaries sent and supported for work in Japan has gradually been reduced. As of 2008, there were only 52 missionaries on board salaries

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<sup>15</sup> These figures are drawn from Kirisutokyō Nenkan Henshūbu 2008.

and another 28 assigned to church-related educational institutions that receive salary directly from Japanese institutions.<sup>16</sup>

The decline in missionaries from the old mainline has been largely replaced by the increase in evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries. Many are still from North America, but a number are also arriving from the new non-Western centers of world Christianity—Brazil, Peru, Philippines, and, especially, Korea. With over one-quarter of the population belonging to Protestant or Catholic congregations, South Korea has become a major source of the modern missionary movement. The growth of the Korean church has been accompanied by the development of numerous mission agencies and overseas missionary work. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the number of Korean missionaries serving overseas grew from 1,645 serving in 87 different countries in 1990 to 10,745 serving in some 162 different countries in 2002. According to recent studies by Steve S.C. Moon, Director of the Korean Institute for Missions, the Korean missionary movement has continued to grow and today some 18,035 missionaries are assigned to work in 177 different countries in association with 190 different mission agencies.<sup>17</sup> Moon also notes that some 463 Protestant missionaries from Korea were assigned to Japan in 2000, and he estimates that this number has reached 800–900 by 2009.<sup>18</sup>

The 2009 *Directory of the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association (JEMA)* indicates that there are currently 2029 Protestant missionaries still active in Japan. Almost 70 percent belong either to one of the JEMA-related evangelical mission societies (1,052) or work as independent missionaries (357), which indicates the shrinking role of the missionary force from the mainline churches. In a review of the most recent *JEMA Directory*, I was only able to identify 157 Korean Protestant missionaries. According to Korean sources, however, many more are actually working in Japan. While some may be 'hidden' within the category of 'independent' missionaries and work with Korean mission organizations unrelated to JEMA, many also work with churches or mission groups that have until recently been associated with the churches from the West. The Anglican Church (Nippon Seikōkai), for example, which has historical roots in the Church of England and the Anglican-Episcopal Churches in the United

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<sup>16</sup> These figures are reported in the *Kyodan-Related Missionary Directory 2008–2009*.

<sup>17</sup> See Moon 2003, and various online reports on the website of the Korean Research Institute for Mission.

<sup>18</sup> Steven S.C. Moon provided the most recent figures and estimates in e-mail communication, 31 December 2009.

States and Canada, has seen a steady decline of missionaries in Japan. Of the 19 foreign priests still working in the Anglican Church today, 14 are from Korea and only 5 are sent from the traditional Anglo-churches (England, Canada, and the United States). Similarly, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which initiated work in Japan with American missionaries over a century ago, today has 23 missionaries working in Japan and only 4 have non-Korean names. Campus Crusade for Christ, an evangelical group founded in the United States in 1951 for outreach to college students, began work in Japan in 1963. Of the 46 full-time staff in Japan today, 15 are Korean and another 12 are serving as short-term missionaries for about a year. In addition, Koreans constitute the majority of the hundreds of 'project workers' that come to Japan for specific short-term outreach activities.<sup>19</sup>

While many different Protestant mission groups from Korea have a missionary presence in Japan today, it was Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church ヨイド純福音教会, who was one of the first to become actively involved in mission work.<sup>20</sup> The mission to Japan began in 1976 with the organization of a church in Osaka. Two years later another church was established in Tokyo, and numerous branch churches and home cell groups have been organized since that time. Japanese translations of Cho's books, large-scale revival meetings, and television broadcasts gave the Full Gospel Mission a higher profile than other mission groups. By 1989, the Full Gospel Mission in Japan had grown to nine churches and a membership of some five thousand guided by twenty missionary pastors. The initial growth was clearly related to the fact that these Korean churches provide a home away from home for many Korean immigrants working in Japan. The degree of success in incorporating Japanese into these ethnic organizations varies from church to church. In my own field research in the 1990s, I discovered that the Japanese membership was well below 20 percent and most were spouses of interethnic marriages. These churches are making efforts to transcend ethnic boundaries, but with limited success. Following the model of the Yoido Church in Seoul, all of the branch churches in Japan have organized multiple services on Sunday and scores of home cell groups. The Tokyo Church, for example, offers multiple services in Japanese and Korean (providing simultaneous interpretation for the Korean services).

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<sup>19</sup> The information on Japan Campus Crusade is from the *JEMA Directory 2009* and provided by Dr. Andy Meeko by e-mail (10 February 2010).

<sup>20</sup> The following section draws on my earlier study Mullins 1994.

The most recent data on the Full Gospel Church mission indicates that there has been a steady investment in resources and new church development over the past two decades. There are now 105 missionaries working with 74 churches in Japan, but the membership has only increased to 5,703. These churches continue to primarily attract Koreans and have made little headway within the larger Japanese population. In the Tokyo Church, for example, which is the largest Full Gospel Church in Japan, only 100 of the 1,200 members are Japanese.<sup>21</sup> It is safe to conclude that more than 90 percent of the membership is still Korean in these churches across Japan.

There has been some speculation that the recent 'Korea wave' (*hanryū* 韓流) or boom in the popularity of Korean culture in Japan from late 1990s could attract more Japanese to these churches. Lee Hyunkyung's (2009) recent study of Korean churches in Tokyo, Sapporo, and Osaka found that churches are trying to use this interest in things Korean and have been offering classes and cultural events. While this has attracted a number of Japanese to churches for various activities, including religious services, so far it has not led to significant membership recruitment for Korean churches. A few Japanese dissatisfied by what they regard as the 'anemic Christianity' of established Japanese churches have been motivated to join the more dynamic and charismatic Korean churches. But these are not 'new' Christians and essentially they represent the 'circulation of the saints' rather than new growth. In sum, the 'Korea wave' has increased some traffic to the churches, but most new participants remain 'non-believers' and indicate that they have no intention of embracing the religion.

The less than enthusiastic Japanese response to these latest missionary initiatives must also be seen in light of the widespread media coverage of 'problematic cults' from Korea. The Unification Church (Tōitsu Kyōkai 統一教会), for example, has been in the news for years and this has undoubtedly shaped public opinion and negative attitudes toward Korean religious organizations. The Unification Church is widely known for high-pressure recruitment methods and fundraising activities. The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, which includes some 300 lawyers concerned with Unification Church activities in Japan, reports that it

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<sup>21</sup> For these most recent statistics and observations on the ethnic composition of the Full Gospel Church in Japan, I am indebted to Ikuya Noguchi, a doctoral researcher affiliated with the Free University of Amsterdam and Sophia University. Some data about the current strength of the mission in Japan is available on church.jp and on the website of Yoido Full Gospel Church World Mission.

received some 18,000 complaints over a ten-year period (1987–1997). The Unification Church has been taken to court numerous times and found to be “legally liable for the unlawful procurement of monetary donations” in numerous judgments determined by courts in Japan over the past few years. Over the past two years, there has also been critical coverage of other Korean churches that have been involved in sexual scandals of one kind or another, and one church that was investigated for arranging some 300 marriages between Japanese and Koreans to facilitate long-term residence in Japan by illegal aliens, which allegedly brought in several million dollars over the course of two decades. This kind of media attention necessarily cultivates a cautiousness and suspicion toward religion in general, but especially toward new religions from Korea.

While the “salvation of ten million Japanese souls” may be possible, which is Cho’s optimistic vision for Japan, the hard reality is that even enthusiastic and hard-working Korean missionaries are having a difficult time making much progress toward this goal. It is undeniable that some of these churches are growing faster than Western-oriented churches and represent a more dynamic stream of Asian Christianity. In spite of the recent ‘Korea wave’, the relations between many Koreans and Japanese remained strained and it seems unlikely that many Japanese will seek religious solace in these churches dominated by religious leaders from a former colony.

### *Immigration and the Transformation of Christianity in Japan*

While the diffusion of Christianity through immigration is a taken-for-granted reality in the history of religion in many places, it has not been regarded as a significant factor for understanding the development of Christianity in Japan. The study of Christianity has been primarily about the documentation of the Western missionary enterprise and its reception and indigenization by Japanese. While human migration is hardly a new phenomenon, it has accelerated during the last half of the twentieth-century. The number of international migrants, in fact, has more than doubled in the past forty years from 75 million in 1965 to 150 million in 2000.<sup>22</sup> The global rise of international migration is also reshaping the religious landscape of Japan and having a significant impact on Christianity,

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<sup>22</sup> These figures are drawn from the UN Population Division and reported by Martin (2001).

particularly the Roman Catholic Church, and generating new lines of research.<sup>23</sup>

The unanticipated and rapid influx of foreign workers to Japan has included many from dominantly Catholic countries in Latin America and the Philippines. In order to cope with the challenges of living in an unfamiliar environment, it is not surprising that many seek out the Catholic Church as a 'home away from home' shortly after their arrival. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of 'newcomer' foreign workers increased by 50 percent (this group is to be distinguished from the Korean population, for example, which has been in Japan for several generations).<sup>24</sup> Many of these 'newcomers' are Catholics and have been filling the empty pews of churches across Japan, particularly in Tokyo, Saitama, Nagoya, and Osaka. According to the 2005 report of the Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees and People on the Move, "there are about 529,452 foreign Catholics in Japan. For the first time there are more foreign Catholics than the 449,925 Japanese Catholics."<sup>25</sup> This increase in the number of foreign Catholics comes at a time when the Japanese Catholic Church is on a trajectory of serious decline.<sup>26</sup> This demographic shift represents a fundamental challenge to an institution that has been largely concerned with 'inculturation' and the effort to become a Japanese Church. The Catholic Church in United States, Canada, and Australia has a long history of dealing with multicultural and multiethnic parishes, but this is unfamiliar territory for most churches in Japan.

In spite of the lack of resources and some cases of resistance, many Japanese churches have responded positively to the new challenge. Japanese language classes are often provided for immigrants and their

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the impact of immigration on the Catholic Church in Japan, see Mullins 2011. See also the special issue on "Japan's Catholic Church and Immigrants" in *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* (Terada 2008), which includes both articles and interviews with Catholic leaders involved in the emerging multicultural and multiethnic church.

<sup>24</sup> For a helpful summary of statistical data on these new foreign workers, see the website of J-CaRM.

<sup>25</sup> Reported by J-CaRM.

<sup>26</sup> Although membership statistics indicate a modest increase over the past few decades, other key indicators suggest that Japanese Catholics are going to be a shrinking religious minority for the foreseeable future. Between 1995 and 2005, for example, the number of baptisms (both infant and adult), the number of children and youth enrolled in religious education and catechism classes, and Mass Mass attendance (Sunday, Easter, and Christmas) have all declined significantly. The number of priests, as well as the number seminarians training for the priesthood, also continues to decline steadily (see the statistics on the website of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan).

children, services are scheduled and coordinated to allow non-Japanese the opportunity to gather for special activities with their ethnic community, and, gradually, representatives of various nationality groups are being appointed to serve on church councils and committees in an effort to more fully integrate the foreign communities into the life of the parish. Considerable efforts have also been made to provide masses in multiple languages and today foreign-language services are provided in English, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indonesian, and Miyanmarese (Burmese).

A church, which in the past has been largely shaped by European and North American traditions and gradually Japanese through the process of inculturation, is now being reshaped by new cultural influences and ways of practicing Catholicism from Brazil, Peru, and the Philippines. At these new multicultural parishes one can observe very different styles of worship, a stronger emphasis on Marian devotions not usually observed in Japan, and more expressive participation in masses and special services. A number of new celebrations and processions have also been introduced to the Japanese Church. The Lord of Miracles Procession, for example, which was first organized by religious brotherhoods in eighteenth-century Peru, has been spread by eight Peruvian immigrant brotherhoods in Japan since the early 1990s. The new Catholics from the Philippines have also brought lay movements with them, including the popular charismatic El Shadai Movement and Couples for Christ. These are now recognized by the Japanese hierarchy and allowed to conduct special masses, celebrations, and seminars in various parishes. It remains to be seen if these Filipino movements will significantly influence the average Japanese Catholic, but they will undoubtedly shape the immigrant community and bicultural children of international marriages who are brought by their mothers to attend these services.

The Catholic Church in Japan is clearly in a major period of transition. It has responded positively in many ways to the rapidly changing situation and needs of foreign workers, but many practical difficulties remain. There are clear tensions between older Japanese members and new non-Japanese members surrounding their different expectations regarding parish life (particularly in connection with use of sacred space, church facilities, and financial matters). Japanese churches that are in decline and struggling to survive, however, could very well be revitalized by these new immigrant Catholics if they are able to transcend their differences and find a way to combine their resources and work together.



### Conclusion

In spite of its minority status, Christianity in Japan has been a relatively well-studied and documented religious tradition. As has been the case in other non-Western contexts, research was initially burdened by a Eurocentric and North American orientation and studies tended to focus on transplanted mission churches, missionary leaders, and institutions. Western mission churches have certainly played a significant role in the cross-cultural diffusion of the faith, but this is clearly only one side of the story. Japanese have also been significant actors who have reshaped the received traditions through the formation of independent movements. Furthermore, religious movements and people from new centers of religious vitality have assumed an increasingly important role in the diffusion of Christianity. In the case of the Catholic Church, the 'primary carriers' of the faith this time around tend not be religious professionals (priests or missionaries), but lay Catholic immigrants who bring their faith, traditions, and practices with them and incorporate them into their Japanese communities and parishes. In sum, the diffusion of Christianity in Japan reveals a complex and ongoing process in which cultures are made and remade from old and new elements as people encounter each other and share their diverse traditions.

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MONEY AND THE TEMPLE:  
LAW, TAXES AND THE IMAGE OF BUDDHISM

STEPHEN G. COVELL

Buddhist institutions in Japan today are a vibrant part of the Japanese religious world. Nevertheless, postwar Japanese Temple Buddhism has been faced with a variety of difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Of particular interest here is the funding of temples. Much of the criticism currently aimed at Temple Buddhism stems from the economic activities of priests. Religion and money, it is commonly assumed, should not be overly familiar partners. And yet religious organizations, like the people who create and join them, need some measure of financial stability. We begin by reviewing the history of temple funding in Japan and then go on to examine the economic activities of temples today and the manner in which they shape the images and realities of Temple Buddhism.

Critiques of Buddhist affluence are nothing new. External and internal critics abound throughout the historical records. Buddhism in China, for example, was subjected to periodic persecutions, in which wealth amassed by temples was reclaimed by the state.<sup>2</sup> Critiques also appear from early on in the record of Buddhism in Japan. For instance, in 1571, Oda Nobunaga burned the temples of Mt. Hiei 比叡山 to the ground and slew countless priests in an effort to erase the Tendai denomination's political, military, and economic power. In the Edo period (1603–1868), Confucian and Nativist critics chastised Buddhists for their wealth, claiming it was symptomatic of religious, if not legal, corruption. During the Meiji period (1868–1912) persecutions of Buddhism (which peaked during 1870–1874), negative images of corrupt priests were used to legitimize the seizure and destruction of numerous temple properties as well as the defrocking of priests. In short, there is no lack of evidence that, throughout Buddhism's history in Japan and elsewhere, the economic activities

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<sup>1</sup> Here I use the term Temple Buddhism to distinguish the various denominations of Buddhism that developed prior to the modern period from the many Buddhist new religions and lay Buddhist movements that appeared during the modern period.

<sup>2</sup> The extent of persecution varied by period. Acts of suppression included the execution of hundreds of monks, forced laicization of tens of thousands of monks, and the confiscation or destruction of thousands of temples.

of priests and temples have been a source of both stability and political upheaval (see Harvey 2000; Sizemore and Swearer 1990).

Questions regarding the economic activities of temples often arise from the assumption that Buddhist priests and temples are supposed to exist removed from the mundane realm of financial matters.<sup>3</sup> Despite such assumptions, priests and temples exist in the lived world and, therefore, have fiscal and legal obligations that must be met. Ritual supplies must be purchased, land managed, and even proselytizing efforts require funding. In many ways, temples today face even greater demands on their coffers than did their predecessors. For example, modern temple administrators must worry about fire, liability, and theft insurance. Moreover, building or maintaining classically-designed structures often requires hiring expensive specialists. Then too, because most priests now marry, they must draw a large enough salary to provide for their family.<sup>4</sup> All these considerations and others make the financial management of the average temple little different from that of a family business.

It is this similarity to a business that invites criticism today. Critiques regarding economic activities often assume a clear division between the sacred and profane, between world-renouncer and householder. They fail to acknowledge how thoroughly enmeshed these realms are in everyday life. Such critiques bring to light scholarly and popular assumptions about what is, or is not, properly 'religious' or 'Buddhist'.

Before introducing the example of taxing the temple as a way of understanding these issues, it is necessary to place the contemporary debate over the economic activities of temples in Japan within a historical context. A brief history of how temples were funded in the past will serve as background for what their major funding sources and expenditures are today. Some discussion of the legal status of the temple as a 'religious corporation' will also help to clarify certain issues related to the management, taxation and identity of temples today.

### *Temple Funding Past and Present*

In the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1185) periods, temples derived funding from the imperial court or court nobles. From the later Heian and

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, local and national politics, as well as economic rivalries, have always played a part in how and when such rhetoric is used.

<sup>4</sup> For more on clerical marriage see Covell 2005 and Jaffe 2001.

into the Kamakura period (1185–1333) funds began to come from private estates (*shōen* 莊園) owned and operated by the temples. Temple estates became so powerful, in fact, that Kuroda Toshio describes the society and politics of medieval Japan as dominated by three groups including the leading religious establishments (*jike* 寺家) (Dobbins 1996: 217–32).<sup>5</sup>

In the Kamakura period in addition to support from noble and warrior family households and income derived from temple estates, temples also came to rely on *kanjin* 勧進, or donation campaigns, for fundraising (see Kuroda 1996: 287–320). As Janet Goodwin notes, changes in Buddhist fund raising practices coincided with changes in political and economic structures. In general, “the needs of the lay community informed the way the Buddhist message was promoted and received, often reshaping both message and community” (1994: 142). This point applies to Buddhism in any period, contemporary Japan included.

A wide variety of funding sources, representing the diversity of Buddhist institutions that had developed by then, are found in the Edo period. The priests of many large temple complexes received state support in the form of stipends. Smaller local temples often relied on local community members for their income. In return for ritual services, such as funerals, families made offerings to the temple. Temples which housed religious objects of renown, or which were home to religious practitioners of renown, might have confraternities (*kō* 講) develop around them. These confraternities would often pay for the maintenance and upkeep of the objects or individuals around which they formed to worship. Some temples also derived income from pilgrims. Still other temples derived substantial portions of their income from renting out farmland, while others leased land to the shops that sought to accommodate pilgrims and other visitors to the temple. In addition, some temples earned income through the sale of medicines (see Williams 2005). As a rule, temples relied on a mix of several such sources.

In the modern, and especially the contemporary periods, sources of income display even greater variety. This variety reflects the increased strain on temple revenues that occurred when lands were lost to government reform during the Meiji and postwar periods. Confraternities continue to exist and in some areas (primarily rural) play an important role by providing a web of social interaction that serves to support the temple. There are women’s groups, groups dedicated to a specific image, and ritual

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<sup>5</sup> Kuroda (1996) calls the society of this period ‘*shōen shakai* 莊園社会’ (estate society).

groups (such as *nenbutsu* 念仏 groups). Confraternities and similar support groups continue to develop around famous Buddhist practitioners. Pilgrimages remain a major source of income for some temples today. At times, temples team up with local authorities, and also with bus and train lines, to create or reinvigorate pilgrimages (Reader 1987: 133–48; see also Reader 2006). These are designed to further Buddhist proselytizing efforts, while also generating revenue for temples. City planners, local businesses, bus, and train lines cooperate because pilgrimages are thought to increase consumer traffic.

Just as in the Edo period, when temples developed new, or aggressively marketed old rituals, the modern period, too, has witnessed the development of new rituals. *Mizuko kuyō* 水子供養 (rites for aborted fetuses), for example, were developed and marketed by religious organizations, including temples in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s.<sup>6</sup> In addition to deriving income from rituals and confraternities, many temples have employed their remaining properties to generate income. Everything from daycare centers, to parking lots, to vegetarian restaurants has been attempted. Another form of income available to some temples today is grants and loans from governmental offices for the maintenance and housing of objects and buildings designated as local or national treasures. Temple properties designated as cultural assets also draw tourists to the temple and increase the temple's name recognition level. However, such support also comes with requirements, such as making the object available for public view and maintaining the object, which often cost far more than the subsidies provided. Each denomination also has available its own loan program, through which temples can qualify for loans in order to repair and maintain structures.

As with donation (*kanjin*) campaigns of the past, local donation drives provide another source of income. Unlike the campaigns of the Kamakura period, however, today's donation drives invariably target temple lay members for local projects and work through the temples of specific denominations for denomination-related national projects. Contemporary donation drives, therefore, rarely afford the opportunity to proselytize beyond temple lay members. In many cases temple lay members perceive donations

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<sup>6</sup> Hardacre cites a survey demonstrating that 47.5 percent of temples marketing *mizuko* rites began to advertise such rites between 1975–1984 (Hardacre 1997: 94–95). For more on *mizuko kuyō* see Hoshino and Takeda 1987: 305–20; LaFleur 1992; and the collection of articles in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (4), ed. Charles Mathewes, 1999.



as acts necessary to the care and maintenance of ancestors who are buried and memorialized at the temple, rather than as funding for the promotion and support of the denomination and its goals. In informal questioning, however, some priests argued that donations should be seen as a form of Buddhist practice and confided that it is a struggle to instill that motivational understanding in their temple lay members. Based on my fieldwork, I would argue that for many in Japan today there is little connection between the classical Buddhist idea of merit generation through donations and the practice of donating. This does not mean that some people do not donate with merit generation in mind, but in most cases I believe donations are viewed more as fees or tithes required for services or membership.

Funerals and related services grew in importance as sources of income in the postwar period as social and economic conditions changed. Income derived from funerals does not stop with the event of the funeral. Donations are accepted for a series of memorial services following the funeral, and for special occasions such as *obon* お盆 (in late summer) and *higan* 彼岸 (at the fall equinox). The average amount of income for a temple with an average sized lay membership from all of these combined is not a great sum of money, but is on par with the salary of low to mid-ranked businessmen. However, this income is not the priest's; it belongs to the temple. The priest's salary and other temple expenses are deducted from these funds.

Temples also derive income from graveyards. Such income results from the sale of rights to a gravesite and from grave maintenance fees. In addition, typically only temple lay members are permitted burial in a temple's graveyard. This means that individuals seeking a grave plot for a family member cannot simply purchase a plot, they must purchase a lasting institutional relationship with the temple. Temple lay members are often required to donate a small sum of money annually (ranging from a few thousand yen to thirty or forty thousand yen) to the temple for its support.

If graveyards represent the physical tie of the dead and their survivors to the temple, and thus an important and lasting proselytizing avenue and revenue stream, it is the funeral that creates that tie. Until about the mid-seventies, priests were often the first person called as death approached. The priest served to guide the family through the entire death process: praying for the deceased, scheduling the funeral, and instructing them in the practical social relations associated with death. However, today the 'business' of the funeral has shifted out of the hands of the priest, and with

it much of the support service roles as well. By the mid-1980s, the role of funeral companies grew from providing materials and occasional manpower assistance to scripting, implementing, and managing the funeral from beginning to end, even in some cases providing the priest. In the cities, in particular, where a large population unaffiliated with community temples exists, funeral companies came to serve as the intermediaries between temples and bereaved families.

Driven by a desire to find new ways to spread the teachings of Buddhism and new means to generate income to support the temple, beginning in the 1990s some priests began to implement new forms of burial and memorial practices. Moreover, some of these practices move beyond traditional lay member household (*danka sei* 檀家制) affiliation and create individual membership associations (*kai'in sei* 会員制). Not only has this changed how income is derived but it has begun to change how ancestors are venerated. Mark Rowe's study of various associations for burial and memorial clearly demonstrates the changing nature of veneration and the manner in which it affects social structures. For example, Rowe states:

...the two most common forms of relationship or bond (*en*) in Japan are those of blood and locale. What is fascinating to note about some of these burial groups is the way they are appropriating the *en* bond in new ways. . . . [T]raditionally recognized forms of relations are being dramatically expanded, so that friends, acquaintances, even strangers, may now be buried together and memorialize each other. (2003: 112–13)

While the groups Rowe examines are still in the minority, they represent the beginning of a gradual shift in how people memorialize the dead.

Running a temple today is not the same as popular imagination might believe it was in the past. Long gone are the times, if they ever existed, when a monk might stake out a cave or grove and begin practice. Today, there are forms to be filled out (zoning laws, building permits, etc.) and bills to be paid. Moreover, although a particularly adept monk might be able to make a living begging for his daily sustenance, it is doubtful that the institutions and traditions that have developed over time could survive off begging alone.

Critiques of the income-earning activities of Japanese Buddhists often stem from the perception that begging is the proper 'traditional' method for raising funds to support temples and priests. Such critiques, sometimes comparing images of Buddhists elsewhere in Asia to images of Japanese Buddhists, fail to take into account the social, cultural, historical, and economic circumstances elsewhere in Asia that enable begging. They also fail to take into account that begging, though practiced, has

not been the primary income source in those areas for a long time (if ever). The socio-cultural institutions for the acceptance of begging activities do not exist in contemporary Japan. The image of begging monks, however, remains ingrained in popular (Western and Japanese) images of 'true' Buddhist practice. Japanese Buddhist denominations themselves work to perpetuate this image. For example, training centers associated with the Zen denominations continue ritualized begging as part of their practices. The Tendai denomination conducts an annual fundraising drive called "Tendai All-Japan Begging" (*Tendai Nihon issei takuhatsu* 天台日本一斉托鉢). This drive is led by the head priest of the denomination and is significant for its use of the image of 'traditional' begging to raise funds for Tendai's social welfare activities.

Whether through begging or not, temples need income. Maintaining a temple is not inexpensive. To summarize the points discussed thus far, first, funds are needed to maintain structures. Second, funds are needed to pay the priest and perhaps staff. Third, funds must be raised to pay annual tithes to the sect. Fourth, liability insurance often must be paid. Advice columns for priests frequently deal with questions such as "can the temple be held responsible for food poisoning from food served after a service?" (*Kōhō Tendai* 1996, 1999).<sup>7</sup> Fifth, scheduled ceremonies and festivals need funding. Such funds are often raised on a case-by-case basis through requests for donations made to temple lay members. Finally, temple supplies such as robes and incense can be very expensive.

The pressure to raise the funds needed to maintain the temple and to meet the demands of temple lay members for ritual services often forces priests away from striking out into new realms of proselytizing or social welfare. When attempts are made at creating new, or improving old, methods of proselytizing, so strong is the bias against the intermixing of money and religion, that such efforts, no matter how sincerely engaged in, are often seen as little more than thinly-veiled attempts at fundraising.

### *Law and the Temple: Temples as Corporations*<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand the legal status of Temple Buddhism in contemporary Japan, we need first to discuss the peculiar nature of temples as

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<sup>7</sup> The answer to this question is, like the answer to so many other legal questions, "It depends." If negligence and fault can be found then the temple can be held responsible.

<sup>8</sup> This section appeared previously as Covell 2000.

religious corporations. 'Corporations' refers to entities established under law to which rights and responsibilities are attributed.

All religious corporations must meet three requirements to be certified. They must promulgate religious teachings, perform rituals and observances, and educate and nurture adherents. Religious corporations are granted rights and responsibilities similar to those of individuals. However, such rights are limited to actions falling within the boundaries of the three requirements described above. Furthermore, each religious corporation is bound by its stated purpose, which must be made clear in its bylaws. Bylaws also serve as contracts either between a religious corporation and its constituent members (i.e., temple lay members) or with other religious corporations with which it has relations, such as the denomination in the case of local temples.

In addition to the three requirements, there are three aspects of the law that are often called the 'three pillars' of the Religious Corporations Law (*shūkyō hōjin hō* 宗教法人法). These are the certification system (*ninshō seido* 認証制度), public announcement system (*kōkoku seido* 公告制度), and the responsible officer position (*sekinin yakuin* 責任役員). The last of these is what concerns us most. This 'pillar' has had lasting impact on temple identity. The two main responsible officer positions are chief responsible officer (*daihyō yakuin* 代表役員) and responsible officer (*sekinin yakuin*). The law requires that religious corporations have a minimum of three responsible officers, one of whom is the chief responsible officer. Together they constitute the board of directors. The chief responsible officer represents and carries out the decisions of the board of directors. The officers are responsible for all nonreligious functions of the corporation. The roles of a responsible officer include following: determine budgets, purchase and sell properties, negotiate loans, establish and change bylaws, and enter into contracts. In the case of temple/corporations, the head priest often appoints the officers. Bylaws of temple/corporations regularly state that the chief responsible officer must be the head priest. This means that the religious head of the temple, the priest, is also the secular head of the temple. This dual role can lead to confusion and has been the source of numerous lawsuits that, in the end, have sought to clarify the distinction between religious and secular realms.

Though the temple today is popularly imagined as a place where rituals take place or as a tourist site, it must also be understood as a corporation. Denominations have sought to increase awareness of the temple's status as a religious corporation and thereby combat the privatization

of the temple, while also preventing misunderstandings between priests and temple lay members regarding proper legal management of the temple.

### *Taxation and Temples*

Popular opinion in Japan holds that temples are not taxed, and that priests, therefore, are able to accumulate wealth quickly. This, combined with movie and television images of priests driving expensive cars and drinking fine sake in exclusive geisha clubs, feeds a general image of priests as corrupt. However, temples are subject to taxes, as are priests. An examination of how temples are taxed brings to light Buddhist roles in debates over the relationship between state and religion, temple roles in local economies, popular stereotypes of corrupt priests, new ritual forms, and even issues regarding temple succession. Moreover, an examination of temples through the lens of the tax code reveals not only how the state, but also how Buddhists and Buddhist Studies scholars envision Temple Buddhism.

Temples registered as religious corporations, along with schools (educational corporations, *gakkō hōjin* 学校法人) and social welfare corporations (*shakai fukushi hōjin* 社会福祉法人), are treated as a form of public interest corporation (*kōeki hōjin* 公益法人). Specifically, they are given certain tax advantages because they are supposed to benefit society. These tax advantages include exemption from property tax and income taxes on both properties and activities related to the purpose of the organization, and a reduced tax rate on for-profit ventures. Defining what is, or is not, related to the stated purpose of a religious organization, however, is difficult. Doctrine and ritual, it is often assumed, are easily and correctly termed 'religious', or properly 'Buddhist', in nature. But, what about activities undertaken to support doctrinal studies or ritual practices?

Income derived from various activities has long been required by law to be used for either the temple, the denomination or organization to which it belongs, religious groups supported by the temple, or public welfare activities. In short, the law was written to forbid personal or other misuse of temple funding by the head priest or others. It was not easy to determine misuse, however, and it was not until the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 incident (Aum was found responsible for sarin gas attacks on Tokyo subways) that close scrutiny of the use of income earned by religious organizations became a major governmental concern.

Local as well as national lawmakers and bureaucrats, starving for new forms of revenue, have encouraged greater public scrutiny of religions, especially their tax-exempt status. In the early 1980s, the National Tax Agency (Kokuzeichō 国税庁) stepped up tax audits of religious organizations. Many of these revealed bookkeeping problems on the part of some priests. Such revelations only served to encourage the popular image of greedy priests. However, the majority of poorly kept books can more likely be explained by the lack of training in bookkeeping on the part of priests than by greed. Before the promulgation of the Religious Corporations Law, little consideration was either needed or given to accounting at temples by priests. For example, the practice of paying of priestly salaries is relatively new (postwar). Previously, there had been no need to separate a paid managerial role from a paid ritual role.

Most temple activities do not surrender readily to categorization as secular or sacred. For example, graveyards are often described as the lifeblood of Japanese Buddhism. So integral to temple ritual and financial life are funerals and graveyards, that Japanese Buddhism has earned the derogatory title 'funeral Buddhism' (*sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教). Legally speaking, however, only those graveyards which are run directly by the temple, and which are sectarian in nature, qualify for tax-exempt status. Non-denominational graveyards, a popular choice among temples looking to expand their economic base today, are taxable, because, although religious activities take place there, they are not tied directly to the sectarian character of the temple.

Many other activities designed to support a temple financially are seen as simply cultural or habitual activities and are not often considered 'religious' by scholars and others. For example, the purchase of protective charms and amulets, fortune lots, and the like by visitors to temples is considered by many merely a secular custom. George Tanabe and Ian Reader, however, forcefully argue in their work, *Practically Religious*, that such objects are not simply part of a secular cultural tradition, but are representative of Japanese this-worldly religious practices. The Japanese tax office agrees, though a different measure is used. Such objects are judged religious and the money paid a donation, because they are priced beyond a reasonable level. Therefore, the money used for their purchase is considered money 'thrown away', or a donation made without expectation of reasonable return.

The line between so-called 'real' Buddhist practice and secular or customary practice is further blurred when the tax office turns its attention to the priest. For example, most temples today are passed on from father to

son. Father thus becomes master, and son, disciple. It might be assumed that the son's tuition and other fees for attending a Buddhist college and majoring in Buddhism could be counted as temple expenses and not as part of the priest's taxable salary. According to the tax collector, however, any money taken from the temple for such purposes is considered taxable salary. However, expenses incurred after becoming a temple priest, such as costs incurred attending annual training courses, can be deducted from temple expenses and need not be considered as taxable income. This treatment of temple succession ignores the fact that in many Buddhist denominations in Japan today, much of the fundamental training for the priesthood occurs at Buddhist colleges.

The equation of temples, understood as corporations, with businesses is one subtle way in which the tax code serves to conflate images of temples with images of businesses. The Kyoto city tourism tax case serves as a window into such problems. The case demonstrates the extreme difficulty of any attempt to cordon off the so-called 'purely religious' from the so-called 'mundane' as an object of either taxation or study.

### *Taking on the Temples: Taxing the Religious*

In 1956 Kyoto officials sought to construct their city as the cultural tourism center of Japan. However, the city was in debt and was forced to hunt for new sources of income. Mayor Takayama proposed a Cultural Tourism Facilities Tax (*bunka kankō shisetsuzai* 文化観光施設税), which would tax visitors to popular tourist attractions (primarily temples). After one year of debate, the temples cooperated, and the tax went into effect. When it expired several years later, the mayor (still Takayama) sought its renewal under the new name 'Special Tax for Cultural Preservation' (*bunka hogo tokubetsuzai* 文化保護特別税). The temples reacted much more severely than before. To placate temple protests, the mayor limited the tax to five years and signed a promise that the city would never again levy such a tax.

Years after the second tax lapsed, a new mayor, Mayor Imagawa, proposed a similar tax in the early 1990s. Officials earmarked income generated from the tax for the preservation of cultural artifacts and preparations for the 1994 celebration of the 1200th anniversary of Kyoto's founding.

The new tax was called the 'Kyoto City Old Capital Support and Preservation Tax Regulation' (*Kyotoshi koto hozon kyōryokuzai jōrei* 京都市古都保存協力税条例). The regulation levied a tax on people who

entered temples that had visitors in excess of 20,000 people per year and that charged admission. The tax could not be levied on those entering temple grounds for 'religious' purposes, defined as attending services, chanting sutras, or making ritual offerings. As with the previous two tax measures, temples and shrines were made special tax collectors. The tax was added to the price of admission and collected at the time of the ticket sale.

The Kyoto Buddhist Association, an organization representing nine hundred and fifty temples, stood firmly against the new tax. Temple representatives argued against the tax claiming that it went against constitutional provisions for the freedom of religion. The freedom of religion argument was based on the premise that temples open their grounds to the public in order to spread their teachings. Temple representatives argued that

each and every blade of grass and tree on the temple grounds is there for the purpose of spreading the Buddhist teachings. Viewing these is a religious activity. To tax this activity would be to deny its religious nature. This is an encroachment on the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. (*Asahi Shinbun* 1986: 4)

This argument was not unique. Buddhist kindergartens, for example, maintain that creating a Buddhist atmosphere (temple buildings, statues, etc.) is a crucial part of Buddhist sentiment education (*Bukkyo jōsō kyōiku* 仏教情操教育).

Furthermore, it was argued that, although people went to temples for sightseeing, they also went for religious purposes, including obtaining 'peace of mind' (*anshin* 安心). Buddhist priests frequently mention obtaining peace of mind as the goal of those who visit temples. Tanabe and Reader show that, in the case of the purchase of an amulet or other device related to this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益), the actual goal of the supplicant is less peace of mind than the practical this-worldly benefit associated with the charm or amulet that is purchased (for example, traffic safety), though the activities are not mutually exclusive (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 17–21). However, in the case of visiting a temple to view the gardens or sacred objects on display, it can be argued that the goal is peace of mind, since there is no other practical benefit to be had. The importance of the search for peace of mind led temple representatives to claim that any attempt to distinguish between touristic and religious activity was impossible and intrusive.

Temple representatives also argued that, by forcing the temples to act as officers of the state in collecting taxes, the state-religion divide was



crossed. In response to the temples' stated reasons for protesting the tax, the city officials argued that the vast majority of people visit temples to see cultural artifacts, not to engage in religious activities. Those who might go for specific religious purposes were protected within the regulation and exempted from paying the tax. Moreover, city officials argued that temples charged entrance fees to visitors seeking out such 'non-religious' artifacts as gardens, tea houses, and the like. Because temples charged visitors to view what the city felt were the 'cultural' aspects and not necessarily the 'religious' aspects of their facilities, giving the temples the duty of tax collection would be no different from charging other organizations, such as art museums, with the same responsibility.

On January 4, 1985, the mayor announced that the regulation would go into effect in April 1985. On January 10, 1985, the Kyoto Buddhist Association announced that affected member temples would close to the public. The closure was timed to coincide with the spring tourist season, and its announcement led to panic among members of the Kyoto Tourism Association.

Soon after the tax went into effect, twelve of the designated temples closed their gates to the public. The temples reopened after one month, but closed their gates a second time for three months, beginning in December 1985. Later, for nearly nine months in 1986, six temples (Kinkakuji 金閣寺, Ginkakuji 銀閣寺, Kōryūji 広隆寺, Shōrenin 青蓮院, Rengeji 蓮華寺, Nison'in 二尊院) closed their gates to regular traffic.

Temple representatives hoped that city officials would soon cave in to the chilling effect temple closings would have on the economy. However, the battle dragged on for years. The economic effect was severe. Altogether, city businesses lost an estimated thirty to forty billion yen in revenues. The temples also suffered. Many of the temples that closed their gates relied almost exclusively on income derived from visitors. Ginkakuji, one of the most visited temples in Kyoto, lost virtually all of its income while closed, but was still left with annual operating expenses of nearly 100 million yen.

The affair suddenly came to a close in 1987 after a related scandal forced the mayor to accede to the temples demands.<sup>9</sup> The effects of this lengthy feud between the Kyoto city office and the temples of Kyoto went

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<sup>9</sup> Temple representatives played secretly taped conversations between Mayor Imagawa and temple representatives regarding the negotiations that had brought about a short-lived 1985 accord. On the tapes, the mayor revealed that he was striking the deal to get reelected, and not necessarily out of consideration for the citizens of Kyoto.

far beyond the economic damage wreaked upon local businesses and the ruined vacations of tourists. The long battle over taxes brought to the forefront questions over temple finance that had previously simmered below the surface.

Although the city emphasized that visiting temples was a secular activity and that temples were basically a tourist industry, the criticism of contemporary Buddhism by some, such as the following *Asahi Shinbun* 朝日新聞 editorial, reveal a deeper chord of discontent, namely anger over the commodification of Buddhism itself.<sup>10</sup>

Faith and prayer are supposed to be matters of the heart, not of money. Prices [charged by temples] for posthumous names vary by rank, and those who pray [at temples], likewise, believe that they can succeed in exams or secure safety by paying for votive tablets or protective charms. This is wrong. Religion should not be a business. (*Asahi Shinbun* 1985: 4)

Thus, a debate over taxes became a forum for the discussion of the fate of Temple Buddhism in contemporary Japan. Were Buddhist temples merely secularized tourist spots, or did they now reflect a new form of personalized religious practice based on commodity exchange (i.e., admission ticket price in exchange for personal ease of mind, or a fixed donation price for a protective charm good for one year)? Although temples have derived income from the sale of objects or the performance of rituals in exchange for donations throughout history, it is only in the postwar years, and especially from the 1970s, that we can speak of truly commodified practices. It is during this period that women's magazines began listing 'market prices' for services such as funerals. Other mass media forms also served to create a public awareness of 'prices' for various religious services. Moreover, it is during this period that Japan began its shift to a modern consumer society, with large marketing campaigns aimed at the massive Japanese middle class.

In a 1998 article, Shimazono Susumu challenged accepted scholarly opinion, which supported the view that commodified practices were best understood as somehow not 'religious'. Shimazono concluded that Japanese religion, including that of Buddhist temples, is best explained as a set of commodity exchanged-based practices (1998). In other words, while religion in Japan is still very much a lived affair its form has changed from devoting (consecrating) oneself to the Buddha to one-time exchanges.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the topic of commodification of religion in Japan see Reader and Tanabe 1998, and Shimazono 1998: 181–98.

Some argue then that the denominations of Temple Buddhism are faced with the difficult task of existing within the modern socio-economic system while maintaining the stance that they have somehow escaped what could be described as a 'commercialization of the soul'. I would agree, however, with Shimazono that this is a false choice. There is nothing corrupt about commodified practice; rather it simply contradicts certain traditional views of religious practice. The problem is not with the practices but with the way in which some view them.

This tension is seen in the view of temples as cultural artifacts in Kyoto and elsewhere. On the one hand, the city questioned the touristic nature of the temples. Temples were framed less as places where 'real' religion could be found, and more as museums home to collections of artifacts designated as 'cultural assets'. On the other hand, the temples countered that all cultural artifacts, and indeed "every blade of grass and tree on temple grounds," exist for the purpose of spreading the Buddhist faith. Nevertheless, the image of Kyoto's temples as museums of culture, not as sites of religious practice, remains strong. The Cultural Assets Preservation Law may contribute to this effect. The Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō 文化庁) is charged with implementing this law. Works designated as 'treasures' or 'assets' are ideologically removed from their local and religious settings and become assets of the 'nation', 'prefecture', or 'city'. They are in a sense made public property and their local/religious content is packaged as part of their standing as public, 'cultural' properties. The temples that house them thereby become museums of a shared public 'traditional' culture.

The image of temples as museums of traditional culture is also due partly to Buddhist priests themselves because many envision themselves as keepers of tradition, a role they see as an inseparable part of their religious role in society. Some of the most prominent Buddhist preachers today teach what might be termed the 'religion of traditional culture'. Such priests do not see themselves as museum operators, but advance the view that traditional Japanese Buddhist values are the key to Japan's future, and that maintaining temples, gardens, and other centers of the Japanese spiritual tradition is one of their most important duties.

The debates over Kyoto's tax also focused attention on the current social role of Buddhist temples. One argument raised against the temples centers on the nature of their tax-exempt status (*Gekkan jūshoku* 1982: 19). As noted, temples that register as religious corporations are granted certain tax advantages because their presence is assumed to benefit the public. The battle over taxes in Kyoto, during which the temples closed

their doors to the public, allowed critics to ask, “In what way do temples benefit the public?” This was part of an ongoing national debate over taxes and religion. A commentator on the Kyoto affair ventured the following:

As for the temples, I wonder if they realize how many citizens hold them in respect [for their role in caring for cultural treasures across history]. There are people who visit Kyoto. There are people who come for the temples. And, there are those who own shops to meet the needs of those who come. Shouldn't temples peacefully fulfill their duty as a part of the [social] structure that weaves people together? (*Asahi Shinbun* 1987: 5)

From these arguments we learn that the social role of the temple today is seen as providing ease of mind and as a community focal point—inseparably blending together religious, economic, and cultural aspects. When an imbalance between these parts occurs, as it did in the Kyoto tax affair, the whole is called into question. Contemporary social welfare activities of the denominations of Temple Buddhism are one response to the critique that temple Buddhism fails to benefit society in some tangible manner (see Covell 2005).

In response to criticism, some temples began to change the way in which visitors were approached for donations. Several temples eliminated entrance fees altogether. This not only addressed the tax issue, since no tax could be levied if they did not charge admission, but also answered those critics who, holding that religion and money should remain separated, argued that, if viewing temple grounds were really a religious practice, temples should not charge a fee. Other temples set out collection boxes, although minimal donations soon forced all but one to revert to charging fees. Some addressed critics further by making visitors undertake some kind of Buddhist practice, for example sutra copying, in exchange for admission. In this way, even internal critics of the temples, who had argued that the priests must meet donations of money by the faithful with donations of teaching Buddhist truths, were at least partially countered.

In the end, this case and the examination of temple economics demonstrate how temples have come to be viewed in contemporary Japan. The economic needs of temples have placed them in a difficult situation. On the one hand, they require funding in order to survive. On the other hand, income-earning ventures, even simply opening the temple for public viewing, are responsible for critiques that temples no longer act as ‘religious’ centers. Some priests of Temple Buddhism react by defending ‘traditional’ Japanese culture and a particular religious space associated with it. Temple gardens, temple architecture, and the like, these priests argue, are integral to the support of Japanese values and culture, which

they understand as being rooted in Buddhism. In addition to vigorous debate on this front other priests are engaged in research at Buddhist universities and denominational research centers to understand contemporary religious trends and public needs and find ways to meet them that are grounded in Buddhist ideals. Still others are involved in the creation of new ways of reaching out to the public such as some of those discussed above. This examination has also demonstrated that scholars of Japanese Buddhism must find ways to approach their topic of study that do not limit their understanding of Buddhism on the ground. Staid views of Buddhism based on doctrinal studies or the study of leading monks of the past have contributed to a failure to understand the economics of temple life and the impact law, taxes and finance have on how Buddhism is viewed and practiced.

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VOICES FOR THE DEAD: PRIESTLY INCANTATIONS  
AND GRAVE DISCUSSIONS

GEORGE J. TANABE JR.

*Introduction*

In this first decade of the twenty-first century, Japan is in the middle of an unprecedented death boom. Beginning around 1980, the death rate started to increase after a period of decline from 1945 to the late 1950s and a flattening out thereafter. From 689,000 deaths in 1979, the number rose to 896,000 in 1996, an increase of about twenty-three percent over seventeen years (Statistics Bureau 1997). The death boom is expected to continue until the year 2020, when it will peak at 1.6 million deaths for a 130 percent increase from 1979 (Matsunami 1996: 98). This annual number of deaths exceeds that of any other year in the twentieth century, except for 1945, when over 2 million Japanese died as a result of World War II and its consequences.

The funeral industry and the Buddhist establishment are well aware of these numbers, and are very active in meeting this growing need. A beehive of activity, funerals are swarming with new developments, and provide a multifaceted mirror reflecting social change. Like weddings, some aspects of funerals now tend toward elaborate productions: altar murals made of thousands of flowers; laser beams glowing through clouds of dry ice vapor; slide, audio and video shows of the life of the deceased; services held at hotels in special halls remodeled to expel incense smoke and to provide separate passageways to keep the newly wedded from running into mourners. No other area of the ritual life of Japan is the scene of so much movement, not to mention the scrutiny it attracts.

The media is paying particular attention to new forms of funerals and burial practices that depart from the traditional Buddhist patterns: internet *hakamairi* 墓参り (grave visitations); scattering of ashes (*sankotsu* 散骨, *shizensō* 自然葬); and nonreligious funerals (*mushūkyō sōshiki* 無宗教葬式) that may feature Bach instead of Buddhism, eulogies instead of incantations, and flower offerings instead of incense. Some scholars, like Suzuki Hikaru (1998), argue that the departure from Buddhist practices represents the death of ancestor veneration, and that household ancestors are being replaced by 'beloved antecedents'. Eulogies for the

death of the Buddhist funeral, however, are premature, and far from falling to the wayside, the Buddhist funeral will be riding the crest of the death boom. Nonreligious forms will certainly increase, but in this bull market of postmortem services, the major institutional players will realize huge gains that will greatly exceed the advances of the small investors.

The Buddhist funeral will make modifications to follow trends, but its appeal will remain rooted in a fundamental, seemingly nonnegotiable transaction of death: the deceased must be given identities, which require bodies to possess. The genius of the Buddhist funeral is that it treats a person's soul as that person's body. It guarantees that the soul will not be reincarnated in another body—that would be the dreaded transmigration discussed in other religions such as Hinduism—but that the soul will be born again in the same body. The tragedy of death is the loss of carnality; the comfort of the funeral is that it restores it through ritual conception. Re-incarnation is the restitution of carnality.

The carnal understanding of death was exemplified clearly by my mother, a faithful Jōdoshinshū believer, who nevertheless understood Buddhism as a religion of amulets and funerals. Uncaring or perhaps unaware of the official teaching within the denomination that prohibits the use of *omamori* お守り, my mother and all of her Jōdoshinshū friends always carried a number of amulets, which, in addition to the protection they provided, were emblems of their Buddhist identity. Even more central to her practice of Buddhism were the memorial rites for deceased family members: offerings at the household *butsudan* 仏壇 altar, temple services on anniversary death dates, and regular visits to the graves. As she aged into her late 70s, she became obsessed with saving enough money to erect a tombstone on the family grave plot so that her 'eternal home', as she called it, would be ready for her. When I suggested to her that she could spend her money in more pleasurable ways than investing in stone, she warily asked me what I would do in that case with her remains after she died. I replied that I would scatter her ashes in the ocean and return her to nature. She recoiled in horror and said, "But I can't swim!" Needless to say, she had her tombstone built. She had a watertight argument: If you cannot swim now, stay out of the water after you die.

### *Grave Discussions*

If souls could be left in their disembodied state, then discussions about their final domicile would be vastly simpler than they actually are. But families entomb persons, not pure souls, and the complexities of personal



relationships extend into the grave. Decisions about where and how to bury are based on continued relationships with a person, who happens to be dead, and often require the same kind of maneuvering needed to navigate the labyrinths of the living. Far from being liberated from entanglements with the world, the life of the dead is inextricably tied to ongoing relationships with their surviving families.

The existential dependence of the dead upon the living is defined clearly in cemetery contracts. As a piece of real estate, a grave is not owned by an individual, but is rented or leased from private companies, governments, or temples. Furthermore, the lessee is not the person entombed but a surviving successor (*atotsugi* 跡継ぎ, *keishōsha* 継承者), normally a family member, who is also defined contractually as the user (*riyōsha* 利用者). The deceased is a 'usee', an occupant whose privileges and identity are defined by his or her relationship to the user. In addition to paying the required fees, the user's main responsibility is to use the grave by performing memorial rites on a regular basis, for even if the fees are fully paid, the occupants can be evicted if visitations and rituals are not carried out for a certain number of years. Cemetery contracts define this period, which usually covers five or more years, and a continued lapse of graveside remembrances for that period transforms the deceased person into a dreaded *muen botoke* 無縁仏, a cadaver (referred to as a buddha) without relatives who care enough to visit its grave and thus maintain its right of occupancy. This is a matter of particular concern in large urban areas, where cemetery space is at a premium. In Somei Cemetery, a municipal facility in Tokyo, public awareness of the user's responsibility is not left to the fine print of contracts. Posted throughout the cemetery are signs that read:

Notice: Concerning Abandoned Graves [*muen bochi* 無縁墓地]

If the addresses of cemetery users are unknown for ten or more years and there are no relatives, then in accordance with the provisions established for Tokyo municipal cemeteries, their graves will be deemed abandoned [*muen*], the right to use it will be revoked, and [the remains will be exhumed and] reburied in a common grave site.

Temples also provide common graves (*gassō* 合葬) for the abandoned dead, and priests perform 'eternal offerings' (*eitai kuyō* 永代供養) for the now nameless lot, becoming in ritual effect their surrogate relatives. Pure souls do not require such elaborate considerations, but the bodily remains of dead persons need physical places in which to dwell in the company of family or, if forsaken, total strangers. Ashes of a faceless crowd, *muen botoke* lose their bodily integrities and thus their identities.

Blood is the lifeline of bodies, and blood lines are crucial in death. Inoue Haruyo, one of the most perceptive writers on the mixing of blood and marriage, reports the case of a certain Mr. Kobayashi, who died in his sixties, leaving his wife and mother to battle over his resting place. The couple had no children and the inheritance of his property was transacted smoothly. But the transmission of the family grave rights provoked a bitter fight between the two survivors. The mother felt that by blood she was more of a Kobayashi than the wife, who was a Kobayashi only by virtue of that legal arrangement called marriage. Even worse, the wife had not given birth to any children and she therefore had no biological relationship with anyone in the Kobayashi family. She was an outsider, and in that disadvantageous position she was forced to yield to her mother-in-law, who thereby became the legal user of the grave.

The dispute would have been settled at that point, except for the fact that the mother, who was well into her eighties, knew that what she had just prevented would come to pass upon her death, which could happen at anytime. She therefore arranged to have her husband's younger sister (the deceased Kobayashi's aunt), also in her sixties, take over the grave after her own death, and thus felt satisfied that she had protected the Kobayashi lineage, at least in mortuary terms based on blood. The younger sister was particularly appropriate because she, having never married, was still in name as well as blood a Kobayashi. But she, by the same token, had no children, and her death would bring about the end of the Kobayashi line. Her death (and here we assume the prior death of the mother) would also bring an end to the successors of the family grave, unless, of course, Kobayashi's wife would assume, as she legally could, that role. Kobayashi's wife, however, who had lost earlier to her mother-in-law, struck back by hiring a lawyer to sever her legal ties with the Kobayashi family, as is provided for widows by Article 728 of the national Civil Code. In removing herself as the last possible successor to care for the grave, she guaranteed that her husband, his mother, and his aunt would all become *muen botoke*, abandoned bodies that would in time be dug up and thrown in with the rest of the anonymous others, who, by losing their names, had lost their identities. The wife had the ultimate revenge, obliterating the Kobayashi family forever.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The lawyer, Tsunoda Yukiko, related this case to Inoue Haruyo, who, using the pseudonym Kobayashi for the family, published the account in Inoue 1990.

The rules governing successorship are fairly rigid, and represent a vestige from the old household (*ie* 家) system. Observers of contemporary Japan often account for certain social changes to a perceived shift from the extended family (three generations or more under the same roof), which they identify as the heart of the *ie* system, to the nuclear family (two generations or less). Some social scientists, however, point out that this is a misperception, one that is based on an unfounded conviction that before the mid-twentieth century most families were extended (Cho and Yada 1994a: 8).<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, most families were nuclear, especially in times when couples had many children. In a family of five children, for example, all of whom marry and have their own families, only one, usually the eldest son, can end up with the parents and thus have an extended family. The other four are nuclear. The contemporary shift is not in family structure, but in lines of authority: whereas in traditional families authority and therefore inheritance lines were patrilineal, modern families, imbued with a greater egalitarian sense, are much more flexible. Current laws governing the inheritance of property allow for a good deal of flexibility in the determination of heirs, but cemetery policies, especially those enforced by city governments, preserve old-fashioned values of *ie* authority.

Ōno Masako, a married woman who followed the usual practice of taking her husband's family name, leased a plot in the municipal cemetery in Hachiōji to bury the remains of her mother.<sup>3</sup> After erecting the headstone with her mother's married name carved on it, Masako was told by officials that she would have to remove her mother's last name, and that neither her mother's maiden nor married names could be used. The only wording allowed in her case was something generic, like 'rest' (*ikoi* 憩い). Masako had to pay a mason to remove the stone, grind her mother's name off, and inscribe the platitude. The rules of the cemetery, she was told, restrict the family name on the tombstone to that of the user (*riyōsha*), meaning Masako herself, not her mother, whose maiden and married names did not match Masako's married name and therefore could not be used. There is a reason for this otherwise arbitrary ruling: if the user has a different name from the buried 'usee', then she is, in terms of old *ie* values, an outsider with no family authority and is therefore unqualified to care for the grave (Inoue 1990: 75–76). While the Civil Code does not restrict

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<sup>2</sup> Kawabe Hiroshi and Shimizu Hiroaki (1994) also argue that there is no clear indication of a move away from three generations families to two generation or conjugal families.

<sup>3</sup> It is not clear why her mother needed her own grave instead of being buried in her husband's family grave.

tombstone names to that of successor users, most cemeteries have made it a policy to refuse to allow any person with a different surname into the grave (Yoshizumi 1995: 194). We have already seen that the right to occupy a grave depends upon the existence legitimate successors who care for the graves, and, in a similar pattern of dependency, Masako's mother's right to the inscription of her name depended on the marital status (and therefore name) of her successor. A grave is not one's own eternal home but is property borrowed from someone who holds the lease on it, and an occupant can be evicted or rendered nameless if the lease holder cannot fulfill the terms of the contract. While the cemetery did allow Masako's mother's name to be chiseled in small letters on the side or back of the tombstone, the size and placement of her name graphically emphasize the fact that her grave is a borrowed abode.

Blood relationships are important for defining postmortem lineage and identity, but they are not as advantageous for women as they are for men. In the definition of a married woman's identity, her maiden bloodline is subordinate to her husband's surname. No one's bloodline can be changed, but names can, and in taking on her husband's name, Masako was linguistically orphaned from her mother. It did not matter that Masako was her mother's flesh and blood; what mattered was her married name, which, for ritual purposes defined by cemetery policy, disqualified her from being her mother's successor since she could not meet the requirement that user and usee have the same name. Since only the user's name can be carved on the front of the stone, the loss of Masako's maiden name through marriage was also inflicted on her mother, who could not be identified by any of her names on the main face of the stone. The predicament arises from the tyranny of names, the grip of language, and the solution is likewise linguistic: write 'rest' and all is well. The more perfect solution, of course, would have been for Masako not to have changed her name in marriage.

While the actions of the living reach deep into the grave, the grave, or more accurately, expectations of what life in the grave will be like can also affect existential decisions. In what she calls a case of being saved from suicide by thoughts of life in the grave, Inoue tells of Hoshino Ikuko (pseudonym), who fell in love with and married a man from a country village in Tohoku, where marriage is expected to be between people from that locale. The wife was not only an outsider but had become pregnant before she was married, and thus had to endure the displeasure of her in-laws, who were prominent business people in the area. Everything she did was wrong in the eyes of the Hoshinos, who even summoned her parents to speak with her about correcting her bad attitude. Though she gave

birth to a child, her relationships did not improve and she endured long working hours and the greater burden of unrelenting disapproval. When her mother-in-law's long standing animosity flared out in the open, Ikuko despaired of any chance that life would get better. She took her child and walked to a grove of trees where she started to strangle herself. Suddenly realizing that she was ending her life, she thought of the family grave. If I die now, she reasoned, I will be buried in the family grave with all of them, and I will still be the odd person out, the only one not even able to speak the local dialect. The prospect of such eternal torture so repulsed her that she regained her resolve to go on living. Worse than being trapped with her in-laws in life was living with them forever in death (Inoue 1990: 28–31).

The horror of spending an eternity with their in-laws and their husbands is driving some women to purchase their own graves so that they can enjoy the independence afforded them by this form of postmortem divorce (ibid.: 14–21).<sup>4</sup> But family feuds are not the only reason why women are purchasing their individual graves. Some women, especially those who have been widowed for some time, enjoy their independence and wish to take it to their graves. Being abandoned (*muen*) is not always dreaded, and can be turned into a virtue, especially if it is possible to be free of successors but still have a name. Sakurai Seiko, a healthy seventy-seven year old woman who in 1998 still worked as a nurse, lost her husband when she was fairly young but still has her daughter. She works with her daughter and physician son-in-law in their Tokyo medical clinic, but Mrs. Sakurai still prefers to live by herself as she has for so long. Her parents and her husband are buried in the family temple grounds in Miyazaki, and she visits their graves once a year. She too could be buried there, but she does not want to add herself to the burden of the country relatives, and, besides, her sense of home is firmly rooted in Tokyo (*Asahi Shinbun* 1998).

Seeing a newspaper ad for Tōchōji's 東長寺 Grave Garden for individuals, she went with a friend, also a single woman, to visit the temple and was favorably impressed. A Sōtō Zen temple in the busy Yotsuya area in Tokyo, Tōchōji built its Grave Garden to serve the increasing number of people who by choice or circumstance find themselves without successor relations (*muen*). "Graves for the living," ran a 1996 headline for

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<sup>4</sup> The market for graves for women is also growing because of the increasing number of single women.

a *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞 story about Tōchōji. “Recruiting members who are not parishioners,” it continued (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1996). A year later it ran another story with a string of subtitles: “Eternal memorial services through a membership system; grave visitations by non-relatives; die in peace at any time as a single individual” (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1997). The *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 日本経済新聞 found the temple still newsworthy in 1998: “Individuals separated from families; graves for only oneself.” And most significantly: “The quiet revolution by women.”

Quiet revolution is also the term used by Iwao Sumiko (1993: 2) to describe the way in which Japanese women have been changing to gain “an astonishing degree of freedom and independence” in the postwar period. Sakurai Seiko decided to join this quiet revolution. Her ‘plot’ consists of a four inch square piece of granite hollowed out to hold a favorite memento and set in a larger square of sixty-four other similar blocks. Over twenty-five of these large squares are placed like islands in the large shallow pond called the Water Garden in front of the main hall. Sakurai’s ashes will be placed in the basement, but her name will be carved and preserved in granite surrounded by water.

When Sakurai told her daughter of her intent to acquire one of the small grave stones in the Water Garden, her daughter objected, saying that she would gladly continue to care for the family grave in Miyazaki, where her mother should be buried with her husband and parents. Sakurai, however, was determined to be independent, especially in death, and her daughter finally agreed to her mother’s plan. Sakurai’s friend also decided to buy her grave there, and they arranged for adjacent spaces, delighted that they will always be together. Totally relieved that she had arranged everything for her death—she even has her Buddhist posthumous name (*kaimyō* 戒名)—she continues with her work and life without having to worry about leaving the burden of final arrangements to her daughter and relatives in Miyazaki. Her daughter, knowing that she “thought about it and made her own decision,” is satisfied because her mother is getting what she wants (*Asahi Shinbun* 1998).

Born in 1921, Sakurai Seiko values her independence as much as the postwar generation does. She has excellent relationships with her family, and yet she finds the non-family grave appealing. She already has a family grave in which she can be interred, and has a daughter more than willing to carry on the rites of remembrance. But she still chose the Water Garden in which she will rest forever next to a friend instead of a relative. Most significantly, she is doing this without any displeasure with her family, a good reminder that not all of the new developments of individualized

burial practices reflect a breakdown of family relationships. In choosing the Water Garden, Sakurai frees herself and her family from their mortuary responsibilities to each other and thus voluntarily becomes *muen*, one without relatives to care for her grave.

In choosing her *muen* status at Tōchōji, Sakurai did not have to become a parishioner (*danka* 檀家), which is a prerequisite for burial at most temple cemeteries, but she did have to join the En no kai 縁の会, the Association of Relationships. With the increasing number of people who do not have successor relatives, the Association is finding a ready market for its services. The parishioners at Tōchōji numbered about 700 in late 1998, but the Association's membership was 2,200 and still growing.<sup>5</sup> The Association is expanding its capacity to accommodate more members. In its attractive brochure, the Association presents an astute analysis of the current social climate and the rationale for its program. In a section titled "Living as Individuals" it states:

Contemporary urban life places a premium on the awareness of ourselves as individuals, and in reality we live our lives according to our own beliefs without being encumbered by old styles and past customs. However, for some reason, the matter of graves is still tied into the traditional family system [*ieseido* 家制度]. The Grave Garden of the Association of Relationships does not consist of graves for generations of family, but is a grave site for individuals who can make choices for themselves according to their own ideas of life, lifestyles and death.

In another section of the brochure, the topic is "A Relationship of the Unrelated" (*muen no en* 無縁の縁):

The Grave Garden of the Association of Relationships is a communal grave of individuals. The Water Garden located in front of the main hall of this temple is the Grave Garden. Individual gravestones are gathered together and in their entirety make up a garden brimming with peace and quiet. Members of the Association of Relationships form new relations that transcend geographical and blood relationships, and together they pray for the repose of each other's soul. The term *muen*, being without relations, does not mean being sad and lonely, but indicates that connections with people can be expanded without limit. Furthermore, this temple will continue to perform services far into the future for the many souls resting in peace. (Tōchōji n.d.)

Recognizing that most people live as individuals who enjoy unprecedented personal freedom, the Association openly promotes the advantages

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Honma Ryūji, staff member of En no kai, 15 September 1998.

of being free from cemeteries ruled by an outdated system of family values. Rather than decry the dissolution of family ties as a social tragedy, the Association celebrates it as an opportunity for the creation of a new community that will replace the family in its postmortem responsibilities. *Muen*, without relations, is redefined as relations without restrictions. The brochure continues:

The old way of thinking according to the traditional family system has produced a difficult situation for supporting graves. There is an increasing need for graves for individuals, for those who do not want to be placed in their family graves but who wish to be buried with friends of their liking. In the Grave Garden of the Association of Relationships, people are interred with their own names inscribed with no connections to their families. This temple will for an eternity protect the graves and carry out memorial services at the lowest possible essential cost.... The Association of Relationships intends for like-minded members to form new relationships, and members will all pray for the repose of those who have preceded them in death. In this sense, the Grave Garden of the Association of Relationships is a cemetery for individuals, and at the same time it is the Grave Garden for all members. (Tôchōji n.d.)

Sakurai's desire for independence is not driven by self-centeredness but by what she believes is good for her daughter as well. Her desire not to bequeath a burden to surviving family members is widely shared by others (Inoue 1990: 44, 55–56). The high percentage of people who visit graves—indeed it is one of the most widely performed religious activity in Japan—indicates that most people do not resent bearing that responsibility themselves, but they do not wish to pass it on to others. Even when, as in Sakurai Seiko's case, they have children who would gladly continue graveside practices, they do not wish to burden them. And yet it is a burden willingly carried by many now, a burden that shows little sign of being rejected by the next generation. Why, then, is it deliberately being set aside so that no one need carry it, even if there are those who wish to? Why put an end to such a widely accepted practice?

The answer must first recognize that the question is a bit misleading. The data does not suggest that people like Sakurai Seiko want to put an end to postmortem care. What they want is either to shift the burden of that care from surviving family members to others such as temples, associations, and the cemeteries themselves; or to have each generation bear the burden themselves for themselves. The demand is being made by parents who wish to set their children free, and here, again, can be seen a deep concern for what is thought to be best for them. What is at work here is not selfish individualism or alienation from the family but a realistic



estimation of what is good for one's own children and the generations of the future. These are family values.

Breaking away from the patrilineal grip of *ie* values, Sakurai Seiko retains her modern individuality and her strong sense of family. By shifting the burden of postmortem responsibility to the Association of Relationships, Sakurai frees her family without obliterating her existence after death. Sakurai's voluntary *muen* status is critically different from that of the Kobayashi family in that she will preserve her identity through the retention of her name and ashes, which will not be mixed anonymously with others. In meeting Sakurai's modern needs, Tōchōji is adopting a new form to provide an age old service: keeping the body attached to the soul.

### *Incantations of the Priests*

Buddhist funeral rituals, which still control over 90 percent of the market,<sup>6</sup> are obsessed with the question of identity. These practices aim at nothing less than granting the deceased a bodily existence that will be immune to transmigration, which, as a form of bodily change, would radically transform if not destroy the person's identity. The easiest way to prevent change and its destruction of identity would be through the belief in an eternal soul, which, disembodied, would not be subject to physical alteration. While parts of the ritual attempt to do this, the funeral cannot make this its final objective, since pure souls are not persons, but generic transparencies having no personal identity. Bodies are needed to preserve persons, and the funeral ritual must therefore try to immunize the soul against change and decay without stripping it of the body. The classical aim of early Buddhism was to put an end to transmigration, which was, after all, an endless wandering from life to life, death to death, suffering to suffering; and the funeral ritual likewise affirms this lofty goal. This is a tall order: can the funeral liberate the soul but retain the body, enable rebirth but prevent transmigration?

The separation of the soul from the body, as best as that can be done or is desirable, is accomplished primarily through the use of the *ihai* 位牌, or mortuary tablet. The literal meaning of *ihai* is 'status tablet', as it indicates the status conferred on the dead by the priest, but its more generic

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<sup>6</sup> Masao Fujii, a leading specialist in the study of funerals in Japan, cites a 1981 survey showing that 93.8% of funerals were performed according to Buddhist rites (Fujii 1983: 39).

function is expressed in the term *reii* 霊位, or spirit tablet. Like the Confucian memorial tablet and even more like the Shintō tablet (*reiji* 霊璽), the *ihai* is the physical object in which the soul resides, much as the grave is the place where the remains of the body are put to rest. While it is not possible to maintain a strict separation between body and spirit, distinctions do exist, and in describing the Shintō ritual of transferring the spirit to the memorial tablet (*senreisai* 遷霊祭), Elizabeth Kenney (1996: 412–13) points out that through the ceremony, the “spirit is now considered to be separate from the body,” at the same time that body and spirit are still thought of as conjoined. In a similar fashion, the Tendai Buddhist *ihai* is animated with the spirit of the deceased in the ‘opening of the eyes’ ceremony (*ihai kaigen shiki* 位牌開眼式) (Tada 1995: 62) in the same way that the spirit of a Buddhist divinity is invested into an image, which otherwise is just a piece of stone, wood, metal or paper. The eye opening ceremony, however, plays a very minor role in the Tendai funeral, which is much more concerned with bodily matters.

The separation of the soul from the body is a weak suggestion compared to the emphasis placed on keeping the two together. The words placed on the *ihai* itself, as well as talk about it, treat it as the abode of a person, not of a pure soul. Ever vigilant against any form of animism and superstition, Jōdo Shinshū even rejects the suggestion of the soul’s abode by disallowing (officially) the use of *ihai*. Since the deceased becomes a buddha upon rebirth after death, “there is absolutely no such idea that the soul of the deceased is placed in an *ihai*, and for this reason in principle there are no *ihai* in Shinshū” (Okazaki 1995: 123). Instead of *ihai*, the family *kakochō* 過去帳 or registry of the deceased is used to record the names of the dead, who cannot wander off and get lost since they remain forever members of a family registered as such.

The posthumous names written on the *ihai* or *kakochō* record both the Buddhist identity of the dead, who are now ordained monks and nuns or formal disciples of the Buddha, and the secular identity of the person as indicated by age, gender, and personality. Both identities comprise the person’s status (*i*) on the tablet (*hai*), and no two are alike any more than any two persons are identical. The *kaimyō* 戒名, or precepts name, and the *hōmyō* 法名, or dharma name, which is used in Shinshū since it does not consider the funeral to be an ordination rite for conferring the precepts, both indicate characteristics specific to the person. High standing in the community or temple organization can be indicated by the *ingō* 院号, an honorific prefix of great value. The Buddhist name itself expresses the ascribed if not real moral qualities of the person, and a variety of suffixes

indicate gender and age categories (fetus, infant, child, adolescent, young adult, and adult). The determination of the posthumous name depends in large part on the negotiations between the family successors and the priests, not the least consideration of which is the price the family is willing to pay for a good name, and once again we see how the identity of the deceased is dependent on the inclinations of the living. Unlike Taiwanese Buddhists who, upon rebirth in the Pure Land, are not only all male but all become the same man,<sup>7</sup> those who have posthumous names in Japan have their own individual identities.

The other occasion in which the soul is seen vaguely apart from the body is at the moment of death or any time thereafter when the soul takes its leave from the body. While the soul may leave the body, it is never free from being thought of, remembered, understood, or memorialized apart from the body. Souls also need to be fed, and so much of the funeral and memorial services centers on offerings for the sustenance and pleasure of the body: food, drink, cigarettes (if the deceased was a smoker), and incense, which is the food that gives the soul its definition and identity.

In Sino-Japanese Buddhist terminology the soul is most commonly called *chūin* 中陰. *Chū* refers to intermediate or in-between, while *in* (also *on*) is one of the words used for the Sanskrit *skandha*, the five psycho-physical constituents of a person (form, feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness). Though it presumably loses its corporeality in the death event, the first *skandha*, which is form or body, still retains its physical essence and, like all living beings, the material soul must maintain its life by eating. What it eats is made clear through other terms used to define it: *jikikō genzen* 食香現前, that which appears by 'eating' incense; *jikikōshin* 食香身, the body that eats incense; and *kōon* 香陰, incense *skandha*. After death the soul wanders in limbo, and must be fed every seven days for a period of forty-nine days if it is to make safe passage to its final destination. The function of the memorial service performed every seven days after the funeral is to provide sustenance to the soul through offering incense and prayers. "We burn incense," says Fukunishi Kenchō, a Jōdoshū ritual specialist, "because they feed on incense" (1997: 146).

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Shih Tszu-kai, 15 October 1999. As a Buddhist nun from Taiwan, Shih Tszu-kai gave a free interpretation of sutra texts that speak of the power of chanting sutras and mantras to prevent rebirth as a woman in the pure land. She cited, for example, *Ta-ch'eng wu-liang-shou ching* 大乘無量壽經, T19: 84a; and *Ta-ch'eng sheng wu-liang-shou chüeh-ting kuang-ming wang ju-lai t'o-lo-ni ching* 大乘聖無量壽決定光明王如來陀羅尼經, T19: 86a.

Properly fed, the intermediate existence can be reborn. There are, however, a number of rebirth possibilities, and while all involve re-incarnation, not all rebirths are desirable. Specifically, rebirth through the process of transmigration leads to aimless wandering in body after body, life after life, death after death. "Born, reborn, reborn and reborn," wrote Kūkai, the ninth century founder of the Shingon sect, "whence they have come they do not know. Dying, dying, ever dying, they see not where it is they go" (Hakeda 1972: 158). Transmigration promises an unending series of lives, one causing the next, but each is never the same as the previous one. There is no retention of identity; no posthumous name can be given to a transmigrated soul, which, after all, might be a frog if not, for sure, a different person. Transmigration is a horrible fate, and the great service rendered by the Buddhist funeral is the giving of a guarantee that rebirth and enlightenment will take place instead of aimless wandering, and that the reborn and enlightened person will not lose his or her bodily and personal identity. The posthumous name is a personalized designation that assures the retention of an individualized identity. Men are still men, women are still women, the young are still young; rebirth takes place but transmigration has been stopped.

There is a price for this retention of the posthumous person. Retaining a body, the deceased must be committed to the responsible management of the body and attaining repose for it. What good is a body, especially in death, if it will continue to be a source of suffering? The ideal status for dealing with the fallibility of the body is that of a monk or nun, and by far the most significant function of Japanese Buddhist funerals is to ordain the dead. Posthumous ordination originated with the Ch'an sects in China, where it was limited to the funerals of monks and novices, and in adapting it to Japan, Zen monks applied it to lay persons as well (Nara 1995). Other sects adopted the practice, and the lay funeral thus features sutra chanting, shaving the head, conferring the precepts, granting a 'precepts name' (*kaimyō*), and washing the body (*yukan* 湯灌), which originally aimed at purification in preparation for administering the precepts (Gorai 1992: 995). In ordaining the dead, the Tendai funeral places a heavy emphasis on repentance and purification of the six faculties (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body, and mind). In the *Hokke senpō* 法華懺法 (Lotus Repentance) section of the funeral, the penitent (on whose behalf the priest speaks) enumerates the sins committed by the physical and mental faculties, and promises rectification. Concerning the eyes, for instance, the priest chants:

Wherever I have been born, life after life, ensnared by visible forms that corrupt my eyes, I have become a slave of love and obligation. . . . Now I recite the Mahāyāna sutras, and entrust myself to Fugen Bosatsu 普賢菩薩 and all the world-honored ones. I offer incense and flowers, and enumerate the transgressions of my eyes. Confessing and repenting, I hide nothing. I ask that the dharma waters of wisdom of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas wash away my sins. May this be the cause for the complete purification of all my serious sins rooted in sight, as well as those of all sentient beings in the dharma realm. Thus repenting, I revere the Three Treasures. (Hazama 1927: 731)

Repentance, purification, and rectification add up to the price for retaining the body and its troublesome faculties.

The Tendai funeral also employs the ritual magic of the *kōmyō shingon* 光明真言, the mantra of radiant light, to further the cause of moral purification. Popularized by Myōe Shōnin (1173–1232) and other medieval Shingon monks, the mantra is still widely chanted today with the belief that the power of that incantation can overcome the most serious of sins and can posthumously cleanse the souls of those no longer able to repent for themselves. A form of purification in absentia, it is performed by proxy, and is the magical guarantee that covers any failure of moral purification through personal repentance. There is another benefit of the *kōmyō shingon*, one that is not indicated in the mantra itself but is popularly understood, and that is its power to eradicate sins so that one can be reborn in the Pure Land.<sup>8</sup> As a mantra for rebirth, the *kōmyō shingon* is seen on equal terms with the *nembutsu* 念仏.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the Pure Land sects that regard rebirth in the Pure Land as a final destination, Tendai thinks of it as an intermediary stage. In its handbook for ordinary believers, the Tokyo [Tendai] Clerical Association for Education describes the Pure Land as a place of strict asceticism. Since it is impossible to attain enlightenment and become a buddha in this world, everyone should aspire to be reborn in the Pure Land where the conditions are perfect for monastic discipline (Tendaishū Tokyo Kyōku Fukyōshi Kai 1992: 20–21). Yamada Etai, the late Tendai Zasu 座主, the highest ranking Tendai priest, described the Pure Land as place of hard work:

Amida's paradise is where we can receive the direct teaching from a living buddha, but it is not a place where we can eat sweet dumplings if we just think about eating them, or hear music whenever we want to. Paradise

<sup>8</sup> For an explanation of the mantra, see Tanabe 1992: 137.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Himon'ya 1996: 235.

exists so that one can engage in religious practice as much as one wants to, and not for the sake of being comfortable [*anraku* 安楽]. (1990: 243–44)

*Anraku*, comfort and repose, is the term others use to describe the advantages of the Pure Land, but Yamada divests this Buddhist heaven of good food and music for pleasure, insisting that it is a serious place of spiritual discipline. The Tendai Pure Land is filled with shaven monks and nuns, each with their own names and identities to be sure, grinding away at the hard work of attaining enlightenment.

If this version of the Pure Land promises a life of intense asceticism, then even as ordained monks and nuns, the deceased cannot enjoy repose in death. In terms of native *tama* 魂 (spirit) belief, they are still *aramitama* 荒魂, the souls of the newly dead, unsettled and still in transit to the final stage of being *mitama* 御霊, the benign and contented souls of the ancestors. The *aramitama* are monks and nuns who continue to suffer their practices until they attain enlightenment. The funeral must therefore guarantee that final attainment by which there is not only the termination of transmigration but the successful end of the rigors of ascetic effort. In the Tendai ritual, this climax comes in the *indō* 引導 section in which the officiating priest ‘draws forth and leads’ (*indō*) the deceased into nirvana. The priest takes a symbolic pine torch (*taimatsu* 松明), writes a Sanskrit letter in the air with it, draws a circle around the letter, and reads the *ako* 下炬 message certifying that the deceased has become a buddha. *Ako* refers to the lighting of the cremation fire, which symbolically represents the change in status from the ordained deceased to an enlightened buddha. In part of the *ako* message, the priest declares that

the cremation fire is made neither by humans nor heavenly beings, but is the essence of the fire of wisdom originally possessed by sacred spirits. It is the [Sanskrit] letter *lan*, which is impervious to pollution. To enter into the meditative state of fire is to burn all delusions and manifest the three bodies with which one was originally endowed. The text says, “This mind is the Buddha.” (Nakayama and Tsuzuki 1958a: 57)

Free at last from pollution, the newly enlightened buddha successfully ends the work of asceticism.

The ceremony jumps easily from detailed descriptions of the hard work involved in becoming a buddha to the blessed state of being one. If the ordained dead do not achieve their final goal, they will remain in the Pure Land of strict asceticism, constant effort, and no rest. The soul would remain an *aramitama*, unsettled, still seeking, unfulfilled. There must be closure and it must come quickly, and the Buddhist rhetoric of immediacy,

to borrow a phrase from Bernard Faure (1991), serves this purpose perfectly. The *aramitama* monks and nuns are now *mitama* buddhas. The priests can deliver the certification (*ako tandoku* 下炬歎徳) provided in the Tendai ritual handbook:

We have transmitted the exquisite [Tendai] teaching of the sudden and perfect in accordance with the guidance and instruction of the Tathāgata. What the Tendai school teaches is that one can gain enlightenment without seeking enlightenment, and that one can be removed from passions without casting off passions. The place we arrive at is the Pure Land of paradise. The place we are proceeding to is the quiescent sphere of Nirvana. We respectfully request that the holy multitude in the ten directions and three worlds immediately clear away the clouds of delusion and quickly lead [*indō*] the soul of the deceased to the Pure Land of the Tathāgata. (Nakayama and Tsuzuki 1958b: 49–50)

The point of arrival is the Pure Land on the way to Nirvana, and the final request is for rebirth in the Pure Land. It is still intermediary, still short of the final goal of Nirvana, but the rhetoric of immediacy makes it possible to collapse becoming with being. Despite the injunction to repent, and repent again even in death, the arduous effort demanded of the dead is swept away in the dispensation of an enlightenment gained without being sought, of passions removed without being cast off. If becoming a buddha is possible theoretically in this life (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛), then it must be a certainty in the Pure Land, which, as Yamada Etai described it, is most conducive to that final end.

Tendai gained early acceptance as funeral Buddhism because it could so clearly use its rituals of realization to treat the dead as native *aramitama* and lead them to becoming enlightened *mitama*. Even today scholars/priests point out, some with dismay, that the Buddhist souls ordained in funerals are still native *tama*, which in the Shintō configuration, retain their identities and family ties. From the Sōtō Zen side, Sasaki Kōkan points out that though it is called a *hotoke* 仏 (buddha) in name, the soul is still a *tama*:

The *tama* of the dead, supposedly ordained and enlightened, still return to visit their families at set times of the year, and upon receiving ritual offerings from their families and Buddhist priests, return again to the other world. (1985: 19–20)

These are not the proper actions of ordained clergy, whose primary responsibility is to leave home (*shukke* 出家). Gorai Shigeru pursues the question further by arguing that ordination of the living makes sense, but the posthumous tonsure is a belated action that makes little sense unless

it is placed in the context of native ideas of rebirth (*umarekawari* 生まれ変わり), which are different from the Indian concept of the round of transmigration. In Japanese rebirth, the soul is purified of its defilements, is reborn a spirit (*tama*) that resembles a *kami* 神 (deity), and thus leaves the world of impurity. Using its own terminology, the Japanese Buddhist claim is nearly identical (Gorai 1992: 631) and can easily be superimposed: funeral rituals purify the deceased of its bodily defilements through ritual magic and repentance so that they can be reborn immediately as buddhas.

### Conclusion

In both the grave discussions and the incantations of the priests, we have listened to some of the voices for the dead. It is not difficult to construe these utterances as voices for the living, spoken to the dead only as a pretext. William LaFleur, for example, concurs with Robert Aitken's insistence that *mizuko kuyō* 水子供養 rites for aborted fetuses are

fundamentally *for the sake of the bereaved*. It deals with parental guilt. Mizuko rites are not to be thought of as effective in changing the *status of the dead*—such dead conceived of as still somehow alive and involved in an otherworldly journey about which we on this side can know nothing. (LaFleur 1992: 200; emphasis in original)

The *mizuko* rites, in their view, are voices for the living, not the dead. Since neither LaFleur nor Aitken give voice to what these rites say, it is difficult to confirm or deny the truth of their claims.

The voices we have listened to are clearly for the dead. They do not address a supposed guilt or even sorrow felt by the living. They are thought of as effective in changing the status of the dead, who are still spiritually alive and on a journey to a world about which we know a lot. When grave discussions are directed to the living, it is a pretext for speaking to the dead or the projected dead, which often includes oneself. If the dispute about who 'uses' the grave in the Kobayashi family were really about survivors struggling over control over the grave, the widow would have been victorious if she prevailed in wresting the successorship from her mother-in-law. But her ultimate victory did not emerge from changing her mother-in-law's mind but by changing her future status as deceased, stripping her and the rest of the family of their named ancestry, damning them to eternal anonymity.

In the other case discussed in this essay, Ōno Masako's troubles with the cemetery administration had no bearing on her own identity but on



that of her deceased mother, who was denied the privilege of resting in her own eternal home and had to settle for identification in small letters in the back of a tombstone lifelessly labeled 'rest'. In a less traditional vein, Sakurai Seiko defined her own postmortem identity apart from her family, volunteering to be *muen*. The temple Tōchōji's own voice is pitched to the living, of course, but those who respond positively are not attracted primarily by the Water Garden, but by the temple's description of what it means to be dead in the modern world: an individual free to form relations with anyone.

The incantations of the priests are direct speeches to the dead. It is a complex language, but even the mourners understand, if only vaguely, that the deceased is somehow becoming a buddha and has a new name, even as that person retains important attributes. If that is comforting it is because the priestly incantations assert that the soul departs from the body at the same time that the body does not depart from the soul. The great comfort of mortuary enlightenment is that it is the only possible repose for the body. Through the funeral ritual, the body is finally put to rest, a safe haven for the soul to live in. Memorial rites demand respectful treatment of the body/soul: feed it, remember its name, and keep it in the family. And if your mother does not have the physical ability to swim, then do not scatter her ashes in the ocean.

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## RE-IMAGINING BUDDHIST WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

NORIKO KAWAHASHI

Gender is without doubt one of the most critical issues of our time, but the field of religious studies has remained relatively unaffected by the so-called 'critical turn' of gender. And yet, as Ursula King has argued repeatedly, "it is no longer possible to accurately describe, analyze or explain any religion" without recourse to the category of gender (King and Beattie 2004: 8). King emphasizes, moreover, that gender is not a synonym for women. Rather, gender studies must concern men as well as women, for studying gender involves questions of "their respective identities, representations, individual subjectivities, as well as their mutually inter-related social worlds and the unequal power relations between them" (King 2005: 5:3296).

Japanese feminist and gender studies have typically shown little enthusiasm for religion as a topic of study. There is a tendency to see religion and feminism as mutually incompatible, and to view religious feminism as an oxymoron.<sup>1</sup> Many feminists consider religion to be a tool of patriarchy that is still being used to oppress and exclude women, and to deny them the opportunity to make their own decisions (Ōgoshi 1997). A similar resistance to gender concerns and feminism has been felt more strongly in religion than in other fields, not only in Japan but in Europe and America. As Darlene Juschka (2001: 1) summarized it, "[t]he study of religion has been one of those disciplines resistant to feminist thought." This tendency has been even stronger in Japan, where scholars of religion frequently take the religious life of women as a topic, but consider the introduction of feminism or gender concepts as insinuating a particular political design into research. Such concerns are widely viewed, therefore, as undesirable signs of a stance that lacks scholarly neutrality. In short, feminist studies have been viewed as existing in an awkward relationship with religious studies in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This has been taken up, for example, in the debate over whether Islamic feminism is possible (e.g., Moghadam 2002).

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Japanese religious studies have always silenced the woman's voice. In recent years, the International Institute for the Study of Religions (IISR) has been a force for the advancement of religious and women's studies, and it is continuing to address this issue deliberately and enthusiastically. Also see the *Journal of*

During a recent academic conference in fields related to religion and sociology, one panel was supposed to reexamine gender equality and the public character of Buddhist communities. A male anthropologist of religion who frequently appears in the mass media commented that feminism was something that only had to do with intelligent people, and so the ordinary women he knew found it too difficult to understand. He presented this comment as if he were close to socially disenfranchised women, and as if to state that the theories of feminism and gender are actually so abstruse that they are far removed from the realities of ordinary women, belonging rather to the province of researchers and other similarly privileged women. Beneath its superficial seeming of sympathy, however, the comment was a sophisticated maneuver in the service of an anti-feminist agenda.

Later, we learned that a number of male scholars of religion who were at the conference had expressed approval of the comment. Many of them are senior scholars of considerable achievement and position. They have apparently concluded that the feminist and gender perspectives are inconsequential for religious studies because the common person is unable to understand them. To the contrary, feminist thought can influence and even transform women's religious practice by making the religious institutions less patriarchal and thus giving women greater chances to participate in them. The religious world in Japan has begun to be informed by feminism in recent years, and movements to reform religious organizations are emerging. Here we find commonalities with the feminist theology movements in Europe and America, where feminism is used for critical leverage to reform male-dominated Judeo-Christian religions (e.g., Plaskow and Christ 1989). One purpose of this chapter is to introduce some of these movements by women in Japan who are engaging the task of reforming established religion by incorporating women's perspectives and experience.

### *Religion and Social Movements*

If feminist movements in the religious world have any feature that differentiates them from social movements in general, it is that they are

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*Japanese Religious Studies* special edition on "Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan" (Kawahashi and Kuroki 2003).

founded in faith and belief that there should be gender equality in religious practices and doctrines taught by the founders. This discussion, therefore, will examine feminist movements that seek to reconstruct religion from the perspective of gender equality. Religious movements of this kind can be viewed as social movements, in the broad sense. I will focus on Buddhism, in which I have been particularly involved both as a scholar and as an activist.

In the West, Buddhism has often been construed as socially disengaged in comparison with the wide variety of ways in which Christian churches have addressed social problems. Buddhists, however, have engaged in anti-war, liberation, and political movements, as well as social projects and volunteer activities. As a result, a new image of socially engaged Buddhists has begun to replace that earlier image (Mukhopadhyaya 2005). We can now see a Buddhism that is taking direct action to improve society. This reality does not fit within the constraints of the biased, largely Christian-centric notion that Buddhism holds to a principle of priestly renunciation of secular life (*shukke* 出家, also *shusseken* 出世間) and therefore cannot participate in society.

Religious feminist movements in Japanese Buddhism include some of the feminist theology that belongs in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Feminist theology of this variety is said to take two different stances. One is revolutionary and considers the tradition of gender discrimination to be so entrenched in the religious community that it withdraws from that community. The other is reformist and aims to restore the truths of equality and liberation to the religious community by transforming it. This distinction between the two stances is a matter of convenience, and does not imply that either one is more advanced than or superior to the other.

The revolutionary tendency in contemporary Buddhism is critical of the fact that there are gender-discriminatory streams in Buddhist traditions. This stance ultimately ends by rejecting Buddhism entirely as a religion that suppresses women (e.g., Ōgoshi 1997). The reformist approach, in contrast, seeks to reconstruct Buddhism in the interest of gender equality, and this movement will be the main focus here.

### *Women's Liberation Movement in Buddhism*

Accounts of Buddhism generally present it as egalitarian, and Buddhist communities have been viewed as conforming to that basic principle, at

least in outward appearance.<sup>3</sup> However, some people have begun to voice criticism of certain Buddhist views of salvation that are gender-discriminatory. Denunciations of gender inequality in Buddhist religious orders have occurred, as well as resistance to such inequality. For the first time, the issue of Buddhist orders that have been relegating certain people to positions of weakness and vulnerability has been laid bare both by scholarly works and by grass-roots movements. An awareness has emerged in society, and among women themselves, of the existence of women who had been marginalized and 'made invisible'. Here I would like to examine the circumstantial reality of movements that seek to uncover and correct such gender-discriminatory practices in Buddhism, and set them within the specific contexts of Japanese society today.

#### Jizoku 寺族 (*Priests' Wives*)

Virtually all of the existing Buddhist orders in Japan have marginalized women in terms of both institutions and teachings. This is apparent, for example, in the identity assigned to the spouses of male priests. These women are commonly referred to as 'temple wives' (*jizoku*, literally meaning 'of the temple group', one of many similarly elliptical terms used). In almost all of the orders, the wife is expected to bear and bring up the successor to the chief priest and serve as assistant to the chief priest in the temple's administration. Furthermore, it is implicitly assumed that only male priests can serve as instructors and that their wives can only be recipients of instruction. One of the core problems here is the fictitious principle of the priestly renunciation of secular life, which is a major factor obstructing equality for both sexes in Japanese Buddhism today (Kawahashi 2003).<sup>4</sup> Religious renunciates who hold strictly to the precepts do exist in present-day Buddhism, though they are extremely

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<sup>3</sup> Consider that most religious communities operate by a parliamentary system. A survey of religious communities today will show that no more than a handful of women are members of the councils that are the highest decision-making bodies of those communities. Recently there was a successful effort in the Ōtani 大谷 faction of the Shin school to have two female priests appointed to the council. That was in 2005. Under circumstances like these, the various religious communities are beginning to gradually take steps to amend their regulations affecting women members.

<sup>4</sup> An early study of priests' wives referred to this as 'fictitious celibacy' (Kawahashi 1995).

few (and mostly women!).<sup>5</sup> As is widely known, however, marriage has become the norm for male priests in every school of Buddhism in Japan. They have become laicized (*zaikeka* 在家化), much as in Shin Buddhism, where priests have been able to marry since the middle ages. The problem arises because the Buddhist orders have made no serious move to face this fact openly, but instead continue even today to maintain a stance of ostensible priestly renunciation of secular life. Prior to the Cabinet decree of 1872 that allowed male priests to eat meat and take wives, only the Jōdo Shin school of lay Buddhism institutionally permitted its priests to marry. The other schools did not officially recognize the wives of priests, though they may have tolerated them tacitly.

It should be clearly understood from the outset that this discussion is not intended to hold up any particular notion of an official 'wife's position' that temple women should seek to achieve, nor to suggest that they should rest content with a wife's conventional status. The experience of the Jōdo Shin school suggests that to do so would be unproductive. This school incorporated the spouse of the priest into the structure of its lay order, but that order still suffers from gender discrimination problems, as is evidenced by the existence of a women's coalition striving to achieve gender equality within the denomination.

Long observation of the relations between the men and women in temples who are thus bound by a fictitious principle of priestly renunciation has shown that the wives are almost invariably forced into insecure and unauthorized positions, and the way their roles are assigned is extremely one-sided. Most of the renunciate orders need to honestly face up to the existence of the women who are priests' wives and realize that the professed principle of renunciation has kept them from dealing in good faith with the realities of actual temple life, in which women play such crucial roles.

If the lay Buddhist notion of marriage is accorded overriding status so that the position of the priest's wife is privileged, this will set up a barrier that walls off the lay order wives from the Buddhist women of other schools and factions. Uncritical acceptance of the status of *bōmori* 坊守 (Jōdo Shin priest's wife) as a recognized wife also constitutes willful disregard of the various elements of discrimination encoded in that status. This is precisely why I stated earlier that criticism of the fictitious principle of

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<sup>5</sup> No definite data exist on the number of religious renunciates, in the strict sense, who are to be found in the various schools of Buddhism.

priestly renunciation does not imply an uncritical acceptance of the status of wife, nor a facile endorsement of marriage.

While the renunciate orders (such as the Sōtō, Rinzai, and Tendai schools) have refused to face the reality of priestly marriage, the Shin school, because it views priestly marriage as a matter of course, has conversely shown no inclination to pursue the subject as an issue of concern.<sup>6</sup> A way must be found, therefore, that allows the women who are priests' wives in the lay orders to live without being trapped or buried by fixed gender roles in the temples, where the wives are nearly obligated to assist the husbands and produce male heirs. The renunciate orders, for their part, should stop pretending that no women even exist in temples, and squarely face the fact that the *jizoku*—who are such an essential presence in temples today—are none other than the wives and administrative partners of the priests.

Efforts to recreate Buddhism are not seeking to protect temple women in order to insure the survival of their temples, or of an official wife's position, nor are they aiming to expand women's authority over temple management. If those were the objectives, then the efforts would never obtain endorsements from women outside the Buddhist orders, and they would certainly be seen as nothing more than activities for privileged women within a closed world. The goal of those efforts, however, is rooted in the Buddhist conception of the human being. Buddhism is originally supposed to have taught the equality and liberation of human beings—and one wonders how it could have changed to the extent that it can be termed a gender-discriminating religion. To overcome gender discrimination in Buddhism, relationships of control and submission need to be recognized openly and corrected. A broader issue of self-reform among male priests, administrators, and lay practitioners also needs attention.

### *Disassociation from the Public Commons*

Male priests have mostly responded to these women's voices by one-sidedly defining the female priest and *jizoku* (priest's wife) solely in their role of producing and rearing successors who will take over temple management from their fathers. Any rights or formal qualifications that the

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<sup>6</sup> Obata Bunshō explains that since priestly marriage (*saitai* 妻帯) was viewed as a self-evident tradition descending from Shinran, there is no "history of any serious doctrinal debate about the nature of the question of marriage in the Shin community" (1990: 103).



women have are therefore allowed them solely on the assumption that they act only in that role and no other.

Much attention has been paid recently to the term 'public commons' (*kōkyōsei* 公共性) in Japan, referring to the shared public forum in which everyone has an equal voice, where various different values coexist, and where multiplicity is valued (Saitō 2000). In Buddhism, however, women have often been unable to take part in debates on issues of gender discrimination inside and outside the community. These women's own experiences in dealing with an issue that was their own have been ignored. Rather than speaking in their own words, they have been represented by the words of certain male researchers and members of their religious communities who speak as their surrogates. In this regard, the Buddhist community of contemporary Japan has been conspicuously lacking in public commonality.

On the other hand, we sometimes hear people remark that the use of gender perspectives to legitimize criticism of a religious community strikes them as a kind of arrogance. Today the campaigns conducted by women are spreading, and some religious groups that declare at least an outward gender equality are starting to emerge. The kind of backlash against feminist perspectives we see in society at large is also apparent in the Buddhist community, where people who seek to maintain conventional gender relationships in the old style are also surfacing. Even more powerful counter-currents that also encompass issues of the emperor system are stirring in Japan's Shintō community, in particular.

We find cases in the Buddhist community, for instance, of male priests in various denominations denouncing a movement by women who seek gender equality, claiming the women lack religious belief. Such priests consider gender equality and spiritual faith to be essentially incompatible. According to them, the feminist movement in Buddhism is merely an attempt to grasp privileges, and the pursuit of equality between men and women is driven by personal selfishness. This kind of negative reaction in itself exposes a failure to understand that women's rights are not simply privileges but fundamental human rights. The fact is, however, that this backlash has also received support from certain women in the religious community who want to maintain the status quo. In some cases, these women themselves have even dismissed feminist criticism as the complaints of women who have no religious faith, and they have not welcomed the gender reform movement's challenges, which may well invite criticism by the male authority.

These are all maneuvers to turn religious faith into a private matter and thus remove it from topics that are susceptible to debate in the public

sphere. To these conservatives, even if a problem of the kind identified by the women's movement did exist, it could be reduced to a merely personal and individual issue that has nothing to do with social justice. Therefore religious faith can be used as a rationale for suppressing attempts to denounce discriminatory practices. Objections to inequality within the institution are reduced to nothing more than exceptional cases, and can consequently be eliminated from consideration. There is a growing tendency in many religious circles to handle such objections in this way.

### *The Challenge of Gender Equality*

The reformists' movement locates its foundation in part on a rereading of sacred scriptures. That is, the reformists do not blame the scriptures and seek to overthrow them as revolutionaries do. What they seek, rather, is to reread the scriptures from new perspectives in order to obtain a clearer understanding of their truth and use it as their fundamental principle of liberation.

This kind of movement appeared first in the Christian community in the 1970s, when its adherents questioned the treatment of the Bible as absolute scripture, as well as biblical scholarship and interpretation that supported this position. Reformists wanted to reexamine the issues of who was reading the Bible, how it was being read, and the position from which it was being read.

In the early 1990s, a movement by women for institutional reform of the Buddhist orders also began to emerge in the Buddhist community. They engaged in rereadings of doctrine. In the late 1990s, the Tōkai-Kantō Network for Women and Buddhism was organized (Josei to Bukkyō Tōkai-Kantō Nettowāku 1999, 2004). A diverse group of people are committed to this project, including wives of male priests, female priests (nuns), women who are a combination of both, and women who do not belong to any particular Buddhist order. These women are participating for a variety of reasons, but what they have in common is that they have chosen, of their own accord, to live in engagement with Buddhism or Buddhist temples. These women have a commitment beyond the boundaries of the various denominations. Their project, in brief, is to enlarge women's voices in the Buddhist community by a variety of means, including autonomously organized workshops, publication of workshop findings, and formation of networks across sectarian boundaries for information exchange, and, by means of women's participation, to transform present-day Buddhism

to provide equality for both sexes. The project also envisions a new Buddhism that empowers present-day lay women. This involves reinterpretation of conventional, male-centered Buddhist history and doctrine in light of women's own experiences. In this sense, the goal of the project extends well beyond mere criticism of Buddhism.<sup>7</sup>

The dialogue among women across sectarian boundaries has much in common with the ecumenical cooperation by Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish women in Europe and America to overcome the traditional gender discrimination in Judaism and Christianity. Dialogue extending beyond schools and sects has brought women to understand that their individual experiences of gender discrimination were culturally and historically structured. They have come to realize that the crucial move for resolution of these problems is, above all, for women to unite in voicing their protests. Their network also functions as a support group for women who have begun to speak out within their communities, to help keep them from becoming isolated. The recognition by Buddhist women that they have issues in common has expanded the network.

The discriminatory view of women in Buddhism, as well as the gender-discriminatory nature of this religion, are historical facts that cannot be denied. Kawanami Hiroko, for instance, observing the images of women that appear in Buddhist scriptures, finds that Maya, mother of Śākyamuni Buddha, was venerated like the Holy Mother in Christianity as a symbol of "the mother's deep compassion and immaculate virginity." By contrast, she finds that the maidens sent by the Demon King Mara to tempt Śākyamuni are embodiments of intense sensuality and attachment that delude the human mind (Kawanami 2007: 25–26). Women, situated between these polarized female images, increasingly came to be seen as temptresses who lead men into degradation. It is equally a historical fact, however, that Buddhism also included a denial of gender discrimination and an impulse toward salvation for women. We must ask, then, what Śākyamuni Buddha's view of women was, and how it has been conveyed. We will have to reconsider these questions from a variety of perspectives to avoid both simplistic criticism and simplistic defense of Buddhism.

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<sup>7</sup> *Bukkyō to jendā—onna tachi no nyoze gamon* 仏教とジェンダー女たちの如是我聞, published by Toki Shobo in 1999, was the first result of several years' activity by the Josei to Bukkyō Tōkai-Kantō Nettowāku, with which I am involved. The title cites "thus have I heard" (*nyoze gamon* 如是我聞), which is an opening phrase in Buddhist sutras, to make the point that "this is how we have heard and understood the teachings of Buddhism as women."

The feminist viewpoints are, as indicated above, extremely diverse. The criticisms of them, however, tend to be rigid and simplistic, so that the trajectory from criticism to backlash has in fact become very markedly visible. Ueki Masatoshi (2004) has argued that feminists' denunciations lump together the differences in various Buddhist traditions, and he has developed a counter-argument that he claims is derived from research in the original texts. Ueki's study rejects the women's movement itself. His main thrust, which is to rebut the 'unjust' criticism of Buddhism levied by feminism, appears to have been received favorably not only in Buddhist circles but also by the mass media at large. While Ueki emphasizes the diversity of Buddhist tradition on the one hand, on the other he totally ignores the diversity of feminism. Feminism as he defines it, therefore, is limited to "the movement that attacks [Buddhism] as the product of a patriarchal system." This means that the reformist position that aims to reconstruct Buddhism by means of feminism falls outside the scope of Ueki's approach. His claim that Buddhism includes egalitarian thought, however, actually constitutes a valid critique of gender discrimination in the Buddhist orders today, and this claim should be understood in itself as providing a rationale for seeking gender equality. By rejecting feminist perspectives, therefore, Ueki actually ends up forestalling the reform of contemporary Buddhism. This kind of self-contradiction characterizes Ueki's approach.

Sasaki Shizuka takes the contrasting position of arguing that the early Buddhist order had a mixture of views about women. According to this approach, it is one-sided and biased to focus only on gender discrimination and conclude that Buddhism is a religion of discrimination, and just as one-sided and biased to focus only on the egalitarianism of liberation and conclude that Buddhism treats women equally. In that light, to claim that the possibility of spiritual realization was open to women in Buddhism, and that they were not excluded from salvation, cannot justify the historical reality of female priests who were discriminated against in the Buddhist orders (Sasaki 1999). The reasonable viewpoint taken by Sasaki also overlaps with the understanding expressed by women in the Buddhist community.

### *Movement and Researcher Perspectives*

Up to this point we have been looking at feminist movements in religion. Now I would like to consider what it might mean for researchers to write

about such a movement. Let us say, for instance, that certain scholars concentrate on a particular religious group, and that group as a result becomes more widely known. In some such cases, the people within that religious group might feel that the leaders of the group are actually greedy materialists who are using their newfound celebrity to bolster their autocratic behavior. If scholarly research on a religious group had the result of aggravating authoritarian behavior within the group in that way, then the researcher involved could hardly excuse it with claims that "I'm just writing about the religious group, and I'm not responsible for improving its internal situation." In actuality, the researcher is obtaining the benefit of writing about the religious group, while the leader of that group gains additional power from being written about. The researcher and the leader are therefore complicit in wrongdoing, and their positions are ethically dubious.

When researchers who enjoy a position of advantage study people who are in positions of vulnerability, the disparity in positions can raise ethical and political problems. These problems can be further complicated when the object of research is a movement conducted by women. Women researchers who are studying women involved in a movement can identify too closely with their research objects and assume an excessive intimacy with them because they are of the same gender. Such a naïve attitude, however, tends to obscure problems that arise in the course of research, such as interference or exploitation by the outside observer. It can also obscure the problems of inequality that result from a disparity in position. Solidarity among women does not in itself guarantee the propriety of a study or the accuracy of research. In other words, a woman may capitalize on the fact of common gender in order to conduct her research on other women. When she carries out her research without realizing that she is exploiting those women, then she is actually committing a double breach of faith (Stacey 1988). Researchers, therefore, should take sufficient care to be aware of conflicts and contradictions that arise from sharing and from disparity between the movement and the research, between the side conducting the study and the side being studied, and between women. Working from that awareness, they can then channel it toward a better understanding and a sense of solidarity with others.

Increasing attention has lately been given to efforts, made in the name of a socially engaged Buddhism, to revitalize Buddhist temple institutions by holding special events that attract young people. One wonders, however, whether the resulting institutions should really be called new temples or temples that are open to new possibilities. These efforts generally

proclaim the aim of regenerating Buddhism, but they show virtually no traces of a woman's perspective. The analysis of this phenomenon by male researchers has also been very weak in terms of gender perspectives. Quite simply, these programs are headed by male priests, and they do not allow for active involvement by women. Even in some temples where the wives seem to participate in innovative programs, it is often the case that the husbands' authority and decision-making power as the head priests outweigh the wives' initiative and autonomy to take part in those activities. The women who are involved do not participate as actors with their own volition in the matter so much as they take part in secondary roles that rarely extend beyond providing support. This type of situation is unfortunately not regarded as problematic.

#### *A Network of Buddhist Feminist Movements*

The network described above as forming among feminist movements in the Buddhist community emerged when women who had until then been acting as scattered, isolated points joined together to form connected networks through which they could speak out and take action together. These women have thus found their experiences intersecting and overlapping. They also differ from one to the other, and are all, in their own ways, engaging the inbuilt discriminatory structure of contemporary Buddhism from their various perspectives. The richly textured activities of the women who take part in this network have not made them objects of attention from the mass media in the way some male priests who proclaim the rebirth of Buddhism at certain temples have become conspicuous objects of attention.

It is definitely not the case, however, that the movement these women are engaged in constitutes some kind of asocial, apolitical escape from reality. As Ursula King has said, "the spiritual is personal and political." She emphasizes that spiritual concerns generate political action and a communal ethos (King 1993). The women of Buddhism are also taking part in society through a number of different activities, including shelter programs for victims of sexual violence, assistance programs for former Hansen's disease patients, study groups in problems of social discrimination, environmental protection in regional communities, support programs for local women legislators, volunteer programs to improve the educational environment of Asian children, and programs to support human rights in Burma (Myanmar).

The repercussions ripple outward still farther when women write down their own experiences and disseminate their writings. One woman explained: "Writing made me a stronger presence in the temple." For the movement and for the people associated with it, writing becomes a great source of strength when their own words find a receptive audience and when they are able to know themselves as presences that cannot be ignored or denied. Another woman became involved with a volunteer program for Asian children that was promoted by the Buddhist community, and as she said, "I am with a small temple, and being in the temple makes it possible for me to motivate the people around me and establish connections with people out in the larger world." She tells us that the experience of volunteer activity connected her with something larger than herself alone, and describes her great joy in undergoing the resulting transformation.

Neither is it the case that a women's movement of this kind ends when the individual women involved are empowered and strengthened, and gain the respect of others. In being empowered, the individual people concerned form ties between each other and this further strengthens the organization of the movement itself. This is of great importance. Movements of this kind originated when women with a diversity of perspectives began to resist the way they were being defined one-sidedly by men who would relegate them to anonymous membership in a homogeneous entity. These movements therefore do not aim to achieve goals that are uniform or that could be formulated in a standard form such as might be found in an organizational manual. In other words, these are women who, from their diversity of perspectives, have made a commitment to the movement for gender equality in Buddhism. Such women live in the real, specific temples that are the locus of what they do, and they are working from a critical awareness that has emerged out of their activities in their everyday lives.

Male priests as well as researchers, both male and female, who occupy positions of dominance or advantage should not ignore the diversity and the independent subjecthood of these women, nor should they impose a unitary view of the principle of liberation, or their own vision of the women's movement in Buddhism. For them to do so is to utterly reverse the reality and do the opposite of what they should be doing.

Where, then, is the teaching in Buddhism to be found that promises to guide women to liberation and open to them the expanse of a new horizon? Śākyamuni Buddha pointed directly to a way by which human beings would acknowledge one another as equals. Today's women can take strength from the truth that Śākyamuni Buddha did not discriminate

among human beings by their birth. Sexual and racial prejudice, based on gender, ethnicity, and so on, strip individuals of their dignity and rights. Śākyamuni Buddha, however, explains in the clearest possible terms that such prejudices have no real foundation. Śākyamuni's teaching in the *Sutta Nipata*, one of the earliest texts of Buddhism, to "ask not their birth, but their action," empowers today's women in the sense that these words provide them with powerful support as well as the driving force to create a gender-equal society. When women reevaluate Buddhism from their own perspectives, this teaching becomes a support and a source of energy in their quest to create a society of equality and coexistence.

Another crucial point, in addition to this teaching, is that the essence of Buddhism (if we consider it to have any 'essence' at all), is the truth that all things exist in relationship and are undergoing ceaseless change. Śākyamuni Buddha cautioned against taking any fixed view of things and events. The Buddhist negation of essentialism points to the possibility of breaking down the assumption that gender differences between men and women are immutable and universal. Seen in this light, the struggles of Buddhist women to improve conditions of gender discrimination from their own situation within their religious traditions are doing more than just unsettling patriarchal religious authority. We might also see them as relativizing secular feminists' accounts of women's liberation.

Unfortunately, the efforts by women in Japan today to remake Buddhism from a new feminist perspective are little if at all known in Europe and America. A growing number of women in recent years, largely in America, have looked to Buddhism for a spirituality to replace Judaism and Christianity. Some of them have given up on Asian Buddhism, finding it spoiled by gender discrimination, and they have made the colonialist maneuver of proclaiming Western society to be the driving force for a new Buddhism.

Rita Gross, a central figure in this project, initially stressed the superiority of Western-style feminism and cast a jaundiced eye on the Buddhist women of Asia. Gross (1993) claimed that Asian women do not understand feminism and have no means by which to extricate Buddhism from indigenous patriarchies, so it is up to Western women to create a Buddhism that is beyond patriarchy. Recently, the non-Western feminist scholar of religion Kwok Pui-lan wrote this devastating encapsulation of Gross: "Gross's discussion completely overlooks the feminist movements that are developing in many parts of Asia, and does not envisage that Asian Buddhist women can be change agents within Buddhism" (Donaldson and Kwok 2002: 28). In order to overcome negative views like Gross's, as well



as for other good reasons, it is clear in any event that the Buddhist community in Japan must undertake to reform its present condition. What I hope we will see, therefore, is a continuing accumulation of research that, while based on thoroughgoing fieldwork, also deals at the same time both with movements by women in religion to reform religious communities and with the influences on Japanese society from religions that have been changed by feminism.

On these matters, my stance is consonant with the position of those feminist scholars of religion who are of non-Western ethnic and racial backgrounds and who have been claiming a presence in the religious communities of Europe and America in recent years (e.g., Donaldson and Kwok 2002). It has already been observed that religious studies is largely innocent of any critical examination of the 'Eurocentric mindset' and unaware of its habit of reducing other religious traditions to fit into Western categories (Joy 2001: 177). The rise of non-Western feminism in recent years shows that we now must think in terms of plural feminisms. This represents a challenge to the understanding in much of the research carried out up to this point, in Japan as well as in Europe and America, of non-Western women's religious experience as no more than a casualty of patriarchy, or as a strategy of the weak. That is to say, researchers of Japanese women and religions will be called on to be reflexively aware and critical of whether their own interpretations are imposing a Western—or some other—agenda on the subject. At the same time that the situatedness of Japanese women is taken into account, the situatedness of European and American researchers must also be taken into account.

The problem of gender is not an issue that only involves women. The point is not to idealize the temples of a family-oriented Buddhism that have married couples and children. It is also necessary to explore how temples can avoid estranging unmarried people and people without heirs. It is the community that does not exclude its minorities, the assembly of clerics and lay congregations in which diversity is mutually acknowledged, that is truly in a position to impart the message of gender equality. The scholarly study of Buddhism in Japan must not disregard or devalue the critical awareness of issues from gender perspectives, but must share recognition of its importance among men and women scholars alike. The problems of patriarchal and hierarchical systems such as those I have identified here in Japanese Buddhism obstruct the understanding of Buddhism both inside and outside Japan. It is to be hoped that many scholars will pursue both theoretical refinement and finely-textured description of

Buddhist practice in daily life, and that the value of research in Buddhism from gender perspectives will come to be widely recognized.

(Translated by Richard Peterson)

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PART III

RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO SOCIAL CHANGE



## THE POSTWAR CONSTITUTION AND RELIGION

URS MATTHIAS ZACHMANN

Many constitutions are normative reactions to historical experience. Long abuses of rights and powers in a previous period often prompt the founding fathers of a new constitution to compensate for these abuses with even stricter legal safeguards and prevent their being ever repeated again. Nowhere is this situation more apparent than in the Japanese postwar constitution of 1946. Its provisions for the relation between the state and religion are a direct response to the role Shintō played for the previous government. Although freedom of religion was guaranteed by the Meiji Constitution, there were severe limitations, the most oppressive of which was not even mentioned explicitly in the Constitution. State Shintō, or the close identification of Shintō with the emperor cult, was considered not a religion but a state ideology. It was therefore exempt from the rules of religious freedom and forced upon the imperial subjects of prewar Japan. The postwar constitution reacted to this experience by not only guaranteeing the freedom of religion without explicit limitations (although, of course, there are intrinsic limitations by necessity), but also by installing a principle of the separation of state and religion which in its wording is much stricter than in most other constitutions of the world. In practice, as I will discuss in this chapter, the interpretation of this principle is contested, with a more lenient Supreme Court often overturning decisions made by lower courts as well as rejecting the advice of constitutional legal scholars.

The following discussion surveys current interpretations of the role of religion in Japanese constitutional law. The central norm for this role is Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution:

Article 20. Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority.

2. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious acts, celebration, rite or practice.

3. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.

My analysis adopts the traditional division in legal doctrine and examines the role of religion in two major aspects: first, the individual's freedom of religion, including the freedom of religious association and the status of religious organizations (paragraph 1, section 1, and paragraph 2); and second, the principle of the separation of the state and religion (paragraph 1, section 2, and paragraph 3). The object of this analysis is not only to give an overview of the theoretical role religion plays in the constitutional fabric, but also to demonstrate how this role is conditioned by history and enacted in social reality.

### *The Meaning of Religion in Japanese Constitutional Law*

If historical experience lies at the very core of Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution, it should be added that it was the *American* occupational perspective which dominated the drafting process.<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) and his advisors were convinced that State Shintō was the prime source for Japanese militarism and almost immediately undertook steps towards the disestablishment of Shintō and the protection of individual religious freedom. The so-called Shintō Directive (*Shintō shirei* 神道指令) of December 1945 which ordered the separation of religion from the state and the creation of a 'Religious Division' within the General Headquarters (GHQ) were measures to this effect.

The most enduring among these efforts was arguably the drafting of Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution. As is well known, although the Constitution was formally adopted by the Japanese Parliament, it was largely written by the American occupational forces. Thus, Article 20 as it stands today was formulated by the GHQ Committee on Civil Rights (as a sub-committee for the drafting of the constitution). The original draft was much longer and expansive in its condemnation of the political abuse of spiritual power by functionaries and religious bodies (O'Brien and Ohkoshi 1996: 55). However, due to concerns of practicality and the rule of law, the revised version was much briefer and more precise in its wording. It was adopted into the final draft and became Article 20 of the current Constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> On the drafting process of Article 20 in more detail and with further references, see O'Brien and Ohkoshi 1996: 51–61.

Despite the fact that the wording of Article 20 originated with the American occupational forces, it was always assumed that “it was the function of the Japanese people themselves... to implement and interpret the basic principles of religious freedom and separation of ‘church’ and state in a manner suitable to themselves alone.”<sup>2</sup> This “the Japanese people” or, more precisely, Japanese constitutional lawyers certainly did, as the following discussion will show. Despite or because of its brevity, Article 20 left ample room for interpretation, beginning with the meaning of the term ‘religion’ as the specific basis of individual freedom and institutional guarantees.

Defining the contents and limits of ‘religion’ (*shūkyō* 宗教) is not an easy matter, even less so under the constraints of such a terse text as the constitution.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese Constitution therefore does not attempt to give an explicit definition of its own (nor does the Religious Juridical Persons Law, *Shūkyō hōjinhō* 宗教法人法) but rather leaves this task to the judiciary and legal scholars.<sup>4</sup> Legal interpretations of ‘religion’ draw on the findings of religious studies but need not be identical with these views. Some Japanese jurists assert the independence of a legal definition in constitutional law, arguing that the special religious situation of Japan is different from the monotheistic tradition of Europe, thus implying a certain Euro-centrist bias in religious studies and European constitutional law (Ashibe 1998: 127–28; see also Inoue, this volume). However, more technically speaking, the independence is necessitated by the specific function which the term ‘religion’ fulfills within the rationale of Article 20. This rationale is twofold, namely to guarantee individual religious freedom and to uphold the separation of the state and religion. In order to ensure maximum protection of individual religious freedom, constitutional lawyers unanimously advocate as wide a definition as possible, so as to include as many forms of religion as feasible, including not only major traditional religions but also minor and atypical religions as well. However, there is a certain controversy whether this inclusive approach applies to the second objective, the separation of state and religion (Ashibe 1998: 131; Tsuchiya 2008: 140, 143–44).

As a broad definition for ‘religion’, the following seems to be the most widely accepted among practitioners and scholars alike:

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<sup>2</sup> William Woodard, as cited in O’Brien and Ohkoshi 1996: 57–58.

<sup>3</sup> See the editors’ introduction to this volume.

<sup>4</sup> On the legal interpretation of ‘religion’, see Tsuchiya 2008: 140–44; Shibutani 2007: 377–78; Ashibe 1998: 127–33; 2002: 145.

Religion in the sense of the (Japanese) Constitution is “a feeling and a behavior which places its faith in the existence of a supernatural, superhuman entity (i.e. the absolute, the creator, the highest being, especially God, Buddha, spirits, etc.) and worships it.” It comprises all kinds of religions, whether it is an individualist religion, a collectivist religion, a natural religion or a religion founded by a certain person. Therefore, it should not be understood in a limited way, as for example merely in the sense of an individualist religion, or as a religion which has a specific founder, teaching, or scriptures and which, moreover, pursues the goal of spreading its teachings and cultivating a community of believers.<sup>5</sup>

Although not mentioned by name, it is clear enough that the most sensitive issue here is Shrine Shintō. The judges who formulated the definition were intent to include this kind of worship into the regulatory scope of Article 20:

Even if Shrine Shintō is a religion centered on rites and has the characteristics of a natural religion or folk religion, since the shrine deities are the object of individual worship, it is clear that it is not only a religion in religious studies but also according to our national law. People worship the shrines and go there to offer prayers not with respect to the shrine buildings or the priests but because they believe in and worship the divine spirits, i.e. a superhuman existence. As we have said above, all relations between humans and superhuman beings are essentially religious. The fact that Shrine Shintō has no founder, teaching or scripture and historically has not very actively pursued any missionary activities is something which it has in common with other natural religions. Moreover, because of its character as a folk religion, it has not spread in foreign countries. However, all of this does not hinder its being a religion.<sup>6</sup>

The inclusion of Shintō in the scope of individual religious freedom is largely not contentious (see Scheid, this volume). However, for the separation of state and religion, some scholars such as Ashibe Nobuyoshi propose a somewhat narrower definition of religion as “having a specific systematic doctrine and an organizational background” which would effectively exclude Shrine Shintō from the regulatory scope of Article 20, paragraph 3 (Ashibe 1998: 131; 2002: 145).<sup>7</sup> This definition harmonizes in part with the legal practice of the Supreme Court, which for different reasons argues for softening the boundaries between the state and Shrine Shintō and

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<sup>5</sup> Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case, Nagoya High Court, May 14, 1971, as cited in Tsuchiya 2008: 141.

<sup>6</sup> Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case, Nagoya High Court, as cited in Tsuchiya 2008: 141–42.

<sup>7</sup> For a critique of Ashibe, see Tsuchiya 2008: 140, 143–44; Shibutani 2007: 377–78.



seeks to exclude widely observed ritual practices from a strict division.<sup>8</sup> However, the ‘special treatment’ of Shrine Shintō is a subject of wide criticism, even by judges of the Supreme Court. Since this is a specific problem of the division of state and religion, we will discuss it in more detail below.

### *Freedom of Religion in the Japanese Constitution*

Japanese constitutional law traditionally interprets the normative contents of the freedom of religion (*shinkyō no jiyū* 信教の自由) as guaranteed by Article 20, paragraph 1, section 1 (“Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all”), in three ways: the freedom of religious belief (*shinkō no jiyū* 信仰の自由), the freedom of religious practice (*shūkyōteki kōi no jiyū* 宗教的行為の自由), and the freedom of religious association (*shūkyōteki kessha no jiyū* 宗教的結社の自由) (Ashibe 1998: 122–23). Since the freedom of assembly and association as such is already guaranteed under Article 21, some scholars subsume the freedom of religious association according to its primary goals (worship, religious service, and missionary work) under the heading of the freedom of religious practice. However, this is primarily a problem of taxonomy which does not change the contents of the respective freedoms.

As Article 20 says, the Constitution guarantees “freedom of religion . . . to all,” i.e. first and foremost to all natural persons, either individually or as a group. However, juristic persons enjoy this freedom, as well, except for public corporations (*kōhōjin* 公法人) (Tsuchiya 2008: 109). The reason for this latter exception is, of course, that religious freedom is directed primarily against interference by the state itself. There is a possibility that this defense also applies in horizontal relations between private persons, but this interpretation is subject to a case-by-case decision (*ibid.*). Generally speaking, the first section of Article 20 grants the freedom to ‘all’, irrespective of nationality, whether Japanese or foreign.

#### 1. *The Freedom of Religious Belief*

The freedom of religious belief (*shinkō no jiyū* 信仰の自由) is the widest and least contentious of the three freedoms traditionally subsumed under the first parts of Article 20. Whereas the Meiji Constitution granted the

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<sup>8</sup> See the Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case, Supreme Court, July 13, 1977. For a detailed discussion of this case, see below.

freedom of religious belief merely “within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects,”<sup>9</sup> there are no such explicit limitations in the Japanese postwar constitution. Thus, the freedom of personal belief is guaranteed in principle as an absolute right.

This basic right consists of the following three freedoms, in their positive as well as negative form: first, the freedom to choose or not to choose a certain religion, to change religions, or to reject religion as such; second, freedom from any kind of repression or discrimination because of one’s personal faith or atheism; third, freedom from any coercion to make a confession or renunciation of one’s personal faith or of certain dogmas within this faith (Shibutani 2007: 379). These rights overlap with certain other constitutional rights. For example, the first variant could be seen as a specific instance of “freedom of thought and conscience” as guaranteed by Article 19. Moreover, freedom of discrimination is also guaranteed in Article 14, where it says, “All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of . . . creed [*shinjō* 信条].” Here, *shinjō* has the same meaning as *shūkyō* in Article 20 (Ashibe 2002: 144).

As a specific instance of freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of religious belief largely protects the inner intellectual space of a person, rather than the outward actions which emanate from this space. Thus, it is understandable that religious freedom suffers the least legal limitations. However, a certain controversy exists as to whether this inner space should be protected not only negatively by defensive measures, but also actively acknowledged as a legal *interest* which, if infringed upon, would entitle a person to monetary damages. This concept of religious belief as a positive legal interest is called the ‘right to religion’ (*shūkyōjō no jinkakukēn* 宗教上の人格権, or *shūkyōteki jinkakukēn* 宗教的人格権) in analogy with the so-called ‘right to privacy’ in public law or protected rights in tort law.<sup>10</sup>

Although a number of scholars argue in favor of a ‘right to religion’, the judiciary so far has not acknowledged this concept. The precedent where this was first discussed is the so-called ‘Serviceman Enshrinement Case’ which was decided by the Supreme Court in 1988.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the widow

<sup>9</sup> For a translation of the Meiji Constitution, see Röhl 2005: 60–73. The citation above is from Article 28.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the ‘right to religion’, see Shibutani 2007: 379–80; Tsuchiya 2008: 125–36.

<sup>11</sup> Serviceman Enshrinement Case, Supreme Court, June 1, 1988, translated in: Beer and Itoh 1996: 492–516 (partially reprinted in Milhaupt et al. 2001: 175–77), and in Eisenhardt et al. 1998: 286–307.

of a member of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) who had been killed in an accident while on duty protested against the enshrinement of her husband in the Gokoku 護国 Shrine of Yamaguchi Prefecture (the prefectural variant of the Yasukuni Shrine for the war dead in Tokyo). The widow was a Christian (Lutheran) and had placed part of the ashes of her husband in her church, where she attended services in his memory every year. The (successful) application for his enshrinement in the local Gokoku Shintō shrine, however, had been made by the Yamaguchi chapter of the SDF Friendship Association with the cooperation and support of the local SDF Liaison Office. When the widow's protests remained unheard, she sued the Friendship Association and the state (responsible for the SDF) demanding the retraction of the original application for the enshrinement and payment of compensation for violating her religious rights. The courts of the first and second instance rejected the widow's first demand for retraction, but granted her a modest sum of compensation.<sup>12</sup> The Supreme Court, however, rejected these decisions in the widow's favor as well and dismissed the case.

The case is one of the most celebrated precedents of constitutional law, bearing implications both for religious freedom as well as the separation of state and religion. With regards to the former, the court of the first instance and the appellate court clearly acknowledged a personal 'right to religion' and granted the widow compensation for its infringement. Otherwise, there would be no legal redress for violations of one's religious freedom by other persons, and people would not be able to fully pursue their faith.

Generally, the interest to pursue religious actions and have feelings and thoughts concerning one's own or a close person's death in tranquility [*sei-hitsu* 静謐] without the interference by other people can be seen as one of the contents of the right to religion.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Supreme Court rejected such a right, arguing that acknowledging one person's right to religion would automatically infringe upon another person's religious freedom.

The same is true with respect to remembrance or a memorial for a deceased spouse, because every person is guaranteed the freedom of such religious

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<sup>12</sup> Serviceman Enshrinement Case, Yamaguchi District Court, March 22, 1979; Hiroshima High Court, June 1, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Serviceman Enshrinement Case, Yamaguchi District Court, March 22, 1979, also quoted in Tsuchiya 2008: 126.

activities as choosing the object of faith or worship and praying for the peace of the deceased.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, religious freedom, if it was to function at all, was built on mutual tolerance which would preclude the possibility of direct compensations.

A more recent decision of the Supreme Court indicates a more ambiguous stance toward the possibility of a 'right to religion', but leaves the decision open. In the "Jehovah's Witness Blood Transfusion Case," a woman in hospital received a blood transfusion during surgery despite her religious reservations against it.<sup>15</sup> In 1993, she sued the hospital for payment of damages of 12 million yen. In 1998, the Supreme Court acknowledged in principle the woman's claims for compensation, as the surgeons had not explained to her the surgery process in detail—including the risk of a blood transfusion—and therefore denied her the possibility of an informed decision. Since this would have been based upon her religious beliefs, this denial also hurt the woman's religious conscience. The Supreme Court therefore granted her compensation for the emotional distress she had suffered, but only to the extent of 500,000 Yen (about US\$5,300).

Although the Supreme Court's argumentation comes close to acknowledging a 'right to religion', at the same time, the amount of damages granted indicates the exceedingly low position such a right would take in the normative hierarchy. This 'right to religion' corresponds with the relative position of other immaterial rights, freedoms, and interests in the hierarchy, which in Japan generally assume a low status in terms of compensation (Tsuchiya 2008: 136). Thus, even if the Supreme Court might acknowledge a 'right to religion' more openly in the future, in a 'materialistic' legal system that—like many other legal systems of industrial societies—centers upon tangible gains and losses, such a right would be considered more of a symbolic value. It is needless to say that this has a predictably (and possibly intended) discouraging effect upon plaintiffs to pursue their case, considering the costs of time and money that are necessary to reach a definite decision in the Japanese legal system.

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<sup>14</sup> Serviceman Enshrinement Case, Supreme Court, June 1, 1988, as translated in Beer and Itoh 1996: 501.

<sup>15</sup> Jehovah's Witness Blood Transfusion Case, Supreme Court, Feb. 29, 2000; see also Tsuchiya 2008: 133–36.

## 2. *The Freedom of Religious Practice*

Whereas the freedom of personal belief protects the inner religious ‘space’ of a person, the freedom of religious practice (*shūkyōteki kōi no jiyū* 宗教的行為の自由) is directed toward all outer expressions of this belief. It therefore encompasses “any religious acts, celebration, rite or practice” (cf. Article 20, paragraph 2), either individually or in a group. This includes missionary activities as well as the explicit public statement of one’s own beliefs in general (Ashibe 2002: 145). However, even more than the freedom to actually perform these acts, the Japanese Constitution stresses the *negative* freedom to *abstain* from them. “No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious acts, celebration, rite or practice” (Article 20, paragraph 2). This particular stress on the right to abstain must be seen as a reaction to the historical experience of prewar Japan, when participation in State Shintō practices was made compulsory.

Unlike the introverted and therefore relatively innocuous freedom of belief, the more active freedom of religious practice is bound to provoke conflicts among practitioners and other people. Consequently, its guarantee does not come without limits, but ends where other legal interests are endangered or actually infringed upon. Like any other freedom and right, religious practice has to be utilized so as not to interfere with but benefit ‘public welfare’ (*kōkyō no fukushi* 公共の福祉), as is clearly spelt out by Articles 12 and 13 of the Constitution. However, other interests have to be taken into consideration as well, evidenced by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966.<sup>16</sup> Limitations to the freedom of religious practice must not be arbitrary, but are necessitated by an indispensable goal and applying the most moderate means to achieve it (Ashibe 2002: 145).

The practical dimension of the freedom of religious practice and its limitations is best illustrated with a short review of the core precedents in that field. In the “Faith Healing Case,” a female priest of the Shingon sect subjected a mentally disturbed woman to a ritual of exorcism which involved a degree of violence and eventually led to the death of the already frail woman. The priestess was convicted of inflicting injury resulting in

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<sup>16</sup> Article 18, paragraph 3 of the Covenant: “Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.” Japan has signed and ratified the treaty in 1978 and 1979, respectively. See also Tsuchiya 2008: 112; Ashibe 2002: 145.

death, against which she appealed. However, the Supreme Court in 1963 ultimately rejected her appeal. The “unlawful exercise of physical force endangering the life and limb of another person” was an act “seriously inimical to society” and therefore placed outside the boundaries of the freedom of religious practice as guaranteed in Article 20, paragraph 1.<sup>17</sup>

In the “Pastoral Care Case,” a Christian pastor had sheltered two adolescent fugitives under suspicion of unlawful entry and assembling with dangerous weapons during the student riots in the late 1960s.<sup>18</sup> The pastor eventually persuaded the two adolescents to surrender themselves to the police, but was later charged for harboring criminals. However, the Kōbe Summary Court in 1975 exonerated him, arguing that sheltering the two adolescents had been within the duties of pastoral care and an expression of the pastor’s religious beliefs. As such, the state must act with the utmost circumspection, tolerance and reserve when dealing with pastoral care and similar practices. In its own way, pastoral care served the public welfare as much as the Penalty Code, and if both stood in contradiction with each other, the specific circumstance of the case must decide which to give precedence. Here, the pastor had acted within appropriate limits that did not violate the idea of public order and therefore should not be punished.

In the “Sunday Parents’ Day Case,” parents and their children were recorded by school officials as absent during Parents’ Day held yearly on a Sunday, since the family had to attend the Christian Sunday School run by the parents, who were pastors.<sup>19</sup> The parents and the children sued the school authorities and demanded the deletion of the entry of absence and a payment of compensation, arguing that the entry constituted a form of repression which infringed upon their freedom of religious practice. However, the Tokyo District Court in 1986 rejected their claims. It ruled that the entry was merely a formality which constituted no great disadvantage to the children. Excusing them from Parents’ Day on religious grounds, on the other hand, would violate the principle of state neutrality towards religion (Article 20, paragraph 3), since it would grant a privilege for religious reasons which pupils otherwise did not enjoy.

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<sup>17</sup> Faith Healing Case, Supreme Court, May 15, 1963, translated in Itoh and Beer 1978: 223–26.

<sup>18</sup> Pastoral Care Case, Kōbe Summary Court, Feb. 20, 1975, cf. Tsuchiya 2008: 113–14.

<sup>19</sup> Sunday Parents’ Day Case, Tokyo District Court, March 30, 1986.

A similar reasoning lay at the core of the initial judgment in the “Kendō Practice Refusal Case.” Here, a student belonging to Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to participate in Kendō practice at school as being contrary to his religious beliefs. The student thereupon was denied advance and finally expelled from school. The Kōbe District Court as court of the first instance in 1993 upheld this decision with reference to state neutrality.<sup>20</sup> However, the Osaka High Court in 1994 rescinded this decision, arguing that the student’s refusal to participate in Kendō practice was closely related to his religious beliefs, and therefore should be treated with the utmost reserve. Denial of promotion and the eventual expulsion from school were excessive measures and wholly unnecessary. The school could have well assigned a different kind of physical practice without privileging the student and thus breaking the principle of religious neutrality. Thus, the Osaka High Court—as well as the Supreme Court in its final decision in 1996—defended the student’s freedom of religious practice.<sup>21</sup>

The four cases, each different in their specific context, demonstrate well some basic observations regarding the freedom of religious practice in Japan. There appears to be no fixed rule that in cases of conflict between individual freedom and the state (expressed through norms of the Penalty Code or administrative measures), the former invariably has precedence over the latter, or vice versa. In the first set of cases, for example, the Buddhist priestess and the Christian pastor commit crimes according to the Japanese Penalty Code, but only the pastor is exonerated. Likewise in the second set, students plead exemption from the school curriculum due to religious reasons, but only one of them is exempted. In both sets, the courts reach opposing decisions. Thus, instead of applying rigid rules of precedence, courts base their decisions on flexible criteria. These criteria especially address the question of whether religious practice fulfils a beneficial social function in Japanese society. In cases where the answer to this question is inconclusive—as, for example, in the second set of cases—courts decide by weighing the sanctity of religious freedom against the severity of social sanctions, i.e. apply the principle of the commensurability of measures. Thus, there is no general rule of thumb how a court would decide in a ‘typical’ case of religious freedom, as every decision very much depends on the specific circumstances of the religious practice.

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<sup>20</sup> Kendō Practice Refusal Case, Kōbe District Court, Feb. 22, 1993, cf. Tsuchiya 2008: 120.

<sup>21</sup> Kendō Practice Refusal Case, Osaka High Court, Dec. 22, 1994, cf. Tsuchiya 2008: 120; Supreme Court, March 8, 1996.

### 3. *The Freedom of Religious Association*

The freedom of religious association (*shūkyōteki kessha no jiyū* 宗教的結社の自由) guarantees the right to form a religious organization (*shūkyō dantai* 宗教団体), to join or not to join it, or to resign from such an organization (Ashibe 1998: 125). This right is largely not a problem and, in a wider sense, is also guaranteed by the Constitution's clause on freedom of association, Article 21 ("Freedom of assembly and association... are guaranteed"). However, there is considerable controversy concerning the exact meaning of 'religious association'.

#### *Problems in the Interpretation of 'Religious Organization'*

Generally, it is assumed that the meaning of the term 'religious association' in Article 20, paragraph 1, is identical with the phrase 'religious institution or association' (*shūkyō-jō no soshiki moshikuwa dantai* 宗教上の組織もしくは団体) in Article 89 irrespective of the different wording. Moreover, constitutional lawyers agree that 'religious organization' in the context of the Constitution should be understood as being wider than the definition of *shūkyō dantai* in Article 2 of the Religious Juridical Persons Law (*Shūkyō hōjinhō*) and should not be limited by this definition.

However, there are two alternative definitions of 'religious organization' in the constitutional context. The more accepted interpretation is wider and defines it as an "organization set up by its founders with the common purpose of pursuing some religious undertaking or activity" (Ashibe 1998: 125). A narrower definition understands it as an "organization founded by believers of a specific faith [*tokutei no shinkō* 特定の信仰] to accomplish a certain goal within this religion."<sup>22</sup> The difference between these definitions and their practical relevance may remain somewhat elusive if considered only at the level of abstraction. The actual difference becomes clearer when considering one of its most notorious practical applications: whether the Japan Association of War Bereaved Families (Nihon izoku-kai 日本遺族会) and its local chapters are 'religious associations' or not. In the "Minoo War Memorial Case," the plaintiffs protested against the city of Minoo using taxpayer funds to pay for the relocation of a war memorial. In its 1982 judgment, the Osaka District Court applied a wider definition regarding a 'religious organization' and came to the conclusion

<sup>22</sup> Satō Kōji: *Kenpō*, as cited in Ashibe 1998: 125n6.



that the local veterans' association met the criteria because it pursued a religious activity: the religious commemoration of the war dead.<sup>23</sup> However, in 1993 the Supreme Court adjudicated the case by taking a different position. Closer to the narrow definition, the Court argued that not every institution or organization which pursued activities of some religious involvement were 'religious associations'. To qualify as such, an association must have been founded with the *original* motive to pursue religious activities—such as worshipping or spreading the faith—of a *specific* religion. This, the Court ruled, was not the case with veterans' societies.<sup>24</sup>

The Supreme Court's understanding has met with severe criticism in the scholarly literature (e.g., Tsuchiya 2008: 147–49; Ashibe 1998: 125–26). It has been pointed out that the narrow definition of 'religious associations' is but a revival of the old definition under the Meiji Constitution, which similarly limited 'religious organizations' to associations of followers of a *specific* religion, and which had the expressed purpose of religious undertakings. More to the point, the Supreme Courts' decision has been criticized for its inconsistency in rejecting the religious nature of the veterans' societies. Even assuming that religious associations required a specific religious purpose from the beginning, such elements were easily observable in the case of the veterans' societies. After all, conducting services in the memory of the war dead, visiting Yasukuni Shrine and other shrines dedicated to the war dead (who—according to State Shintō belief—were venerated as *kami*), all served the central purpose of the veterans' societies of honoring the 'heroic souls' of the war dead (Tsuchiya 2008: 148–49). Declaring the veterans' societies as non-religious therefore was an arbitrary decision which had the negative effect of eroding the principle of the separation of state and religion (Article 20, paragraph 1, section 2, and paragraph 3) in general, a topic that will be discussed in more detail below.

### *Limits of the Freedom of Religious Association*

The freedom of religious association is of an intrinsically ambivalent nature. On the one hand, it protects the actions of *individuals*. As such, it is closely associated with the general freedom of action as guaranteed in Article 13 ("... liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"). On the other hand,

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<sup>23</sup> Minoo War Memorial Case, Osaka District Court, March 24, 1982. On the Minoo War Memorial Case in detail, see O'Brien and Ohkoshi 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Minoo War Memorial Case, Supreme Court, Feb. 16, 1993.

the freedom of religious association also protects the freedom of religious action in a *collective* sense. It is important to keep this ambivalence in mind when discussing the limits of religious association. Depending on whether the individual or the collective aspect of this freedom is stressed, the results of its application are different. This is best seen when comparing cases that deal with the consequences of criminal transgressions and with the political activities of religious organizations respectively.

The ‘freedom of association’ has become a most virulent topic in the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway by the new religious movement Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教. The incident prompted the dissolution of Aum Shinrikyō as a religious juridical person (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人) on the basis of Article 81 of the Religious Juridical Persons Law (*Shūkyō hōjinhō*). This action constituted the first instance that an “evident threat to public welfare” and “actions which grossly deviated from the purposes of a religious organization” served as a reason to dissolve such an organization (Tsuchiya 2008: 137).

Followers of the Aum Shinrikyō Sect filed a suit against the command of dissolution, arguing that it violated their freedom of religion. The Supreme Court in 1996 dismissed the case (as did the lower courts).<sup>25</sup> The courts stated that the regulations concerning religious organizations (such as the Religious Juridical Persons Law) applied exclusively to the ‘worldly’ aspect of religious organizations and in no way affected the spiritual and religious side of it. Thus, these regulations did not interfere with the religious freedom of members of this organization concerning their individual actions of religious practice. After all, members of the organization could continue with these collectively even after the organization as juridical person had been dissolved, or even found a new substitute organization (which members of Aum Shinrikyō subsequently did, naming it ‘Aleph’). In this case, therefore, the Supreme Court stressed the *collective* nature of the freedom of association and thus dissociated it from the individual freedom of religion. This made it easier to argue for *limiting* the freedom of associating while at the same time upholding the principle of religious freedom in general.

However, the dissociation principle works both ways in that it can be also used for *widening* the scope of action of religious organizations by stressing the predominance of the *individual* aspect of religious association. This is especially true for the sphere of political agitation and participation. Thus, Article 20, paragraph 1, section 2, generally precludes that

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<sup>25</sup> Aum Shinrikyō Sect Dissolution Case, Supreme Court, Jan. 30, 1996.

religious organizations shall “exercise any political authority” (*seiji-jō no kenryoku no kōshi* 政治上の権力の行使). However, apart from the fact that this proscription has been inserted into the Japanese Constitution to strengthen the principle of the division of state and religion, it is quite unclear what ‘political authority’ actually signifies (Tsuchiya 2008: 154–55; Ashibe 1998: 160; Ōishi 1996: 245–47). The strictest interpretation of this rule interprets ‘political authority’ as any exertion of influence in the political sphere whatsoever. However, it is obvious that such an understanding is problematic on various counts. First, the primary addressee of the Constitution is the state and its subdivisions, not private individuals or organizations. Thus, the rule should be read as a command to political organs not to *transfer* ‘political authority’ to religious organizations. Second, considering that the ‘political’ is always hard to define, it would be almost impossible to decide which socially relevant activity of a religious organization would be constitutionally permissible or illegitimate. And finally, such an interpretation would require political neutrality from religious organizations that is even stricter than other private institutions and thus constitute a discrimination on religious grounds.

Practically speaking this interpretation would force the same neutrality on *all individual* representatives of religious organizations, which would lead to an excessive limitation of their freedom of religious practice as individuals. Thus, the majority of court decisions rejects this interpretation and defines ‘political authority’ in much narrower terms as “exclusive political power in the state or in one of its (regional) subdivisions” (Ashibe 1998: 160). An even more limited definition would include ‘state *functions*’ or privileges, such as collecting taxes or the keeping of family registers (which was assigned as a task to Buddhist temples in the Tokugawa period) (Shibutani 2007: 384). Either way, this narrow interpretation is also borne out by the historical drafting process of Article 20, paragraph 1, section 2, as the drafting committee comprised of occupation soldiers and bureaucrats expressly did *not* want to curtail the freedom of political activity of the clergy with this prohibition (Ōishi 1996: 243–44). Despite minority interpretations to the contrary, the political activity of religious organizations, even in the form of a party with a religious background or agenda (such as, for example, the Kōmeitō) is not considered unconstitutional by the majority opinion of the courts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For a more restrictive view on political activities of religious organizations, see Tsuchiya 2008: 155. The Kōmeitō Party was founded in 1964 by members of the Nichiren Buddhist organization Sōka Gakkai. After several splits and mergers, it regrouped in 1998

## *The Separation of State and Religion*

### *1. Nature and Outline of the Principle of Separation*

The constitutions of the world generally adopt one of the three following strategies to deal with the relation between the state and religion. They acknowledge one religion as the national religion (like the Church of England as the established church) and treat other religions with tolerance. They may also allot clearly defined spheres of competence to the state and to religious organizations, providing rules or arrangements in the case of conflict between the spheres (as in Germany or Italy). Finally, a number of constitutions attempt to draw a strict line of separation between the state and religion with as little contact or chance of mutual interference as possible (as in the U.S. and France) (Ashibe 2002: 149; Yokota 1993: 204).

The Japanese Constitution adopts the third strategy of strict separation between the religious sphere and the state and its organs. Article 20, paragraph 1, section 2 decrees that “[n]o religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority” (for the exercise of political authority, see the preceding discussion). According to paragraph 3 from the same Article, “[t]he State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.” And finally, Article 89 prohibits the expenditure of public money or property “for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association.” These norms are the *sedes materiae* or ‘standards of reference’ for the strict separation between the state and religion. In Japanese, the term for the principle of strict separation is *seikyō bunri* 政教分離, i.e. the “separation between politics (*seiji* 政治) and religion (*shūkyō* 宗教).” The term is a scholarly one, as it is nowhere to be found in the Constitution itself or in any other law. It is also somewhat misleading, as ‘politics’ in this case does not mean the sphere of the political in general, but more specifically the state and its organs and institutions (Ōishi 1996: 246).

Considering the strong American influence on the drafting process, it might come as no surprise that the Japanese Constitution would follow the American example in adopting a strict separation of state and religion. However, it should be noted that the wording of the Japanese norm is much more explicit and less ambiguous than its US counterpart.

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as New Kōmeitō Party. Between 1999 and 2009, the party formed a coalition with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Nominally independent from the Sōka Gakkai, its personal ties and agenda are still close to this association. See McLaughlin, this volume.

Moreover, quite similarly to the case of Article 9 (the renunciation of war), Japanese constitutional lawyers and practitioners pride themselves in this strictness and uphold it as one of the most conspicuous and commendable characteristics of the Japanese Constitution (e.g., Yokota 1993: 205). Thus, one judge of the Supreme Court even claimed in 1977 that the postwar Constitution surpassed “all other constitutions of the world” because of its clear and uncompromising language in stating the principle of church-state separation.<sup>27</sup>

Constitutional lawyers generally explain the strictness as a reaction to the abuse of Shintō as the ideological underpinnings of the ‘national polity’ (*kokutai* 国体)—especially during the militarist era from 1931 to 1945—and to the compulsion of Japanese citizens to participate in rites and practices of the so-called State Shintō.<sup>28</sup> The Meiji Constitution did guarantee religious freedom within limits (Article 28 of the Meiji Constitution). However, the authors of the Meiji Constitution considered Shintō a state ideology rather than a popular religion, as they identified its core elements almost completely with the imperial household and its allegedly divine ancestry. Despite its most intrusive presence in everyday (religious) life, State Shintō therefore was exempt from the rules of religious freedom.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore no surprise that the drafters of the new constitution reacted to this experience with special strictness towards State Shintō and the function of the emperor in the state. Although the words ‘Shintō’ or ‘emperor’ appear nowhere in the text of Article 20, a historical interpretation strongly suggests that the ‘religion’ considered in it was mainly Shintō, and the phrase “[t]he state and its organs” (Article 20, paragraph 3) chiefly pointed toward the new function of the emperor in the postwar state (Yokota 1993: 212).

However, despite the nominal strictness of the wording—and again there is a remarkable parallel to Article 9 here—constitutional lawyers often observe as they praise the separation principle in theory that there is a considerable gap regarding its application in reality. The Supreme Court treats the principle of the separation of state and religion with

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<sup>27</sup> Judge Fujibayashi Ekizō in his dissenting opinion to the Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case, Supreme Court, July 13, 1977.

<sup>28</sup> For a broad survey of the historical background, see O'Brien and Ohkoshi 1996: 32–62.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that this understanding of the role of Shintō in the state was not wholly ‘Japanese’, but also shared by foreign (German) advisers; see Murakami 1990: 27–31.

remarkable leniency, especially in relation to the state's dealing with the institution of Shintō.

The general purport of the principle is clear enough (Tsuchiya 2008: 155–57; Ashibe 1998: 154–60). The 'separation' requires strict *neutrality* and abstinence of the state in all matters religious. Thus, in state education, it prohibits *any* form of religious education at public schools, although it does, of course, not preclude the teaching of a general knowledge about religion within the context of other subjects. In this respect, Article 9 of the Fundamental Law of Education (*Kyōiku kihonhō* 教育基本法) is within constitutional limits. Private schools are exempt from the prohibition of religious education. However, they, too, are bound by Article 14 of the Covenant on the Rights of the Child of 1989 concerning the religious freedom of the child.

However, the general rule of neutrality and abstinence is not so clear in application concerning the second alternative of Article 20, paragraph 3, i.e. "the state and its organs shall refrain from . . . any other activities." It is in this area that the Supreme Court and lower courts have passed their most notorious and hotly debated decisions.

## 2. *Religious Activity of the State: The Standard Cases*

The first and most controversial case in which the Supreme Court had to deal with the problem of state neutrality was the so-called "Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case."<sup>30</sup> Here, the city of Tsu (Mie Prefecture) in 1965 paid a small sum of money to local Shintō priests as remuneration for their services in performing a so-called 'groundbreaking ceremony' (*jichin-sai* 地鎮祭) on occasion of constructing the city gymnasium. Holding a Shintō groundbreaking ceremony before the construction work begins is a widespread custom in Japan. Its religious meaning is to receive the blessings of the Shintō *kami* 神 residing at the location. The plaintiff was a local assemblyman who had partaken in the ceremony. He filed suit against the mayor, arguing that the city had violated the principle of separation of state and religion in requesting the performance of a religious groundbreaking ceremony and spending public money on it. The plaintiff demanded that the money should be repaid to the city and also claimed

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<sup>30</sup> Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case, Supreme Court, July 13, 1977, translated in Beer and Itoh 1996: 471–91 (partially reprinted in Milhaupt et al. 2001: 171–74), and in Eisenhardt et al. 1998: 259–86.

compensation for the emotional pains he suffered during his obligatory participation in the ceremony as a local assemblyman.

The Supreme Court rejected the case in its final decision in 1977. Unlike pre-war constitutional lawyers and jurists, the judges certainly acknowledged Shintō as a 'religion' and the groundbreaking as a religious act. However, the core of the majority opinion which carried the decision (ten out of fifteen judges) was that, in many cases, an *absolute* separation between the state and religion was almost impossible to realize in practice. Especially concerning the 'social manifestations' of religion in education, social services, culture and custom, such an absolute separation would lead to quite unreasonable results, as the spheres of activities of religious organizations and the state necessarily overlapped in these areas. An absolute separation would, for example, make it impossible for the state to grant financial support to private religious schools or to a religious organization for the preservation of cultural monuments.

The Supreme Court therefore developed an interpretation of separation which prohibited only such an involvement that "exceeded the limits considered appropriate." The criteria for appropriateness were "the purpose and the effect of the act" in society, i.e. whether this purpose had a 'religious meaning' (*shūkyōteki igi* 宗教的意義) and the effect of "assisting, encouraging, or promoting that religion or of oppressing or interfering with other religions."<sup>31</sup> Whether this was the case should be ultimately decided from the viewpoint of an average, objective onlooker, i.e. the 'average person' (*ippan-jin* 一般人). In this case, the court denied an excessive involvement of the state: performing a Shintō groundbreaking ceremony was a most widespread *custom* in Japan which therefore was undertaken with no religious intention whatsoever and certainly had no effect of promoting Shintō as a religion.

The majority decision of the Supreme Court was called into question by a number of dissenting opinions (five judges dissented) which, by and large, gained the support of most scholars of constitutional law. The main point of critique was not the relativization of the separation principle in general, but that the religious consciousness and effect on the 'average person' necessarily led to the discrimination of religious minorities (Yokota 1993: 207, 215, 217; Murakami 1990: 43). Thus, critics were afraid that the standard of the 'average person' excluded such minorities who are more sensitive toward religious matters than the average person.

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in the translation of Yokota 1993: 215.

Both the majority opinion as well as its critics based their arguments on the explicit assumption and the cultural bias that Japanese were religiously promiscuous, if not (especially in postwar times) indifferent (see Eisenhardt et al. 1998: 268, 278; Yokota 1993: 207). This is especially ironic when applied to widespread Shintō customs, since such an argumentation actually leads to the same conclusions as in pre-war times (albeit on different assumptions), i.e. Shintō—at least in part—is not a religion.

The above majority judgment provided the argumentative basis of both the supporters and the critics of the judgments in two additional cases. In the “Mino War Memorial Case,” the plaintiffs protested against the city of Mino (Osaka Prefecture) paying for the relocation of a war memorial to another city-owned property to make way for the building of an elementary school. As in the case above, they claimed that the expenditure as well as providing the grounds for the new site constituted a violation of the separation principle.<sup>32</sup> However, the Supreme Court in 1993 upheld the decision of the court of appeal that—applying the criteria of purpose and effect as seen from an average person—neither the war memorial as such was a religious monument, but merely a memorial to console the spirit of the war dead and honor their deeds. Nor did the veterans’ society which erected it and received support from the city constitute a ‘religious organization’. Thus, the case was rejected.<sup>33</sup>

The same argumentation was applied in the “Serviceman Enshrinement Case,” decided by the Supreme Court in 1988.<sup>34</sup> In this case, the Christian widow of a deceased member of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) protested against the enshrinement of her husband in the local Gokoku Shrine (a ‘guardian of the state’ shrine for the war dead). The enshrinement had been initiated by the local veterans’ society and assisted logistically by the SDF Regional Liaison Office. The widow demanded the cancellation of the enshrinement and damages for the spiritual pain she had suffered in her religious life due to the enshrinement.

The Supreme Court rejected her claims, again arguing for the religious irrelevance of the state’s involvement. Neither had the SDF Regional Liaison Office extended its help with the ‘purpose of a religious meaning’,

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<sup>32</sup> Mino War Memorial Case, Osaka District Court, March 24, 1982. On this case in detail, see O’Brien and Ohkoshi 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Mino War Memorial Case, Supreme Court, Feb. 16, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Serviceman Enshrinement Case, Supreme Court, June 1, 1988, translated in: Beer and Itoh 1996: 492–516 (partially reprinted in Milhaupt et al. 2001: 175–77), and in Eisenhardt et al. 1998: 286–307.



nor could it have the effect of promoting Shintō as a religion. Moreover, the court rejected the widow's claim to a 'right to religion' (*shūkyōjō no jinkakuken* 宗教上の人格権, see the preceding discussion in this chapter). Finally, the court clarified that, although the separation of state and religion was a principle that had been installed to strengthen the guarantee of the individual's freedom of religion, in itself it was not a guarantee which entitled an individual to any direct claims to the full realization of it. It was, as the Supreme Court called it in recourse to German Constitutional Law, an 'institutional guarantee' (*seido-teki hoshō* 制度的保障).<sup>35</sup> To understand the consequences of this argument, it must be kept in mind that in the Japanese legal system, individuals can sue local governments for the violation of constitutional provisions, even though these did not directly affect the rights of the individual. However, this recourse is not possible against the national government and its subdivisions (such as the SDF Liaison Office) (Yokota 1993: 217–18). By turning Article 20, paragraph 3, into an institutional guarantee and rejecting the concept of 'right to religion', the Supreme Court therefore foreclosed virtually any possibility for individuals to enforce the national government's adherence to the Constitution as such.

Finally, the measure of religious cause and purpose was applied to the "Emperor Accession and Harvest Ceremony Case" in which several citizens protested against the use of public expenditures for celebrating the accession of Emperor Akihito to the throne in 1989 (*sokui no rei* 即位の礼) and against public officials attending the first Harvest Ceremony (*daijōsai* 大嘗際) performed by the new emperor following the accession. The several High Courts of Osaka, Fukuoka and Tokyo which dealt with these actions in decisions between 1995 and 1999 were at variance whether to judge these events as purely ceremonial affairs of no heightened religious meaning, or as a clear breach of the separation principle (Tsuchiya 2008: 207–12). However, there was a slight tendency toward the former, which was re-confirmed by a decision of the Supreme Court in 2002 that declared the attendance of a governor to the ceremonies on public expenses as constitutional.<sup>36</sup> The decision of the Supreme Court is especially delicate in light of the fact that Supreme Court judges themselves had attended the Harvest Ceremony in 1989 (Yokota 1993: 219).

<sup>35</sup> For a critique of this argument, see Tsuchiya 2008: 157–61.

<sup>36</sup> Emperor Accession and Harvest Ceremony Cases, Supreme Court, July 11, 2002.

### 3. *The Yasukuni Shrine Visit Cases*

The above cases, although fundamental for the theoretical development of the separation principle, rarely gained the attention of the broader public in Japan, nor did they stir greater attention abroad. This situation is very different with the cases that concerned the visits of Japanese prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine. It is well known that the visits of Japanese heads of state to the central shrine for the war dead (which also enshrined A-class war criminals) invariably elicited fierce protest from Japan's neighbors and censure from critics around the world. This was the case with Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's first visit on August 15, 1985 (the anniversary of the emperor's declaration of surrender) as well as Prime Minister Jun'ichirō Koizumi's six annual visits to the shrine, starting in 2001 (see Breen in this volume; Nelson 2003). In Japan, protests against the successive visits especially involved Christian and Buddhist relatives of fallen soldiers and their respective religious organizations, but also sections of the general public and even members of the LDP. Moreover, several people from all over Japan sued the state and the prime minister, claiming that their religious freedom, their 'right to religion' as well as their 'religious privacy' (*shūkyōteki puraibashii* 宗教的プライバシー) had been violated. They demanded compensation for the emotional pains they suffered from witnessing the prime minister's visit to the shrine (Ashibe 2002: 154–55; Tsuchiya 2008: 206–7, 241–57).

The various (lower) courts which dealt with these cases generally pursued a similar strategy: they routinely rejected the claims on the grounds that the visits constituted no direct violation of the plaintiffs' freedom of religion, and rejected the notion of a 'right to religion' or similar subjective and vague concepts. However, again routinely—and surprisingly—they stated in a sort of *obiter dictum* or 'legal aside' that the visits indeed constituted a violation of the principle of the separation of state and religion and that the prime minister as organ of the state had therefore acted unconstitutionally.

Thus, in the first case of this kind, the Sendai High Court in 1991 ruled that the objective of Prime Minister Nakasone's Yasukuni visit in 1985 had a 'religious meaning' and that the relation between the state and a religious organization manifested thereby certainly exceeded the 'limits considered appropriate' (thus applying the criteria which the Supreme Court had developed for the separation principle).<sup>37</sup> Nakasone's visit was

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<sup>37</sup> Yasukuni Shrine Visit Cases I (Nakasone), Sendai High Court, January 10, 1991.—It should be noted here that although the incriminated action (the Yasukuni visit) took place

therefore unconstitutional. Similarly, the Osaka High Court in 1992 argued that the official visit objectively and in its outward appearance must be seen as a 'religious activity', the approval of which did not find the consent of the people. The protest of the religious organizations and other groups as well as the outcry in other Asian countries showed that Nakasone's visit certainly was not seen as a mere matter of 'courtesy' or custom.<sup>38</sup> The Fukuoka High Court in 1993 did not think that a single visit was enough to have the effect of propagating the official recognition of Yasukuni worship, but would do so if the visits continued.<sup>39</sup>

The above arguments were taken up by the Fukuoka District Court in 2004 concerning Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine. It argued that despite the PM's protest to the contrary, the objective circumstances clearly indicated that Koizumi visited the shrine in his official function, not as a private person. Moreover, the court contended that, considering Koizumi's statement that he would continue to visit regularly and the fact that the Yasukuni Shrine was a rather poor choice to commemorate the war dead (the shrine only commemorated soldiers, not, for example, the civilians who had died during the air raids of 1945), it was quite clear that the visit was based on a certain faith and had a 'religious purpose'. The visit also had the effect of promoting Yasukuni Shrine, since after Koizumi's visit twice as many visitors came to the shrine on the anniversary of the end of the war than in the previous year, so that the shrine even had to keep longer opening hours than usual. The court was very well aware of the political nature of its judgment, as its conclusion justified the *obiter dictum* with the concern that if they had dodged this issue, these 'religious activities' would continue (as they, however, did for some time).<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

The concluding remarks of the Fukuoka High Court lead us back to the beginning of this discussion. Although we have observed that many constitutions are normative reactions to historical experience and that Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution is an example in case, it must also be said

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in Tokyo, the *effect* of this action, i.e. the alleged infringement of the plaintiffs' freedom of religion took place where these resided, i.e. all over Japan; hence the different courts.

<sup>38</sup> Yasukuni Shrine Visit Cases I (Nakasone), Osaka High Court, July 30, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Yasukuni Shrine Visit Cases I (Nakasone), Fukuoka High Court, Feb. 28, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Yasukuni Shrine Visit Cases II (Koizumi), Fukuoka District Court, April 7, 2004; for this and other cases relating to Koizumi's visit, see Tsuchiya 2008: 241–49.

that the cases concerning Article 20 show with exceptional clarity that history is not so easily overcome by normative imposition. Instead, the law needs constant and vigilant practice to overcome patterns that have been ingrained in the historical fabric of a nation's life. The above survey has shown that, by and large, the Japanese judiciary and constitutional attorneys have developed flexible and effective instruments to protect individual religious freedom and safeguard the separation between the state and religion, albeit with one exception. Shintō, despite constant and conscious efforts to eradicate its presence from official life, still remains one of the most problematic issues in the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court on Article 20. This is not so much due to 'revisionist' tendencies which, for example, inform so much of the discourse on Article 9, or the role of the emperor in the Constitution. Nor is it a wholly legal problem. It is more a problem of how to define the boundaries of a religion whose customs have over the ages seeped into an increasingly secularized society, and who should be the arbiter when these boundaries are transgressed.

The problem to draw the boundaries between religion and mere custom is not unique to Japan, but lies at the core of many constitutional cases in the legal systems secularized 'western' societies that deal, for example, with the afterglow of Christianity.<sup>41</sup> As for who should arbitrate controversies about the separation of religion and the state, the problem is not a legal one but a question of national self-identification. Should Japanese constitutional law uphold the traditional postwar image of a 'homogeneous Japanese society' that consists of 'average people' (*ippan-jin*) who are (as Supreme Court judges claim) "religiously promiscuous, if not indifferent" to matters of doctrine? Or should the law allow for more diversity and plurality in its 'religious mix' that enables to integrate beliefs of varying intensities and exclusiveness? A changing social and political discourse that reacts to the new challenges of globalization since the 1990s indicates a tendency toward the latter, even though it may take some time to show up in legal practice. Moreover, a mere change in legal interpretation will not suffice if it is not paralleled by similar efforts to reform the procedural framework to realize this new awareness in practice. The above survey has shown that, in matters of religion, Japanese citizens are far from 'reluctant litigants' even though the margin of success is low and the rewards even lower. Yet, as long as there is no way in Japanese constitutional

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<sup>41</sup> For a comparison with the German situation, see for example the commentary of K. Stern to the Shintō Groundbreaking Ceremony Case in Eisenhardt et al. 1998: 282–86.

procedural law to directly indict organs of the state for the breach of the separation principle, it is doubtful that a mere ‘institutional guarantee’ will be enough to fully realize the potential of religious freedom in Japan.

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## NEW RELIGIONS IN JAPAN: ADAPTATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

INKEN PROHL

### *Introduction: Innovation and Diversity in the Field of New Religions*

Scholars of religion estimate that between 10 and 20 percent of the Japanese population are members of so-called 'new religions' (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教). The fact that more than ten million Japanese are members of one of the hundreds of existing religious organizations in Japan may be confusing, since it is often said that the Japanese are non-religious (Ama 2005). One may also wonder how these numbers match the fact that most Japanese are listed in official statistics as either Buddhists, as practicing Shintō, or as both. The observation that possibly one-fifth of all Japanese families count at least one active member to one of the so-called 'new religions' (Davis 1991) does not at all fit the overwhelmingly negative images of religion as portrayed in Japanese media. One may also wonder, considering the appearance and extraordinary growth of these new religions in Japan, where this immense religious potential comes from.

These questions and contradictions confronting scholars of new religions in Japan pose a significant challenge to academic observation of the current religious landscape. Groups at home in this landscape demand that observers dispense with traditional, commonly held opinions of and approaches to religion, particularly a reliance on quantitative methods of data collection that use terms like 'New Religious Movements' or 'cults', as well as descriptive patterns that reduce religions to 'belief' or 'conversion'. In the first part of this article, I will test the suitability of the most prevalent terms and categories used in academic literature to describe these new religions. Based on this discussion, the second part offers a short walk-through of the history of these new religions and discusses their specific teachings and practices.<sup>1</sup> I conclude this section by delving into the history of the research into these new religions.

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<sup>1</sup> Because a number of thorough depictions of the characteristics of the so-called 'older' new religions already exist, I will discuss them only briefly. Astley (2006) and Clarke (1999)

In the middle of the 1970s, observers began to take note of a new religious development in Japan. Some spoke of a 'religious boom', others about the rise of the 'spiritual world' (*seishin seikai* 精神世界) (Shimazono 1996b) or the rise of a religious 'third sector' (Hardacre 2003: 140). On the one hand, these terms describe the religious organizations that have formed since the mid-70s in Japan and are called the 'new new religions' (*shinshinshūkyō* 新新宗教). On the other hand, they describe an increased range of religious goods and services known elsewhere in industrialized societies as 'New Age', 'Body Mind Spirit' or 'spirituality'. In the third part of this chapter, I examine the characteristics of the so-called 'new new' religions and clarify their relationships to ideas and practices broadly covered by the term 'spirituality' (*supirichuariti* スピリチュアリテイ). I will also concentrate on the tendency, exhibited by many of the new new religions, to commercialize religious goods and services, and I will comment on reactions to this commercialization, including the rise of networks fighting fraudulent business practices associated with promoting religion. I will also briefly discuss Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教, the treatment the group received from lawmakers and the media, and the impact their poison gas attack had on the image of contemporary religions in Japan.

Given their diversity, Japan's new religions cannot be easily or clearly categorized. A number of factors have combined to create wide religious diversity in Japan: the changes in the country's religious history, the primacy of practice versus teachings, the ability to adapt to new concepts and practices, and a strong orientation toward the demands of religious consumers. The spectrum of the possibilities offered by the new religions is especially clear in the richness of their religious practices. The last portion of this article uses the example of a daily ritual of World Mate (*wārudomeito* ワールドメイト) a new new religion, and analyzes the multiple layers and complexity of religious practice in the new religions.

### *Problematic Terms and Categories*

The new religious organizations that have formed in Japan since the beginning of the nineteenth century are called *shinshūkyō* or 'new religions' (Inoue et al. 1994). In adapting this Japanese term, Western literature often uses 'new religions' or the acronym NRM, new religious movement;

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offer a good survey of these 'older' new religions. Among the most important monographs on the new religions are the contributions from Davis (1980) and Hardacre (1984, 1986).



occasionally, they are referred to as 'cults'. These terms possess limited applicability. First, they reference the date of origin of the new groups and organizations. The oldest of these so-called new religions was founded in the nineteenth century, and thus can no longer be called 'new' as such (see Reader 2005). Religions like Tenrikyō 天理教 or Ōmotokyō 大本教 have become consolidated organizations that have long since become established institutions in Japan. Second, the terms imply that these groups have introduced new practices and content. As a general rule, new religions are based on traditional Japanese religions, which are used to formulate ideas of worldly benefits, salvation, and redemption (*genze riyaku* 現世利益, *sukui* 救い, *kyūsai* 救済). In other words, new religions seldom create genuinely new content. The development of new religions is tightly knit with the modernization process of Japan. Many of these religions have a central leadership and firm organizational structures, which is why I have suggested the term 'Modern Religious Organizations' for them (Prohl 2006).

The biggest difference between Japanese and Western New Religious Movements is the size of their followings. If one believes the self-reporting of these organizations to Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs, a fifth of the Japanese population claims membership in one of the new religions, while in North America and Europe, the new religions claim a negligible to small percentage of the population. Moreover, because the Japanese new religions draw members from all levels of society, the appellations 'marginal' or 'alternative', words typically associated with NRMs, do not apply. In the end, we can say that neither the term 'sect' nor 'new religious movement' appropriately characterizes the new religions established within the last two centuries, and that the term 'new religions' should be used with caution.

Seto Kazuhiro, a member of the lawyers group "Religion and Consumers," explains two important reasons people turn toward new religious specialists or movements. First, most Japanese have an indecisive attitude about the existence of spirits as well as their own existence after death. Many Japanese, about half of the entire population, believe the existence of spirits is possible. Attitudes depend also on the individual situation in which a person turns toward religious observance. A personal crisis, for example, can change an individual's normal mental state. Seto also explains that religious providers use a variety of methods to capitalize on this change and turn indecisiveness into solid conviction (Seto 1996). An individual joining one of Japan's new religions typically does not undergo the cognitive reorientation characteristic of conversion experiences. Rather, the defining moment is more a mobilization of potentially held religious opinions

marked by their flexibility, brought about via the use of targeted methods designed to stimulate the senses. This pattern confirms the importance of the widespread and, until recently, very strong practice of religion in Japan, as well as of the systems that accompany these practices. What we observe is not the adoption of a new 'belief system', but more the gradual activation of widespread basic religious attitudes and practices.

For these reasons, I will dispense with the terms 'belief' and 'believers', because these imply that followers of the new religions have consistent sets of religious notions that apply to any and all areas of life. Furthermore using the terms 'belief' and 'believers' brings about the tendency to forget about the importance of practice. In order to prescind from this heavily Protestant Christian conceptualization of religions (see Lopez 1998), I will speak of social actors, users, followers or members, and consumers of religious notions and practices. Instead of talking solely about religious teachings, the following discussion explores the overtures, possibilities, and programs of new religions.

The degree of an individual's involvement in a new religion in Japan can vary widely. The Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, for example, has a long tradition of having an exclusive membership. For a long time, members of Sōka Gakkai were asked to not engage in any other religious practices apart from those offered by the group itself. This demand is not shared by most of the other new religions, and it has loosened only in recent years. Often the teachings and practices of the new religions are relevant only for a certain period of life, such as coping with difficult interpersonal relationships or job problems. Further, we can discern 'religion-hopping', where religions can be changed depending on the individual's needs. Many members of new religions simultaneously make use of the rituals offered by Japan's shrines and temples. The utilitarian use of religious traditions as a characteristic or consequence of certain situations in life, and the fluidity of religious notions and practice make it very difficult to measure religious belonging using quantitative empirical methods (see Roemer in this volume). Official statistics are therefore misleading. Further, one cannot rely on membership numbers issued by the religions themselves, since what exactly these numbers reference often is unclear. Sometimes they count the number of households belonging to the religion, in other cases they report the number of subscribers to publications or the number of people on the group's mailing list that regularly receive information about the religion at home.

The largest of the new religions are two Buddhist groups, Sōka Gakkai, with approximately 12 million members (on Sōka Gakkai, see McLaughlin

in this volume), and Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, with roughly 6 million members. These are followed by the Reiyūkai Kyōdan 霊友会教団 and the Bussho Gonenkai 佛所護念会, each of which claims nearly two million members. All four have made the Lotus Sutra the center of their teaching and practice, though in different ways. The Shintoist Tenrikyō, with nearly 1.5 million members, rounds out the top five of the new religions. Others claiming more than one million members are the Perfect Liberty Kyōdan パーフェクト リバティー教団 and the Myōchikai Kyōdan 妙智會教団. Hundreds of other organizations whose membership varies from several hundred to several thousand exist alongside these huge organizations.

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Middle of the 1970s*

The new religions arose due to the enormous changes that Japan experienced during its modernization process.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, the oldest of the new religions were established during the nineteenth century. These include Kurozumikyō 黒住教, established in 1814, and Tenrikyō, founded by Nakayama Miki in 1838. These new religions first flowered following the Meiji Restoration in 1868 during a period in which the state altered the religious landscape of Japan via a series of religious-political measures. Buddhism, tightly connected to the state to this point, was in many ways isolated from everyday life in its formalized and conventionalized form (Murakami 1980). Established Buddhist institutions reacted to the repressive anti-Buddhist measures issued by the Meiji government to achieve its desired separation between Shintō and Buddhism with a fundamentally new formulation of the so-called *shinbukyō* 新仏教, or new Buddhism, and by the gradual adaption to the nationalistic tendencies of this time (Ketelaar 1990; Victoria 1999). This Buddhist reformation was expedited by the conflict with missionary efforts and conceptualization of Christian religions.

Meanwhile, the introduction of state Shintō proved to be a very effective religious political instrument to create a national identity and to

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<sup>2</sup> On the history of new religions and their periodization, see Ōmura 1988, Mullins 1992, and Astley 2006. The article “Shinshūkyō no tenkai” (The Unfolding of the New Religions) in *Shinshūkyō jiten* (Encyclopedia of the New Religions), also provides an overview (Inoue et al. 1994).

establish a 'national essence' (*kokutai* 国体) (see Antoni 1998; Scheid in this volume). The cult at shrines in its various regional forms was essentially unified during the establishment of a state Shintō and was limited to the performance of national rituals. Local rituals and customs therefore underwent fundamental transformation. National rituals and ceremonies increasingly supplanted deeply rooted religious practices in temples and shrines. At the same time, radical political reforms ushered in a host of new problems, questions, and conflicts for people looking for support, orientation, and identity. Some of the coherence of traditional communities dissolved due to the rapid changes of the modernization process and new religious structures, which in turn lessened resistance to new gods and new religious communities.

New religious groups such as the Kurozumikyō, Konkokyō 金光教, Tenrikyō und Ōmotokyō, which were established in this first phase, led to a number of successors. The notions and practices of the Ōmoto in particular are regarded as the origin of many of the new religions established in the twentieth century, such as Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教 and Seichō no Ie 生長の家. Deguchi Onisaburō, who together with Deguchi Nao established the Ōmotokyō, is considered one of the most influential religious personalities in modern Japan. His style was characterized by a 'charismatic entrepreneurship', a combination of religious authority, an intuitive understanding of the religious marketplace, good management skills, and the willingness to take risks (Stalker 2008). This leadership style is typical of the new and new new religions.

During a period of modernization and urbanization, the new religions experienced a second flowering from the 1920s into the 1930s. In a time of economic need and explosive political and social conflicts, many people turned toward the new religions in hope of security and salvation. During this period, the Reiyūkai and Sōka Gakkai were founded, along with the Perfect Liberty Kyōdan, Seichō no Ie and Sekai Kyūseikyō, which remain among the largest and most active of the new religions. The new religions came under increasing governmental suppression in the years leading up to World War II, which contributed to the cautious treatment the organizations were afforded after the war. With the establishment of a new constitution that guarantees religious liberty following the war, new religions have enjoyed an immense amount of creative freedom. Thousands of new groups were founded or reemerged. Some of these swiftly dissolved, while others, like the Sōka Gakkai, grew into massive organizations. These organizations reached their high point in the 1970s, with many of them subsequently going into decline. At the same time, however, a fourth

major period of growth in the field of religion began, marked by the emergence and spread by the so called 'new new religions' (*shinshinshūkyō*). These new new religions are said to differ from the older ones in that they adapt many of the concepts and practices of the so-called 'spiritual world', known elsewhere as 'New Age'. This fourth growth is also characterized by the emergence of a religious marketplace that offers many new religiously-oriented goods and services.

### *Characteristics of the New Religions*

The hundreds of new religions active in Japan exhibit a wide variety of different ideas and practices. Despite these differences, they share several attributes. The majority of them draws from the rich pool of widespread religious practice and conceptualization of Buddhism and Shintō, as well as from the Confucian and Taoist traditions, and mixes them with Christian notions and other imports from recent American and European religious history, such as Spiritism and New Thought.<sup>3</sup> The new religions characteristically tailor their activities to the needs and desires of their members, and they focus on offerings and explanations of rituals rather than a specific, systematic worldview (Reader 1991: 50–51). Their notions hold that people are responsible for their own deeds. Personal misfortune or suffering are considered direct consequences of an individual's wrongdoing, a result of their disturbed relationships with the 'vitalistic' gods, a consequence of negative karma, or due to the influence of malevolent spirits. The religions propagate methods of self-improvement, the perfection of one's personality, and a reestablishment of a harmonic relationship with the gods as paths of liberation from suffering.

The majority of their teachings and practices are based on *kokoro naoshi* 心直し, a 'Reform of the Heart/Mind' (Hardacre 1986). Injunctions commanding sincerity and thankfulness to the gods are also integral to these processes. These moral efforts are often combined with rituals for the ancestors. The teachings are in tune with the Buddhist values and practices in Japan, in the center of which are long, complex rituals for the deceased (see both Kawano and Tanabe, this volume). Many of the new and new new religions modify the importance of the ancestor rituals by stressing that neglecting ritual duties toward the ancestors will lead to

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<sup>3</sup> A survey of the teachings of the 'new religions' can be found in the article "Oshie to shisō" (Teaching and Thinking) in *Shinshūkyō jiten* (Inoue et al. 1994: 212–301).

religious disturbances that will manifest as problems in the lives of oneself or one's offspring. As a remedy for this, many of the new religions offer a broad spectrum of rituals for the ancestors.

The motto of the new religions is basically 'try it and you will see'. Their validity rests less on complex teachings than on palpable evidence of the effectiveness of the programs they offer, especially their core offerings, this-worldly rituals. As Ian Reader and George Tanabe have shown, the pursuit of worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*) lies at the very heart of Japanese religions (Reader and Tanabe 1998). These new religions compete with Buddhist and Shintō institutions by offering practices to achieve benefits in the here and now. As the growth of the new religions shows, temples and shrines are not capable of satisfying the religious needs of many contemporary Japanese. The center of the religious practices conducted in the shrine is concerned not with the needs of the individual, but with the needs of the group. According to John Nelson, Shintō finds it difficult to integrate this-worldly rituals with a sufficient pattern of explanation that also considers and speaks to the problems of the individual (Nelson 1996).

For many, the meaning of Japanese Buddhism reduces to its roles in funerals and commemorations of the dead. This-worldly rituals performed in temples are seldom integrated into broader Buddhist teachings. As already mentioned, some Buddhist scholars have criticized efforts to integrate rituals for the here and now with traditional teachings as 'unbuddhist' (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 98).

From at least the end of the Second World War, Buddhist and Shintō institutions have largely failed to articulate convincing explanations of causality. They seem unable to provide answers for their members about questions of universal salvation, internationalization, and globalization, although these issues are of immense importance for contemporary individual and social life (see the Introduction to this volume). This is why the programs and policies of traditional religious institutions are at odds with the demands placed on religion. By the processes of modernization and the universalization of Christian concepts of religion, the demand for religious alternatives in Japan expanded to encompass not only on a normative level but in practical and accessible ways all of the questions and conflicts that arise from the various areas of life. Here the new religions have a clear competitive advantage: their appeal is tailored to the changed demands placed on religion because, in contrast to the traditional institutions, they offer their followers comprehensive religious teachings embedded in religious practice.

The new religions developed strategies that help to integrate their teachings in the lives of individuals. One of their most important features is their approachability: they invite their members to meet regularly in informal and formal settings, giving lots of support to learn about and to adjust to religious concepts and practices. They create handbooks and manuals that explain how to behave and act while performing religious practices. Also the high involvement of lay practitioners helps to overcome the inhibition threshold towards 'doing religion'. Many new religions have separate divisions for different types of members as for example young people or married women. Joining these groups, new members quickly meet like-minded people. Overall the new religions build up hierarchical structures to provide support for both social and religious matters. In providing these means, new religions offer 'instant community' of people with shared concerns who then support each other. These are interpersonal networks and ties based on mutual interests rather than the traditional temple/religious membership defined by residence, household, or lack of choices.

#### *A Look at the History of Research on New Religions*

The history of research into new religions is as full of change as the history of the new religions themselves. From the Meiji Restoration to the Second World War, governmental bodies, the established religions, and the media all considered the new religions suspect. They expressed this attitude by describing the new religions in terms like *ruiji shūkyō* 類似宗教 ('quasi religion'), *giji shūkyō* 疑似宗教 ('pseudo religion') or *inshi jakyō* 淫祠邪教 ('heretical religion') (Laube and Inoue 1995). This derogatory attitude affected scholars working on these religions. Morita Masauma, for example, used in the 1920s the categories 'superstition' and 'delusion' as he attempted to interpret the teachings of the founders of the new religions as well as their experience of sublime awe in the face of a god (*kamigakari jōtai* 神懸かり状態).<sup>4</sup> The lasting influence of this pejorative attitude towards the new religions is obvious in the term *shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教 (newly established religions) that is used in Japanese religious studies. Because it was frequently equated with 'superstition', this term has a negative connotation (see Shimazono 1994). By the end of the 1970s,

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<sup>4</sup> For this and other examples, see Laube and Inoue 1995.

it had been replaced in the literature by the neutral term *shinshūkyō*, 'new religions'. This term had established itself by the mid-1980s as a descriptive category in the field, even though its use can lead to misunderstandings, as I have shown. The first non-biased studies of new religions were published in the mid-1950s. These studies chiefly considered questions about the origins, histories, and teachings of the new religions; their relationships with 'popular beliefs'; and sociological aspects of the new religions, such as conversion and the social class of the members. Pioneers in the research of new religions include Murakami Shigeyoshi, Takagi Hirō, and Morioka Kiyomi (Inoue 1991).

As this short list makes clear, those questions typically asked about Western NRMs or 'cults' dominated scholarly inquiry into the Japanese new religions. Increasingly, however, scholars began to challenge these prior methods, arguing that older terms and theories could not do justice to the religions they purported to explain. As a result, scholars began to change their approaches: since at least the late 1970s, the tone of the scholarly debates over these religions has ranged from sympathetic to fascinated. Researchers adopted terms like 'shamanism' or 'magic' in detailing their analytical categories (Reader 1989), though they seldom wondered whether these terms truly fit Japanese religions. Because field research was the exception rather than the rule, the taxonomies and categorizations of the religions generally were not empirically supported. Frequently, examinations of the new religions remained stuck on an abstract theoretical level and neglected the actual actors and their notions and concerns. As Shimazono Susumu, one of the few scholars in the older generation to use empirical social science methods in conducting his research on the new religions, stated in a self-critical tone:

Since I began researching the new religions, I have seldom had the opportunity in my research to become acquainted with the members and to actually talk with them. Even though I claim to have conducted research, I have the feeling that I have only scratched the surface [of the research subject]. (Shimazono 1992b: 3)

This is why younger scholars, a portion of whom organized the *Nihon no Shūkyō to Shakai Gakkai* 日本の宗教と社会学会 (Japanese Society for the Study of Religion and Society, JASRS) in 1993, increasingly utilize empirical social science methods in their research.<sup>5</sup> However, in response

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<sup>5</sup> See articles in the journal *Shūkyō to Shakai* (Religion and Society), published by the JASRS.



to demands to be more sensitive towards ‘spirituality’ while conducting research, or to use Western theories more often in the debates about new religions, idealized or strongly Western-biased religious terms and approaches became the norm. It is debatable whether these methods can do justice to Japanese religious actors and their actions.<sup>6</sup> It is clear—with the exception of articles such as for example Levi McLaughlin’s in this volume—there remains a lack of studies dedicated to intensive explorations of the practices of the new religions.

*The Flowering of Religions Since the 1970s*

The end of the 1970s marked the beginning of another period of religious growth in Japan. Publications on religious questions and ‘spirituality’ boomed, and religion became an important component of general societal discourse. Important components of this new phase of religious growth are the newly founded religions called the ‘new new religions’ as well as new consumer oriented religious goods and services.

The religious landscape that has developed in Japan over the last four decades has many parallels with the growth of the New Age in Europe and the United States (see Shimazono in this volume). The spiritual world is characterized by a distinct demand for healing (*iyashi* 癒し). The new religions draw from Japanese traditions, world cultures, and world religions in search of a ‘recipe’ for salvation of the self. Common themes include angels, channeling, theosophy and astrology. A dizzying array of options are offered to practitioners to help them work on themselves or to bring about salvation, ranging from classical psychotherapy to *Aura Soma*, or aromatherapy, to reincarnation therapy. The spiritual world has developed a sizeable public presence in recent years: as Lisette Gebhardt demonstrates in her chapter in this volume, bookstores allocate more and more shelf and display space to publications on the spiritual world. Likewise guidebooks and religious advisers propagate the usefulness of ‘spiritual management’, that is to say, techniques to improve personal skills with the help of religious concepts and practices summarized under the term *seishin*

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Terada Yoshirō’s (2000) manifest for constructivist research of the new religions, or the volume *Supirichuariti o ikiru: Atarashii kizuna o motomete* (Lived Spirituality: For a New Connection), which contains articles demanding a turn towards ‘spirituality’ in religious studies (Kashio 2002). See also the contributions to the workshop “Shinshūkyō kenkyū no kadai to tenbō” (Purposes and Perspectives of a New Religious Studies), Maekawa et al. 2002.

*kyōiku* 精神教育 (education of the spirit). Seichō no Ie and the God Light Association ジーエルエー系諸教団 (GLA) are good examples of new religions that offer special concepts and training programs for companies and managers. Ideas about the spiritual world also have increasing importance and relevance in the areas of health, wellness, and fitness.

The marketing of religious information is part of the massive Japanese media-cultural industry. According to Shimazono, the current popularity of religions is a development driven primarily by the media. Actors are connected more via the mass media than by personal communication (see Shimazono 1996a: 180) and construct their own personal religions based on ideas or practices communicated via television, print media, feature films, and the internet. Inoue Nobutaka stresses that the oft-mentioned 'religious revival' typically takes the form of a media event (Inoue 1992). Religion itself often functions as entertainment or as a means to shape one's lifestyle or articulate one's sense of self. Media and media culture provide the means for the creation of a worldview, values, and identity. Knowledge of religion and religions is only one component of the immense body of concepts broadly available for use in finding orientation and meaning. Nostradamus's prophecies, for example, are discussed on talk shows, while special issues of popular periodicals are dedicated to subjects like reincarnation or near-death experiences and introductions to the world of esoteric Buddhism are published as manga.

### 1. *Recent New Religions*

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw a flourishing of new new religious groups. Agonshū 阿含宗, Hō no Hana Sanpōgyō 法の華三法行, the God Light Association, Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 and Shinnyo-en 真如苑 have either been newly founded or experienced a boom in membership.<sup>7</sup> They successfully recruited a large number of followers who belonged to the younger, urban, well-educated middle class. The Kōfuku no Kagaku (Institute for Research in Happiness; since 2008 the official English name was changed into Happy Science), founded by Ōkawa Ryūhō in 1986, exhibits many typical character traits of the new new religions: it offers a broad range of different publications and elaborately staged events, and combines practices of self-reflection with concepts useful as tools for this-worldly application (Astley 1995). The God Light Association (GLA),

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<sup>7</sup> See the statistics in Shimazono 1992a.

established in 1969 by Takahashi Shinji and currently led by his charismatic daughter Keiko, combines strongly emotionalized rituals with practices of self-cultivation and self-optimization. The GLA ties very successfully into the notions and practices of the spiritual world (see Prohl 1999; Whelan 2007). The Hō no Hana Sanpōkyō, on the other hand, has a very short history: Fukunaga Hōgen, who founded the group in 1987, was convicted of fraud, fined, and imprisoned. The group has since dissolved. As the older new religions became established organizations and lost some of the allure and appeal of being 'new', the new new religions have successfully won former members away from the older new religions.

According to Shimazono, the teachings of more recently founded religions differ from those of the organizations that flourished up to the 1970s. He argues that, while the fight against poverty and sickness played a basic role in the older organizations and showed that the here and now was the center of their concerns, the new new religions have other agendas. Programs like yoga or meditation, which are supposed to bring about extra-ordinary experiences comparable to the experiences promised by the spiritual world, form the center of these new new religions and their practices (Shimazono 1992a). According to some observers, teachings about another world and its influence on the here and now have become increasingly important, as have ideas about life after death (see Shimazono 1995; Numata 1995). These remarks are especially true for Aum Shinrikyō and the GLA. Additionally, the publications of the Agonshū and the Kōfuku no Kagaku dedicate considerable space to ascetic practices and the other world. At the same time, however, a close look at the social practices of the followers of the Agonshū and the Kōfuku no Kagaku reveals that for these organizations, the importance of rituals for this-worldly benefits are not to be underestimated. To take but one example, the burning of *gomagi* 護摩木, small wooden sticks with engraved wishes and concerns, is a central practice of Agonshū.<sup>8</sup>

Scholarly literature details further important differences between the older and the younger new religions. Involvement in the religious activities and services of the older organizations was motivated by a desire to improve the welfare of the whole group. In contrast, members of the recent groups are motivated primarily by their desire to improve their own individual well-being. Members of these groups are seen to have changed from dedicated followers to consumers of religious goods and services, for

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<sup>8</sup> See Reader 1989 for an account of this ritual.

which they have to pay. It is therefore possible to speak of a 'commercialization of the sacred' (*sei no shōgyōka* 聖の商業化) (Ōzawa et al. 1996).

This statement cannot be used generally, however. Members of the GLA, for example, express a strong desire to improve the group's well-being by their voluntary service. It is obvious that attempts to describe appropriately the new new religions are sometimes one-sided and based only on the analysis of their texts. These studies remain marked by a tendency toward taxonomies employing inadequate categories, like 'belief' and 'magic' (Nishiyama 1988; Nagai 1995). Although these assessments do give important clues into the religions, it is still necessary to test these insights against the social reality of the religion. This need for differentiation is even more important since it has become clear that the Aum Shinrikyō, heretofore depicted as typical of the new new religions, has proven to be a phenomenon wholly different in many aspects from the other new new religions.

#### *Excursus: Aum Shinrikyō*

Aum Shinrikyō's treacherous poison gas attack in the Tokyo subway on March 20, 1995, which killed twelve and injured thousands, many badly, focused national and international attention on the religions in Japan. Bit by bit, it became clear that Aum had conducted a number of violent acts dating back to the 1980s. Apparently, Aum wished to start a world war and elicited huge donations in order to finance an enormous arsenal. They also experimented with biological and chemical weapons and illegally produced poison gas. Following the attack, which shook Japanese society as did no other event in the second half of the twentieth century, a fierce debate raged over how it was possible that religiously legitimized violence could be used in a religious organization that some scholars held to be Buddhist-oriented. Since then, numerous books have been written, and many special issues of various periodicals published, discussing the history of Aum, its leader, Asahara Shōkō, its teachings and practices, and the developments that led it to use a weapon of mass destruction in the name of religion. The bulk of this literature is in Japanese; one of the most important Japanese works is Shimazono Susumu's *Gendai shūkyō no kanōsei: Oumu shinrikyō to bōryoku* 現代宗教の可能性: オウム心理教と暴力 (The Potential of Current Religions: Aum Shinrikyō and Violence, 1997). Comprehensive analyses in Western languages include Ian Reader's *Religion and Violence in Contemporary Japan* (2000) and a volume edited

by Robert Kisala and Mark Mullins, entitled *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society through the Aum Affair* (2001).

As a consequence of the Aum affair, several amendments were made to the Religious Corporation Law in 1995. All religions now must be registered with the Ministry of Education, and they must be more financially transparent. The Ministry's advisory board, the Religious Corporations Council, expanded and was given increased authority to investigate religions suspected of violating the law (Kisala 1997; see also Dorman 2004). In 1995, Aum Shinrikyō lost its legal status as a religious corporation. Some former members reformed in 2000 under the name Aleph. Jōyū Fumihiko, former press secretary of the Aum Shinrikyō and one of the few former leaders of the group not to be prosecuted, led this successor organization until 2007 when he broke with Aleph and started another successor organization called Hikari no Wa ひかりの輪. In the same year, the Japanese media began to report extensively on a theretofore unknown new religion, Pana Wave (*Pana Uēbu* パナウエーブ). This group centers its teachings on the dangers and damaging influence of electromagnetic radiation. When white-robed members convoyed through Japan seeking a location where they could be safe from this radiation, they aroused public mistrust and kicked off a short-lived 'post Aum Shinrikyō moral panic' (Dorman 2005).

The Aum affair's aftermath remains clearly visible. One notable consequence is the fact that the affair shook belief in the myth of harmony and homogeneity as a typical characteristic of Japan (Reader 2002). The affair also bestowed a negative image on the other new religions, regardless of their size. A further consequence of the affair is an erosion of trust toward religious studies, since some scholars of religion had held Aum in a very positive light before the attack. Following the attack, as suspicion fell more and more on Aum, numerous scholars of religion with a tendency to see new religions as generic targets for slander and defamation travelled to Japan to observe the proceedings (see Reader 2008). Given the field's inglorious performance where Aum was concerned, there are currently relatively few studies of the new new religions. Far worse, though, is the fact that contemporary Japanese society has neither neutral coverage nor extensive informed debate about the new religions or about religion in general.

### *New New Religions, the Media, and Hybridizations*

One of the major common traits of the recent new religions is their virtuosic use of the mass media and modern communication devices and

methods. Mass missionizing via the use of radios, 'film adaptations of belief', satellite broadcasting, and the early adoption of computers has a long tradition in the history of the new religions (Ishii 1996). More recent groups carry on this 'tradition'. Important speaking events and rituals are broadcast via satellite to the regional meeting places of the Agonshū, World Mate and Shinnyoen. The new religions typically have their own publishing houses, which they use to produce and sell their texts, videos and cassettes, and information and advertising materials. Ōkawa Ryūhō, founder of the Kōfuku no Kagaku, published more than 150 books in only four years in this way; these books sold over four million copies (Astley 1995). Some of the most recent new religions hire professional advertisement agencies to manage larger campaigns. Agonshū, for example, hired Dentsu, one of the most powerful advertising agencies in Japan, for several such campaigns.

The recent new religions and their activities are also alike in their tendencies to hybridize their teachings. Their founders drew on Japanese religious history, Christian ideas, Tibetan and South-Asian Buddhism, and Hinduism. Important sources of inspiration are the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, Nostradamus, and Theosophy, as well as astrological ideas, speculations about lost cultures such as Mu or Atlantis, and speculations about Jesus Christ and the Jews. These groups also use psychological approaches and teachings promoting positive thinking to help spread their vision of the spiritual world. Many of the more recent religions have an acute sense of an impending crisis and a clear understanding of the role as a chosen group and the part their teachings and practices will play in helping save humanity from the cataclysm. Kiriya Seiyū, founder of Agonshū, and Fukunaga Hōgen, leader of the Hō no Hana Sanpōgyō, spent much of the 1990s stressing an imminent catastrophe during the transit into the new millennium. As we saw earlier, Asahara Shōkō prophesied an Armageddon, which Aum followers finally tried to bring about themselves. Also in the 1990s, Ōkawa Ryūhō claimed that he was able to see signs of an impending crisis facing humanity.

### *New, New New Religions and National Self-Assertion*

The majority of the new new religions are marked by a strong nationalist undertone with a universal claim to salvation. The starting point for universal salvation teachings, Japan is assigned an important role for the rescue of humanity. The writings of Kiriya Seiyū, founder of Agonshū,

exemplify this attitude. According to Kiriya (1981), the disasters and catastrophes that he predicted would occur at the end of the twentieth century would be caused by humankind's collective karma, including that of all of the spirits of the dead who remain unsettled and cause unrest. Kiriya claims to have discovered in the Agon Sutras rituals that will bring rest to these spirits, and hence eradicate humankind's negative karma. At the same time, these rituals are held to be able to reduce an individual's bad karma and to access divine energy for worldly concerns. These discoveries, together with potent symbols—a Buddha relic from Sri Lanka and a spiritual transmission said to be from the Buddha himself—stand at the center of the proclaimed 'mission to the world' and legitimate the restoration of the 'original Buddhism' of Agonshū that will spread from Japan across the whole world.

The universalizing dimension of Agonshū's mission notwithstanding, it is possible to discern a rather nationalistic and Japan-centered undertone. This tendency can be seen both in the assertion that Japan was to be the new centre of Buddhism and also in the fact that the group's principal event, the Star Festival (*hoshi matsuri* 星祭り), is held on a public holiday. The timing is clearly designed to maximize public attendance. The festival occurs on Constitution Day, February 11, a date that previously marked National Foundation Day when, according to Shintō mythology, Jinmu Tennō, the legendary first emperor of Japan and descendant of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu 天照, descended to earth to create Japan. The flags and speeches disclose nationalist imagery and undertones of the festival. Announcements made in foreign languages are directed towards the Japanese participants in order to demonstrate Agonshū's universal mission. The festival's goal is to reduce collective karma while simultaneously offering a wide range of rituals for worldly benefits for its members. Its universal meaning is thus tied to individual needs and concerns. In his analysis of the festival Reader concludes:

... the festival reflects a central theme in Agonshū's dynamic, in which the movement affirms a particularistic focus of Japanese identity framed around major nationalist symbols, and strengthens that message in the eyes of its followers by placing it in the context of a universal message. Agonshū's followers can, by participating in its festivals and rituals, 'touch base' with the roots of their culture and affirm the unity of their faith and national sense of belonging, yet also feel they are doing 'something' for world peace and harmony: they are taking part of a mission to save the world and spread Agonshū's newly revived Buddhism across the globe, while emphasizing the centrality of Japan and of their identity as Japanese in the process. (Reader 2002: 21)

Agonshū's assertion that it teaches a new form of Buddhism, one that will bring about universal salvation, is not unique in twenty-first century Japan. Such claims have been an important feature in the rhetoric of several of the new new religions (see Shimazono 1993 and Reader 2002). Some of the older religions also link together particularistic and universal themes, often strongly underpinned by a potent nationalist agenda, as do, for instance, the Mahikari 真光 (see Cornille 1999). Another older new religion, the Byakkō Shinkōkai 白光真宏会, expresses its concerns for world peace through its rituals and prayers in order to enable its Japanese members to adjust to the fact that they are not the only inhabitants on earth (see Pye 1986). This movement stresses the fact that the wartime experiences of the Japanese makes them uniquely equipped to bring about peace on earth. Its universalism is thus linked to an affirmation of Japanese uniqueness (see Kisala 1999). Also, as the popular writer and scholar Ian Buruma notes, many Japanese feel a special vocation to act as prophets for peace outside of the new religions as well (Buruma 1994).

*'Fraudulent Trade Methods in the Name of Religion'?*

Complaints about 'fraudulent trade methods in the name of religion' (*shūkyō meimoku ni yoru akutoku shōhō* 宗教名目による悪徳商法) in Japan have increased since the 1980s. Collectively, those negatively regarded practices are also called *reikan shōbai* 靈感商売 (business with ghost diagnosis) or *reishi shōbai* 靈視商売 (business with visionary abilities) (see Yamaguchi 1996). In recent years, complaints were raised mainly against companies that specialized in religious merchandise sold at high prices. These objects include *inkan* 印鑑 (name stamps), *nenju* 念珠 (prayer beads), and other religious objects deemed especially powerful and important in the context of rituals for the ancestors. Disreputable companies used flyers, newspaper ads, and door-to-door visits to tout their ability to trace bad luck and problems back to the influence of angry ancestors. They advertise these religious goods as being effective means of protection against potentially harmful spiritual influences. In some cases, rituals for aborted fetuses (*miz-uko kuyō* 水子供養) are included among these fraudulent business dealings conducted in the name of religion. Two other questionable practices that deserve mention are the sale of special memorial rituals (*kuyō* 供養) and the practice of changing one's name to neutralize bad karma.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> One of the first and best-known businessmen trading in religious goods is Nishikawa Gishun, founder of the Myōgakuji Network and the Hongakuji 本岳寺 temple in Ibaraki



In the 1990s, multiple new religions began to imitate these offers and advertising methods. The Unification Church (Tōitsukyōkai 統一教会, see Gōro 1993), Hō no Hana Sanpōgyō, and the Church of Scientology are the most prominent targets for this criticism, but the Kōfuku no Kagaku and World Mate have also received attention in this context. Typical strategies of persuasion are also employed during self-awareness seminars and by fortune-tellers and healers.<sup>10</sup> As lawyers hired by injured parties to seek damages argue, they cannot use the teachings of the religion in question in order to prove premeditated fraud or to find criminal wrongdoing, since those teachings fall under protections extended by statutory religious freedom. In order to show damages, they must look more closely at selling methods, and so the lawyers have devised a series of criteria that can be used to identify fraudulent business methods carried out in the name of religion.

Lawyers belonging to a network that emphasizes religion and consumer affairs note that the providers in question target a certain group of people that have been shown to be especially receptive to religious offers.<sup>11</sup> These include widowed mothers, parents whose children suffer from disease or handicaps, members of medical and social professional groups that are suffering from some unique stress, and people who are completely alone. The providers systematically try to stimulate these people's interest using advertisements and door-to-door visits, frequently engaging in methods of hidden dialogue marketing. Using a pretense to initiate a conversation with a potential customer, the seller works to gradually change the subject to the concerns or fears of their target in order to highlight the salvific nature of their products.

Also characteristic of this aggressive approach, and sometimes noted in marketing handbooks, is the very sophisticated rhetoric employed by the providers, a distinctive feature of which is the mix of attentiveness and courtesy with small bursts of attempts at intimidation. The lawyers argue that this rhetoric tries to scare potential customers and make them feel

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Prefecture. He wrote a handbook on religious rhetoric that gave detailed instructions on how to get potential users to buy religious rituals for the ancestors. See *Asahi Shinbun Weekly AERA* 1995.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview, see the volume *Sennō saretai: Maindo bijinesu no tenkoku to jigoku* (I Want Brainwashing! Heaven and Hell of the Business with Heart and Soul), part of the series *Bessatsu Takarajima* (1997).

<sup>11</sup> In order to react appropriately to complaints, the Network of the Lawyers Group on Religion and Consumers (Shūkyō to shōhisha bengodan nettowāku 宗教と消費者弁護団 ネットワーク) was founded. For more information on this group and some of their cases, see Shūkyō to shōhisha bengodan nettowāku (1996).

insecure. This intimidation is especially problematic when it is considered in light of the fees the providers demand, which in the best cases tends to be several tens of thousands of yen, but can range as high as several million yen.

Apart from these individual cases, however, there is no reason to assume that the new religions, their programs, or their fee systems are out of step with the generally accepted norms of Japanese society. In light of the relatively high per capita income in Japan, when considered alongside the promised results, such as health, good luck, and success, the financial costs of the religious goods and services are justified, at least in the eyes of the consumers. These consumers share the widespread opinion that one can only expect a reaction from the gods if one has demonstrated their sincere desire by way of an appropriate gift.

Many of the new religions also use advertising strategies employed by secular companies. The promises that new religions and big corporations make are strikingly similar: they both promise satisfaction, physical well being, and success. The means people use in order to realize those desires are based on shared social conventions, be that consuming goods, using medical devices or seeking help from the world of the gods. In the case of religion, factors like physical and spiritual cleansing, the influence of spirits, and a grateful attitude toward godly benefactors are accepted means of trying to realize these goals, at least latently. The programs offered by the new religions are thus in line with general social practices.

*Religious Practice in the New Religions: World Mate's Iyasaka-Ritual  
as a Case Study*

Fukami Tōshū founded World Mate in the mid-1980s. World Mate claims to derive from Shintō, and in comparison with other new religions, such as the above-mentioned Sōka Gakkai, World Mate is a small organization. It claims 34,000 members in over 100 subsidiaries throughout Japan. Through his publications and various other activities, however, Fukami and the organization are reaching a wider audience. Fukami's best-selling book *Lucky Fortune* sold nearly a million copies worldwide, for example.

World Mate displays many characteristics typical of the new new religions: they offer supporters a plethora of activities and goods, such as group pilgrimages, rituals for accessing divine energy for worldly concerns, and a colorful palette of devotional wares. There have also been a couple of scandalous stories involving the group's founder, Fukami Tōshū,

alleging his involvement in various illicit business and sexual affairs combined with accusations of tax evasion. As a result, these issues have aroused media interest in the group. Relatively unaffected by negative media coverage, many members of World Mate meet daily for the *iyasaka* ritual, which is performed every evening in each of the group's more than 100 branches. Drawing on field research I conducted on World Mate, I will describe this ritual in greater detail in order to highlight the mechanisms and effects of regular ritual practices that have become so central to new religions (Prohl 2006).

The *iyasaka* ritual, whose Japanese name, *iyasaka no gi* 弥栄の儀, can be translated as 'the ceremony to increase wealth', follows a complex liturgy. After ritually cleaning the hands and mouth and pausing briefly, participants kneel in a position called *seiza* 静座 before the Shintō altar in their meeting location. During the ritual, which lasts for roughly sixty minutes, the actors kneel largely motionless, their stillness broken by sporadic bowing and joint hand-clapping. They recite collectively a number of syllables and texts, including the syllables *so o a e i, su mi no e no* (*kotodama okoshi* 言霊起こし, or 'awakening religious powers manifest in words'); they repeat a prayer called the *Amatsu Norito* 天津祝詞 three times, invoking the name of the supreme sun deity, Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神, and the prayer of great purification, the *Ōbarai Norito* 大祓祝詞. Deities are also called upon, such as the trio of Sumera Ōkami 皇大神, Sumera Mikoto 皇命, and Sumera Mikuni 皇御国. In the middle of the ritual, members pray silently to what World Mate considers the highest god *Su*, as well as local gods and spirits that provide protection.

Participants half of them women and half of them men are very devoted to the common chanting of the texts and deities' names, and allow themselves to be carried away by the sound of the syllables and the rhythm of the intonations. While praying, they fold their hands before their chests and whisper messages to the gods in their own words. At the end of the ritual, participants try to stand and stretch out their legs, which have grown stiff and immobile from holding the kneeling *seiza* position for an hour. Despite this discomfort, their faces radiate happiness and relaxation. Everyone appears satisfied to have participated in the ritual; more than this, when asked how they felt afterwards, individuals answered that they felt 'replenished' (*rifuresshu shita* リフレッシュした) and 'relaxed' (*rirak-kusu shita* リラックスした). "It is a good feeling to have renewed our connections with the gods through this ritual," they said. They felt close to their gods and powers and were satisfied to have proven their obedience and trust. Although the majority of them did complain about the

pain and numbness in their feet and legs that the *seiza* position caused, they nevertheless persevered through the discomfort to see the ritual to its completion. With the help of the gods, they said they were able to make it through the long recitations and thereby built up contact with the gods and felt their power. In contrast to the colorful outside of World Mate's local meeting locations, the *iyasaka no gi* gives those present an experience of interaction with the gods and gives them the feeling that they belong to a special group of religious people. The ritual also gives them the strength and courage to cope with the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives.

Almost none of the participants I spoke with were capable of explaining the intoned texts, the *Amatsu* Norito or the *Ōbarai* Norito. Though most individuals recognize the prayers as coming from traditional Shintō texts that 'seem familiar', they do not understand their meanings. Nor can they explain the meaning of the other recitations. According to World Mate's brochures, the *iyasaka* ritual that has been performed every evening since 1990 and originated in a secret divine message given to Fukami. Daily participation in the ritual is supposed to increase the power of 'religious perception' (*reikaku* 靈覺) and increase godly virtue (*shintoku* 神徳). By continually participating in the ritual, the actor's entire life, including their professional and everyday private life, is supposed to reorient, turning the individual's life into a location of service to the gods. According to the brochures, continuously performing this ritual accustoms actors to daily prayer and empowers them to absorb the *kotodama*, "the effective religious power of the words."<sup>12</sup> The *Ōbarai* Norito<sup>13</sup> and the *Amatsu* Norito<sup>14</sup> are deemed particularly capable of endowing this power.

The Norito prayers, which are written and recited in the language of tenth-century Japan, are mostly incomprehensible to participants. Philippi characterized the characteristic style of a Norito as follows:

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<sup>12</sup> The notion of *kotodama* plays an important role in the Japanese religions (see Naumann 1988). World Mate professes a belief in the supernatural power of certain syllables.

<sup>13</sup> The *Ōbarai* Norito as used by the World Mate is based on the texts of the *Ōbarae/Ōharae* Norito, which was written down in the ceremonial book *Engishiki* 延喜式 (927). Currently, it is used in cleansing rituals in shrines (see Nelson 1996) and in Shintoist new religions like Kurozumikyō (see Hardacre 1986).

<sup>14</sup> The *Amatsu* Norito is a short version of the *Ōbarai* Norito (see Miyaji and Saeki 1937: 1:43–44). It currently is used in a series of Shintoist new religions like the Mahikari (see Davis 1980) and the Seikai Kyūsei Kyō 世界救世教.

The rituals are cast in antique language of the most flowery sort. Sentences are long and loosely constructed; the grammatical relationship of parts is difficult to determine; the meaning of many words is unclear and everywhere semantic clarity is sacrificed to sonority. (1990: 1)

While reciting the Norito, the actors glean flashes of meaning from the texts via words that they do know, such as *yahoyorozu no kami* (more commonly, *yaoyorozu no kami* 八百万の神, the eight million Japanese gods and goddesses), *takaamahara* (*takamagahara* 高天原, high heavenly realms) or *tsumi* 罪 (an action that violates social norms and order). Participants perceive the text mainly by its sound and rhythm, while participants who read the Norito aloud are able to understand more of their meanings by recognizing some familiar kanji characters. Even if they comprehend the semantics of single words, however, the totality of the text's meaning remains concealed.

Single words, together with the style of the text, raise associations with Shintō and with ancient Japanese traditions. The recitations evoke thoughts about the emperor and the special purpose bestowed on Japan as a 'country of the gods'. These thoughts intermingle with the Norito's rhythms and sounds, which are especially associated with Shintō. Through the Norito, participants build a connection to Japanese antiquity, revered for its religious superiority, as well as to a mystified Shintō and to the holy territory of their nation. Intoning Amaterasu's name along with those of the most important gods and the call upon the deities trio of Sumera Ōkami, Sumera Mikoto, and Sumera Mikuni with which the ritual concludes, reinforces these associations. The intonations thus give the actors a sensory 'return to Japan'.

The ritual also includes the recitation of monthly maxims composed by Fukami himself, such as "*Charenji o yamereba mitama no chikara nae, yokoshimagokoro to nayami dete kuru*" (lit. 'by avoiding a challenge, the power of the soul runs dry, and an evil heart and suffering will come').<sup>15</sup> The monthly maxims are catchy expressions of general life wisdom used to interpret and balance the problems and conflicts within the individual, providing a type of counseling that complements the other components of the *iyasaka* ritual. Embedded in 'echoes' to allegedly ancient Japanese religious traditions, participants are given the opportunity to address their individual desires and requests to the gods. As Reader and Tanabe state

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<sup>15</sup> From a leaflet of World Mate, n.d.

in their studies of 'this worldly benefits' (*genze riyaku*) the World Mate *iyasaka* ritual does not demand any reflection or 'cognitive belief' (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 129). It is based on an 'emotional belief', and need not be logical. The practice forms its own core, a statement that holds true for the *iyasaka* ritual as a whole: the religious practice functions without knowledge of the meaning or the sense of the ritual acts performed. This observation fits many practices of the new and new new religions.

### *Conclusion*

Many characteristics of World Mate's nightly ritual can be found in the rituals of other new and new new Japanese religions. One element shared by these religions is the connection between the familiar topoi of religious ideas and practices and their actualization; another is the connection between individual and collective concerns. Yet another widespread commonality among the new religions is the integration of individual concerns with larger questions of salvation and the concomitant process of internalization via the integration of body and soul. World Mate's evening ritual is a singular example of the way ideas can be mobilized both cognitively and sensually to initiate a religious transformation.

Regardless of whether the new religions are identified as 'Buddhist' or 'Shintoist', their practices tend to function in a similar way. Flexible, polythetic manipulation of semantic contents is legitimized by numerous strategies conveying plausible religious messages that have been established over the course of Japanese history. Revelations and dreams, awe of the gods, or the discovery of new messages in traditional texts are all characteristics of these strategies. The ease with which religious messages are made plausible enables the religions both to adapt swiftly to demands placed on them by religious actors and to articulate new concepts and initiate new practices, such as incorporating elements from Christian history or from the New Age. As a result, many of the new religions offer rituals that mix problem-solving and empowerment, giving actors access to this-worldly benefits. In most cases, these rituals are embedded in concepts of individual self-cultivation and participation in the realization of a universal salvation. These concepts of individual and collective salvation are complemented by multi-faceted activities that give participants social and cultural benefits, recreation, and delight.

At first glance, there appear to be significant differences in the notions and practices of the new religions, and although there are in fact many

shared patterns, not all of the religions follow the same traits. As the example of Aum Shinrikyō shows, the discrepancies can be large indeed. Future scholars and studies will need to employ a strategic and targeted mix of qualitative and quantitative studies in order to delineate more precisely the similarities and differences among the new religions. As we have seen, it is not possible to come to grips with the new religions using the established ideas and categories of religious studies. The fascinating field of the new religions in Japan is therefore an exciting but real challenge for the study of contemporary religions and, by extension, the idea of 'religion' itself.

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## SŌKA GAKKAI IN JAPAN

LEVI MCLAUGHLIN

This chapter discusses the contemporary characteristics and historical development of Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, or the ‘Value Creation Study Association’, a group that began in 1930s Japan as a society of educators and grew into a postwar religious mass movement. Sōka Gakkai is now not only Japan’s largest collective of religious adherents; it is most likely the largest mass movement in Japanese history. Today, the group has a self-declared membership of 8.27 million households in Japan and more than 1.5 million adherents in 192 countries abroad under its overseas umbrella organization Soka Gakkai International, or SGI.<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship challenges these figures and points to a figure in the neighborhood of two percent of the Japanese population.<sup>2</sup> Yet even allowing for the certain

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<sup>1</sup> The most detailed sources for Sōka Gakkai membership numbers are the group’s website and its published public relations materials. See Sōka Gakkai, “Gaiyō,” and its own *Sōka gakkai seikatsu hōkoku* 創価学会生活報告 issued by the Sōka Gakkai Public Relations Bureau at the organization’s headquarters in Shinanomachi, Tokyo. Assessing the Gakkai membership is otherwise difficult, as Sōka Gakkai does not report its membership to the national government, and its membership statistics do not appear in the *Shūkyō nenkan* 宗教年鑑, the annual report on religious affiliation released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). Scholars of Japanese religion have pointed to other ways to assess Sōka Gakkai’s membership. Shimazono Susumu cites a survey of 32,000 people in Japan on religious affiliation taken by a research institute within Japan’s national broadcast company NHK in 1978 in which a total of 3.3% of respondents claimed that they were Sōka Gakkai members. This figure appears to have been (and to still be) in line with a realistic assessment of the number of Gakkai adherents in Japan (see Shimazono 2003: 18–19). More recently, Michael Roemer has reassessed quantitative accounts of religious membership in Japan to provide the most sophisticated view to date of individual religious belief in contemporary Japan. He finds that 4.32% of respondents to surveys conducted from 2000 claim to believe in ‘Buddhism’, 3.19% are followers of a ‘new religion’, and 1.87% self-identify as Sōka Gakkai adherents (see Roemer’s chapter in this volume).

<sup>2</sup> While other large-scale Japanese religious organizations may have huge numbers of registered members, few are exclusive sects with adherents whose personal identities are rooted in group membership. Though Shintō organizations and traditional Buddhist sects, such as Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 and Zen 禅 denominations, claim registered memberships with numbers that approach Sōka Gakkai’s, most of those registered maintain parishioner status purely as a formality. Sōka Gakkai’s membership numbers also far exceed those of other so-called ‘new religions’; Rishshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, also a lay Nichiren Buddhist movement, claimed 4,585,652 Japanese members in 2005, and its predecessor Reiyūkai just over 1.6 million. The only other non-state Japanese organizations that are comparable with Sōka Gakkai in terms of numbers, active memberships, and group solidarity are labor

exaggeration of its reported membership figure, possibly by more than an order of magnitude, and even taking into account frank admissions by members that only roughly twenty percent of their stated membership can be characterized as ‘active’, one can still surmise that every person in Japan is either acquainted with a member, related to a member, or *is* a member of Sōka Gakkai.<sup>3</sup> Few other organizations of any type in Japan have come close to matching Sōka Gakkai’s success in building a distinct, autonomous, and centrally-administered group with committed members in every community, at every socioeconomic level and in every sphere of vocational, social, and civic life.

Sōka Gakkai is commonly understood as a lay Buddhist movement. The group began as a lay association under the temple Buddhist denomination Nichiren Shōshū. Nichiren Shōshū, or ‘Nichiren true sect’, follows the teachings of Nichiren (1222–1282), a medieval Buddhist reformer. Trained primarily in the Tendai tradition, Nichiren broke away early in his life from established temples to preach that only faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* (held to be the historical Buddha Śākyamuni’s final teaching) and the practice of chanting the title of the *Lotus* in the seven-syllable formula *namu myōhō renga kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經 (known as the *daimoku* 題目) were effective means of achieving salvation in *mappō* 末法, the degraded Latter Days of the Buddha’s Dharma. Nichiren reviled other Buddhist traditions, castigating their ‘false sects’ and ‘evil monks’. He petitioned the military government in Kamakura to abandon support of other temples and otherwise challenged the established order of the day, leading the authorities to exile and attempt to execute him. In willingly undergoing persecution, Nichiren established a model of Buddhist martyrdom that has inspired religious clerics and lay followers since the thirteenth century. Nichiren’s strength of conviction, his triumph over adversities, and his lifelong attention to lay adherents have all contributed to a thriving, centuries-long tradition of Nichiren-based Buddhism in Japan. In addition

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unions. Yet even the largest labor organizations, such as the Seikatsu Kyōdō Kumiai 生活協同組合, which rivals Sōka Gakkai’s numbers with a reported twenty million affiliates, do not and have never mobilized their members with anything approaching Sōka Gakkai’s focus and drive. See Shimada 2004: 13–16; Bunkachō 2005.

<sup>3</sup> My observations to date match the figure of 20% attendance/participation mentioned to me independently by members in both Kantō (Tokyo area in the east) and Kansai (Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto region in the west). The local district meetings (*chiku zadankai* 地区座談会) that I attended as a participant observer in Chiba Prefecture (next to Tokyo) between 2000 and 2004 reported just over 90 members and had between 16 and 20 regular attendees.

to several Nichiren temple lineages, several others of Japan's largest 'new religions' (primarily lay-centered groups founded in the last two hundred years) are based in Nichiren Buddhism, including Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, Reiyūkai 霊友会, Kokuchūkai 国柱会, Honmon Butsurūyūshū 本門佛立宗, and Fuji Taisekiji Kenshōkai 富士大石寺顕正会.

### *Sōka Gakkai's 'Twin Legacies'*

Though Sōka Gakkai is commonly characterized as a lay movement within the Nichiren Shōshū Buddhist tradition, it is much more than a Buddhist organization and is instead heir to what I characterize as 'twin legacies'. These are (1) a tradition of self-cultivation through the practice of Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism, and (2) intellectual currents that flourished in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in Japan valorizing education, pedagogy, and humanism, inspired by modern Euro-American liberal thought and aesthetic traditions. The conflation of these two legacies continues to shape the commitments and expressive idioms of Sōka Gakkai members today, and the fusion of Japanese Buddhism and post-Enlightenment modernism have given rise to the institutions and practices that make up contemporary Sōka Gakkai life.

Members of Sōka Gakkai maintain traditional Buddhist practices and uphold specific attitudes and doctrines in keeping with the Nichiren Shōshū teachings. Principal among these are:

- 1) Chanting. Members intone morning and evening prayers in front of their home altars in a chanting performance called *gongyō* 勤行, literally 'to exert oneself in practice'. The twice-daily chant includes Chapter Two, "Expedient Means" (*hōben* 方便), and sections of Chapter Sixteen, "Life Span" (*juryō* 寿量), of the *Lotus Sūtra*, long regarded in traditional exegesis as the *Sūtra's* two most important chapters. The *sūtra* sections are followed by repeated incantation of the title of the *Lotus*, called the *daimoku*, which consists of the seven syllables *namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*, and by silent prayers.
- 2) Reverence for the *daigohonzon* 大御本尊. This is the 'great object of worship', a calligraphic mandala said to have been inscribed by Nichiren on the twelfth day of the tenth month of 1279 for the sake of all humanity. Membership in Sōka Gakkai is confirmed by the reception of a *gohonzon* 御本尊, a replica of the *daigohonzon* that is enshrined in members' homes and chanted to twice daily through *gongyō*.

- 3) Conversion activities known as *shakubuku* 折伏. *Shakubuku* might be translated as ‘to break and subdue [attachment to inferior teachings]’. It was promoted by Nichiren as the only practice appropriate for nations (such as Japan) that slander the Dharma. Recent decades have seen Sōka Gakkai, especially its international wing SGI, claim that members have been encouraged to move away from *shakubuku* in favor of *shōju* 撰受, the other form of proselytization promoted in the Nichiren tradition of gentle suasion through reasoned argument. However, so far in over a decade spent researching Sōka Gakkai, I have never heard members in Japan use the word *shōju* or speak of the act of converting others to Sōka Gakkai in anything other than terms of *shakubuku*, although interpretations of that term have shifted considerably.
- 4) The mission of *kōsen rufu* 広宣流布, which calls for the spread of the *Lotus* in the time of *mappō* 末法, the latter day of the Buddha’s Dharma. *Kōsen rufu* could be translated literally as ‘to widely declare and spread [the truth of the *Lotus Sūtra*]’. The term is employed within Sōka Gakkai as a means of describing any activities that promote the organization’s practice or the growth of the institution. Over the course of its history, Sōka Gakkai has gradually shifted its interpretation of *kōsen rufu* from aggressive conversion of all to conversion of one third of the citizens of Japan to the current interpretation of *kōsen rufu* as a blanket term for all conversion efforts, including dialogue.
- 5) Belief that the present age is *mappō*, the latter days of the Buddha’s Dharma. This belief is derived from a historical conception that emerged in East Asian Buddhism that divided history following the Buddha Śākyamuni into three eras. The three stages are the age of *shōbō* 正法, or ‘true Dharma’; the age of *zōhō* 像法, or ‘semblance Dharma’; and then the final age of *mappō*. Sōka Gakkai members uphold Nichiren’s belief that the only means of salvation in *mappō* (believed to have begun in 1052 CE) is to embrace the *Lotus Sūtra* and reject all other teachings as false.<sup>4</sup>
- 6) Reverence for Nichiren and his writings. Followers in the Nichiren Shōshū tradition, including members of Sōka Gakkai, regard Nichiren as the earthly avatar of the eternal or original Buddha, who is also the Buddha of the age of *mappō*.<sup>5</sup> As such, his writings are considered by

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of this historicization, see Jan Nattier 1991: 65–118. Also see Jacqueline Stone 1999: 383–84n139.

<sup>5</sup> This is a distinctive doctrine of Nichiren Shōshū, not held by other Nichiren lineages. See Stone 1999: 340–42.

Gakkai followers to bear scriptural authority surpassing even that of the *sūtras* of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and his attitudes and actions are taken as exemplary models to be emulated.

Sōka Gakkai has, however, developed into an organization that includes a great deal more than Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism. Many aspects of Sōka Gakkai reflect its origins as a movement inspired by modern ideals and institutional practices. For example, the Gakkai is led by an Honorary President and the organization is maintained by bureaucrats—a president, vice-presidents, division chiefs, and the like—who occupy posts within a complex hierarchical bureaucracy. In other words, Sōka Gakkai's administration is not modeled on that of a temple-based lay Buddhist society but the leadership structure of a modern corporation, civil service, or military. Within its bureaucracy, Gakkai members are grouped according to age, sex, marital status, geographical location, vocation, and many other statistical subdivisions. Proceeding from youngest to eldest memberships, the largest and most basic divisions are the Future Division (up to the age of eighteen or high school graduation), Young Men's and Young Women's Divisions (from age eighteen to forty, or until marriage if women), and Men's and Married Women's Divisions. The most prominent public face of the Sōka Gakkai institution is its political party Kōmeitō 公明党, an organization now technically separate from Sōka Gakkai that remains integrated into the devotional lives of Gakkai members, and Sōka Gakkai also maintains an international political presence as a registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with the United Nations.

Some of the most important Gakkai member activities that originate outside Buddhist tradition include the following:

- 1) Study meetings: Local Gakkai members meet at member homes not for Buddhist study *per se* but at *zadankai* 座談会, monthly 'discussion meetings' or 'study roundtables'. *Zadankai* is a term that usually describes a gathering of scholars, and it was the word used to describe the meetings of the Gakkai when it began as a group of intellectuals concerned with educational reform. Members otherwise gather not at temples but at Culture Centers for larger meetings and to attend satellite broadcasts that feature speeches by Honorary President Ikeda.
- 2) Political campaigns: A major component of devoted members' practice is electioneering on behalf of Kōmeitō candidates. Sōka Gakkai maintains Japan's only viable grassroots electioneering network, a massive collective of committed adherents powered primarily by the Married

Women's Division who canvass for Kōmeitō candidates in all elections, from local town councils to races for seats in the National Diet. Kōmeitō and Sōka Gakkai have been formally separate entities since 1970. However, many local Gakkai members do not distinguish clearly between the agendas of the two organizations, and most committed members include campaigning for Kōmeitō as part of their faith-driven activities.

- 3) Gathering subscriptions for Gakkai publications: Sōka Gakkai members regularly solicit friends, relatives, acquaintances, and each other to sign up to receive periodicals such as the daily Gakkai newspaper *Seikyō Shinbun* 聖教新聞 as well as books, DVDs and other media produced by the organization's many publication houses. Sōka Gakkai calls the practice of soliciting for its newspaper *Shinbun Keimō* 新聞啓蒙, or 'newspaper enlightenment', using the European (not the Buddhist) term for 'enlightenment' (*keimō*) to celebrate the awakening of new readers to the Gakkai.

In addition, Sōka Gakkai maintains subsidiary institutions that appear inspired less by medieval Buddhist precedents than by modern innovations. These include:

- 1) A media empire: The last several decades have seen the rise of Sōka Gakkai's publishing empire, which includes the daily newspaper *Seikyō Shinbun*, as well as literally thousands of books, periodicals, materials for doctrinal instruction, visual media, a massive online presence, and music, to the extent that maximally devoted members can receive most or even all information through a Gakkai lens. Members are also bonded to Sōka Gakkai media through quotidian practices such as delivering newspapers, soliciting new subscriptions from member and non-member acquaintances, and filling their shelves, screens and stereos with Sōka Gakkai texts, images and sounds.
- 2) Schools: The group has built a respected private educational system from preschool up to Sōka University to the west of Tokyo, and in recent years has added educational institutions overseas.<sup>6</sup> Graduates

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<sup>6</sup> These institutions include preschools in Southeast Asia and Soka University of America (SUA) in Orange County, California, the jewel in the crown of Sōka Gakkai's recent international expansion and a symbol of aspiration and achievement for the majority Japanese membership. The image of SUA in Japanese-language Gakkai publications and among Japanese members differs radically from ways in which the school is promoted within the USA and its perception by members and critics outside Japan, where it has been a lightning rod for controversy over religious affiliation and academic freedom.



from Sōka Gakkai educational institutions maintain life-long ties and are among the most committed participants in activities at all levels of the organization. In recent decades, Sōka Gakkai has taken to staffing the ranks of its paid administrative staff with graduates from its own schools.

- 3) Cultural events: Across the organization, thousands of members, including those with and without specialized performance training, participate in Gakkai cultural events, some held at massive sports arenas. All active members enjoy performances sponsored by Sōka Gakkai through its cultural organization Minshu Ongaku Kyōkai 民主音楽協会 (People's Music Association), or Min-on 民音, and by Gakkai musicians at meetings. Members are consistently informed by Sōka Gakkai's traveling exhibitions of art and photography promoting the group's leadership and its distinctive vision of humanism and accomplishment, and visits to Sōka Gakkai's Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in Hachiōji and the Min-on Music Museum at Sōka Gakkai headquarters in Shinanomachi 信濃町, Tokyo promote ideals of expression through the idiom of European art.

Other institutional features point to Sōka Gakkai's growth beyond its temple Buddhist parameters. These include:

- 1) A Sōka Gakkai flag: The red, yellow, and blue tri-color Sōka Gakkai flag, three horizontal bars modeled on European national flags, was adopted as a symbol in 1988. Gakkai territory is instantly recognizable in Japan when the flag hangs above a building, and individual members declare their Gakkai affiliation to their neighbors and business communities by displaying the distinctive tri-color banner.
- 2) Anthems: Gakkai members learn Sōka Gakkai songs and sing them at every meeting. The songs serve as rallying cries that bind members to the group's institutional memory. Sōka Gakkai songs are almost all military marches written for optimal performance by singing in unison over brass band accompaniment. Members sing these songs in local meetings, at satellite broadcasts and at other venues, sometimes along with Sōka Gakkai Music Corps (Ongakutai 音楽隊) ensembles.
- 3) A Sōka Gakkai economy. Sōka Gakkai maintains a thriving internal economy based primarily on *zaimu* 財務 (literally 'finances'), or monetary donations from members. Sōka Gakkai depends on the flow of billions of yen and material goods as gifts by members into the institution, and it reciprocates by providing services to its members. Sōka

Gakkai even maintains a form of *de facto* currency called *chiketto* チケット, or ‘tickets’ in the vicinity of its Tokyo headquarters; these are vouchers issued by the central headquarters that are honored by some shops and restaurants in the area surrounding the Gakkai facility in lieu of Japanese yen. Though *chiketto* are not the precise equivalent of money in the mainstream economy, they are used in commercial transactions and serve to expand Sōka Gakkai’s sphere of influence beyond the religious to the economic.

- 4) Sōka Gakkai territory. In addition to Gakkai headquarters, Sōka Gakkai maintains thousands of Culture Centers, and other facilities across Japan. These are regularly patrolled by trained special cadres, usually the Gajōkai 牙城会 (Fortress Protection) and Sōkahan 創価班 (Value Creation Team) sub-groups of the Young Men’s Division, who are responsible for protecting Sōka Gakkai territory. Sōka Gakkai property remains a secure zone protected by uniformed guards who are committed to defending it against unwelcome incursions.
- 5) Discipleship under Honorary President Ikeda Daisaku (1928–). Gakkai members today conceive of their practice as operating within an affective one-to-one relationship with Ikeda Daisaku. Though members rarely meet with Ikeda directly, they constantly encourage one another to forge an ‘indivisible bond of teacher and disciple’ (*shitei funi* 師弟不二) by formulating all of their personal objectives and accomplishments as dedications to the Honorary President.

### *Sōka Gakkai as ‘Adjunct Nation’*

If Sōka Gakkai is not solely a lay Buddhist organization, how then can we characterize it? As a working hypothesis, one way that I conceive of Sōka Gakkai’s totality is as a type of ‘adjunct nation’—not a state within a state, or an institution seeking to separate from the social mainstream, but a nation-like apparatus that replicates the morphological features of the modern nation within its own institutions. It does this in order to pursue its vision and provide its members with opportunities to realize social legitimacy and leadership in ways that may not be available to them in mainstream society.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In 2008, Shimada Hiromi gestured toward theorizing that Sōka Gakkai is best characterized as something greater than simply a ‘religion’ in his provocatively titled *Mizokuka suru Sōka Gakkai: Yudayajin no kita michi o tadoru hitobito* (Ethnicized Sōka Gakkai: The People

Thinking heuristically of Sōka Gakkai as a group shaped along the lines of a modern nation more fully accounts for the range of its component aspects. There are obvious limitations to conceiving of Sōka Gakkai purely as a religion, especially if one is looking for reasons for Sōka Gakkai's unprecedented growth. There are thousands of religions in Japan, all of which promise essentially the same things as Sōka Gakkai, such as deliverance from this-worldly suffering and benefits—both tangible and transcendent—through practice and devotion to the institution. Many of these groups, like Sōka Gakkai, have charismatic leaders, and many employ organizational structures, media, and other means of binding members to the group similar to those employed by Sōka Gakkai. Yet no other group rivals Sōka Gakkai's size and dominance. There are many reasons for Sōka Gakkai's success, including ingenious leadership, political power, and an unwavering focus on this-worldly achievements. However, a key reason for Sōka Gakkai's unprecedented appeal, one that has been largely overlooked, has been its focus on constructing itself as an alternative means of social engagement by providing its members with opportunities to participate in multiple institutions that mirror those in mainstream Japanese society.

Sōka Gakkai forms a sphere distinct from and yet dependent on broader society. It has a thriving internal culture and administrative structures either comparable with or identical to elements within Japan's nation state as well as those linked to transnational institutions and cultural practices. Although it lacks some attributes commonly associated with a modern nation, such as legally sovereign physical territory defended by armed forces that maintain a monopoly on legitimate violence, and although its transnational apparatus challenges analogy to a single nation-state unit, conceiving of Sōka Gakkai's structural qualities, institutional and ideological goals, and comprehensive presence in members' lives in terms of an 'adjunct nation' metaphor introduces new explanatory and predictive possibilities. Such an analysis accounts for all of Sōka Gakkai's elements—religious, cultural, social, institutional, and individual. From its tri-colored flag and reverence for its founding presidents, to its anthem-like songs, down to the paths taken by individual members shaped by the heroic visions of cultural greatness that are promoted by Sōka Gakkai at every institutional level, Sōka Gakkai's maximal presence in its most devoted

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Who Follow the Path Taken by the Jews). However, Shimada did not expand on what a Sōka Gakkai 'ethnicity' includes or how Gakkai and Jewish identities may be similar.

members' lives encourages them to conceive of their membership in Sōka Gakkai as participation in a mission of world-historical significance on par with, or perhaps even transcending, national citizenship.

Viewing Sōka Gakkai not merely as a lay Buddhist group, but rather as a quasi-independent and nation-like apparatus, does justice to the comprehensive scope of the organization, the group's ideological and political aspirations, its charismatic leadership, and its thriving internal civil society, wherein members grapple with ideas, contest meanings and initiate activities *as* members of Sōka Gakkai. Just as many people in the modern world conceive of their national citizenship as a non-negotiable aspect of their identities, Gakkai members treat their membership in the group as an *a priori* aspect of their existence. While there is a plurality of opinions as to what Sōka Gakkai membership means, for most adherents membership in Sōka Gakkai is as basic to their self-conception as their identities as Japanese citizens. No matter what they do and how they interpret events in their daily lives, they do so as Gakkai members. Conceiving of the group in the broad terms of a nation-like structure makes comprehensible the full range of member activities, from chanting the *Lotus Sūtra* to engaging in electoral politics to performing Western classical music, in ways not fully accounted for by conceptualizing Sōka Gakkai solely as a Buddhist-based religion.

### *Education as the Foundation of a Legitimate Modern Society*

Sōka Gakkai was driven forward by adherents who came to the group from the fringes of modern Japanese society. They were attracted to the Gakkai in part because it addressed them in an educational idiom, promising access to legitimate and legitimizing practices associated with a pedagogical framework. This was crucial in Japan of the mid-twentieth century, a society obsessed by standards imposed by educational systems, whose members were quick to judge one another based on perceived levels of cultural sophistication. The Value Creation Study Association appealed to the people of postwar Japan as a forum for the socially disenfranchised to study, to learn, to prove themselves within meritocratic institutions modeled on the mainstream schools and other educational establishments in which they otherwise had few chances to participate.

Sōka Gakkai's academic idiom that appealed to so many in postwar Japan speaks not only to members' desire to realize legitimacy through educational pursuits; the group also appeals to members' aspirations to

join Japan's social elite. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu famously described the quest to achieve social status as a yearning for 'cultural competence', an ability to demonstrate easy familiarity with 'high' cultural practices that signals membership in the upper echelons of society. In other words, it is not enough simply to make money to participate fully in the cultural elite; one must demonstrate a seemingly effortless familiarity with and an appreciation for the 'legitimate' culture of modern industrialized societies, such as visual art, literature, and Western classical music. Command of these cultural forms is only available to those who move in the circles of the cosmopolitan and the highly educated. Bourdieu was speaking of post-war France when he described the collective desire for 'cultural competence', but he may as well have been describing twentieth-century Japan, a society that adopted many of Western Europe's social and educational mores, along with its accompanying norms, anxieties, and expectations. His descriptions of the French quest for cultural legitimacy apply equally well to the millions of disenfranchised Japanese who sought to improve their lives not only through economic success but also through education, art, music, and literature.<sup>8</sup> Sōka Gakkai is proof that the socially disenfranchised need not sit idle; they are aware of what they lack, and, when organized *en masse* and inspired by the possibilities of upward social mobility, they themselves create the institutions that grant social mobility—political parties, newspapers, study circles, schools, museums, organizations for the performing arts, and opportunities for musical training. They create alternative means of reaching for the social legitimacy that remains out of their reach in mainstream society, of securing recognition ordinarily granted by the central institutions of the modern nation; they create groups like Sōka Gakkai.

*From Intellectual Collective to Religious Organization*

Sōka Gakkai's history distinguishes it from many religious organizations. First, as its name Sōka Gakkai, or 'Value Creation Study Association' suggests, the group began not as a religion but rather as a project in educational reform. Second, Sōka Gakkai in effect had three separate foundings, one each under its first three presidents: Makiguchi Tsunesaburō (1871–1944),

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu's conclusions regarding 'cultural competence' are laid out in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984).

Toda Jōsei (1900–1958) and Ikeda Daisaku. Each of these founders oversaw a new era of institutional changes, guided by different visions and underlying religious and philosophical ideas. As a result, the history of Sōka Gakkai can be broadly divided into three different phases, each corresponding roughly to the tenure of the president at the head of the movement. The history of Sōka Gakkai reveals ways in which its founders' aspirations for membership in Japan's cultural elite conflated with Nichiren Buddhism, and how this blend of influences has shaped the organization that grew to become Japan's largest active religion.

Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, the organization's founder, was a schoolteacher who engaged in religious practice at the end of his life. He was raised in Hokkaido and in April 1901 moved to Tokyo in order to develop his intellectual pursuits.<sup>9</sup> Like many idealists in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century, Makiguchi was drawn to the capital not only by the potential for economic success but by the desire to take part in the burgeoning cosmopolitanism that accompanied Japan's transformation into a modern imperialist nation-state. Makiguchi attracted attention in Tokyo's elite scholarly circles, encountering Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933) and Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962).<sup>10</sup> By August 1910, he had founded the scholarly society Kyōdokai 郷土会 (Home Town Association). Though he associated with leading statesmen and cultural luminaries, Makiguchi was unable to shake his identity as a rural schoolteacher. He was continually hampered by financial insecurity, and he was forced to support his growing family through teaching in Tokyo's public schools.

Throughout his teaching career, Makiguchi became increasingly dissatisfied with Japan's educational system, and he clashed frequently with fellow teachers and with Ministry of Education authorities until he left

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<sup>9</sup> The following account of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō and the Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai is distilled from Bethel 1973; Kumagai 1978; Miyata 1993, 1997, 2000; Murata 1969; Shimada 2004; Sōka Gakkai Nenpyō Hensan Iinkai 1976; Sōka Gakkai Yonjūshūnenshi Hensan Iinkai 1970; Tōkyō Daigaku Hokekyō Kenkyūkai 1962, 1975; and from primary sources cited below.

<sup>10</sup> Nitobe is best known for his book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, first published in 1900 in English. Nitobe fused modern European and American ideals with an essentialized view of Japanese culture that proved compelling to Japan in the twentieth century. Makiguchi would ultimately pursue similar confluences of Western and Japanese cultural ideals, albeit with different religious and philosophical components. Yanagita is known as the founder of Japanese ethnology. He gathered data on village customs and oral tradition across rural Japan, and was influential in founding agricultural administration, anthropology, and folklore studies in Japan.

the profession in 1932.<sup>11</sup> After he retired officially from teaching, he compiled a treatise entitled *Sōka kyōikugaku taikei* 創価教育学体系 (System of Value-Creating Educational Study). The publisher of the first volume is listed as Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai 創価教育学会, or the 'Value Creation Education Study Association'. Sōka Gakkai employs this earliest appearance of the group's name as the official start of its prewar incarnation, and now marks its founding as November 18, 1930, the publication date of the first volume of *Sōka kyōikugaku taikei*. Japan's largest religious organization thus celebrates its launching point as the publication of an academic treatise—one that hardly deals with religion at all.

When Makiguchi Tsunesaburō compiled his essays on educational reform in 1930, he was concerned primarily with philosophical inquiry, not lay Buddhist activism. However, in 1928 Makiguchi was converted to Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism by Mitani Sokei, a fellow school principal and intellectual who served as chief administrator of a temple lay confraternity (*kō* 講) named Taiseikikō 大石講. When Makiguchi published *Sōka kyōikugaku taikei* in 1930, he was essentially summarizing his life's work to that point in educational reform. His interests after this moved in the direction of religion.

One possible key influence in Makiguchi's religious experience occurred around 1916 after his move to Tokyo, when he rekindled his connection with Nichiren by attending a number of lectures by Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939), founder of the ultranationalist Nichiren-based organization Kokuchūkai. Makiguchi never became a member of Kokuchūkai, and neither his philosophies nor his religious beliefs appear to be the product of Kokuchūkai influence. However, by the time Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism in 1928, he was familiar with Nichiren's biography and with Nichiren Buddhism's singular focus on upholding the *Lotus Sūtra*. His recent exposure to the active Nichiren-based lay society Kokuchūkai may have been a source of inspiration for his own group.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> There appears to be some contention as to the exact date of Makiguchi's retirement. Sōka Gakkai sources list the date as 1932, while Bethel, Murata, Shimada, and others place it at 1929. This is potentially an important detail, as the impending end of his teaching career (and source of income) may have been a contributing factor in Makiguchi's decision to embrace lay Buddhist practice in 1928.

<sup>12</sup> Sōka Gakkai of the postwar era employed many of the same institutional practices and technological innovations that were used effectively by Kokuchūkai and other organizations overseen by Tanaka. These included public lectures that made use of the latest technology (Tanaka was fond of magic lanterns, music, and slide projectors); an institutional focus on young men's, young women's, and other gender- and age-specific divisions; extensive production of vernacular print publications; political activism; campaigns to

Although Sōka Gakkai dates its founding to November 18, 1930, the Value Creation Education Study Association did not meet until January 27, 1937, when about sixty people gathered to celebrate the beginning of the new group. Makiguchi's writings in the early 1930s do not appear to explicitly engage Nichiren, but by the early 1940s Makiguchi and the organization he established were firmly committed to defending Nichiren Buddhist principles. Gakkai members engaged increasingly in uncompromising Nichiren Buddhist practices, including the hard-sell conversion tactic of *shakubuku*. Before the Gakkai engaged in *shakubuku*, the group had fewer than five hundred members; after members began to proselytize in 1941, the group grew to five thousand registered adherents within less than two years. Religious activism also attracted attention from Japan's increasingly oppressive political regime. In 1940, the wartime Japanese government enacted the Religious Corporations Law, which gave the state control over all religions and authorized government intervention in the affairs of registered religious groups. One requirement of the 1940 law was that all religious organizations enshrine *kamifuda* 神札 (deity tablets) issued by the Grand Shrine at Ise as a required practice in support of the national creed State Shintō. In accord with its embrace of Nichiren's strict exclusivist stance, Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai maintained that Japan would only prosper only once the state recognized Nichiren's teachings as the only correct faith, and its leaders steadfastly refused to follow State Shintō protocols. After 1940, Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai came under increased state scrutiny. The Gakkai journal *Value Creation* (*Kachi sōzō* 価値創造) was banned after its ninth issue, which was published on May 10, 1942. Makiguchi included a column in this last issue entitled "An Address on the Discontinuance of Publication" (*Haikan no kotoba* 廃刊の辞), in which he wrote "[We] believe in the realization of the state's policies, yet is the decision to cancel this publication not based on a lack of understanding?" (Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai 1942: 1). Makiguchi's remonstrance may have been couched in careful language, but it veers into the realm of *kokka kangyō*

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unify the object of worship as the calligraphic mandala that served as Nichiren Buddhist *gohonzon*, or 'objects of worship'; and a corporate hierarchy that divided the organization into a national network of headquarters overseeing regional sub-divisions. Kokuchūkai had adopted many of these innovations from other modern Nichiren Buddhist lay organizations, in particular the temple confraternity Honmon Butsuryūkō 本門佛立講. Nishiyama Shigeru has outlined a rich culture of modern Nichiren-based lay groups that points toward a legacy that runs from Honmon Butsuryūkō (today the temple sect Honmon Butsuryūshū) through Tanaka Chigaku's Kokuchūkai up to Sōka Gakkai and beyond to more recent groups, such as Kenshōkai (see Nishiyama 1975, 1983, and in particular 1986).



国家諫暁, 'remonstrating with the government' practiced by Nichiren Buddhist followers to emulate Nichiren's exhortation of the secular government authorities of his time to abandon false teachings and embrace the *Lotus* as the sole means of salvation in the latter days of the Buddha's Dharma.<sup>13</sup>

By providing Makiguchi with an opportunity to demonstrate his faith in Nichiren Buddhism's absolute commitment to embrace of the *Lotus*, the wartime Japanese government suppression appears only to have inspired him to greater religious conviction. Makiguchi chose imprisonment and death over compromise to government authority. On July 6, 1943, police arrested Makiguchi and the other Gakkai leaders for violating the Peace Preservation Law. In the summer of 1943, Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai claimed a membership of five thousand. In one day, the group was essentially dismantled. On November 18, 1944, fourteen years to the day after the publication of his *Sōka kyōikugaku taikai*, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō died of malnutrition at Tokyo's Sugamo Prison.

In the course of his life, Makiguchi developed the two ideological traditions—modern philosophy and lay Nichiren Buddhism—that would ultimately intertwine in Sōka Gakkai. Makiguchi's unswerving commitment to his ideals, both as an educator and as a Nichiren Buddhist, set a standard for Gakkai members' behavior, and his most loyal disciple would ultimately build on Makiguchi's teachings to reform his modest study association into a religious mass movement.

*Path of the Disciple: Toda Jōsei and the Great March of Shakubuku*

Apart from Makiguchi himself, only one Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai leader refused to recant his faith and served time in jail: Toda Jōsei, architect of the post-war Sōka Gakkai.<sup>14</sup> Toda was born on February 11, 1900. Like Makiguchi, Toda grew up in Hokkaido; after he moved to Tokyo, Makiguchi hired him

<sup>13</sup> *Kokka kangyō* (remonstrating the state) emulates Nichiren's submission of the *Risshō ankokuoron* 立正安国論 (Treatise on Establishing the Right Teaching and Bringing Peace to the Land) to the Kamakura shogunal regent Hōjō Tokiyori in 1260. Since the thirteenth century, Nichiren Buddhist clerics and lay followers have engaged in this practice, which generally took the form of submitting a letter of admonition to the emperor or a regional authority.

<sup>14</sup> The following account of Toda and Sōka Gakkai in the early postwar years is taken from Higuma 1971; Murata 1969; Nishino 1985; Saeki 2000; Shimada 2004; Sōka Gakkai Nenpyō Hensan linkai 1976; Sōka Gakkai Yonjūshūnenshi Hensan linkai 1970; Tamano 2008; Tōkyō Daigaku Hokekyō Kenkyūkai 1962, 1975; and primary sources (cited below).

to teach at his elementary school in 1920. In December 1922, Toda quit teaching for Makiguchi, and a year later he opened his own academy, a school called Jishū Gakkan 時習学館, which tutored elementary school students. Toda found success in producing textbooks designed to help those aspiring to enter middle school to prepare for entrance examinations. One of these textbooks, a primer on arithmetic called *Shidō sanjutsu* 指導算術 (Arithmetic Guidance) published in June 1930, sold over one million copies. Toda's publishing success resulted in wealth, which he funneled into new business ventures. He attributed his personal successes to the teachings he received from Makiguchi, to whom he remained wholeheartedly devoted. Even as his business interests grew and diversified, Toda served as Makiguchi's chief assistant from the beginning of Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai's activities. When Makiguchi Tsunesaburō converted to Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism in 1928, Toda also converted, and when Makiguchi was forced out of school teaching and focused instead on his own writing, Toda produced and published *Sōka kyōikugaku taikei*.

Among the Gakkai membership, Toda alone demonstrated his absolute commitment to his master Makiguchi through his refusal to bow to the Japanese state's pressure to recant his absolute commitment to Nichiren Shōshū orthodoxy. Arrested in 1943 along with the other Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai leaders, Toda was held in a cell at Sugamo Prison, where he was mostly relegated to solitary confinement. During his confinement, Toda began reading the *Lotus Sūtra* and chanting *namu myōhō renge kyō* in great earnest. In early March 1944, Toda was struck by a realization that everything in the universe is connected by a universal 'life force', or *seimeiryoku* 生命力, a common thread of 'dependent origination' (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Jp. *engi* 縁起). This 'life force' resides unchanged within the network of causes and effects, and is an inexhaustible source of liberation identifiable as the eternal Buddha himself. After his release, Toda lectured and wrote extensively on 'life force philosophy' (*seimeiron* 生命論) for Gakkai members. Study of his interpretation of the Buddha as an eternal life force remains an integral part of the group's doctrinal training.<sup>15</sup>

In November 1944, Toda was visited by another vision in which he saw himself taking part in the 'ceremony in the air' that is depicted in the *Lotus Sūtra*, where he joined with the innumerable Bodhisattvas of the

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<sup>15</sup> See Shimazono 2000 for an analysis of Toda's *seimeiron* and its place in the early Sōka Gakkai ethos.

Earth (*jīyu no bosatsu* 地涌の菩薩) at Vulture Peak where Śākyamuni preached the *Lotus Sūtra*. For Toda, this vision confirmed his revelation of the Buddha as an eternal 'life force', and awakened him to his sacred task of propagating the 'supreme law' (*myōhō* 妙法) of the *Lotus*. When Toda emerged from prison half a year later, he was driven not only by obligation to the memory of his master Makiguchi but by a sense of mission confirmed during his mystical experience that he was personally connected to Nichiren, to the primordial Buddha Śākyamuni, and to the eternal Dharma.

Toda was released on parole on July 3, 1945, only a few weeks before Japan surrendered to Allied forces on August 15. He immediately devoted himself to resuming his religious mission and rebuilding his business empire. In March 1946, the group changed its name from *Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai* to *Sōka Gakkai*, the Value Creation Study Association, and on May 1, Toda was appointed by the assembled members as *rijichō* 理事長 (chief of the board of directors) for the new organization. Soon after this, Toda's business ventures were rocked by the economic upheaval of the immediate postwar years. On November 12, at the fifth general meeting of *Sōka Gakkai* convened to observe the seventh anniversary of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō's death, Toda resigned as chairman of the board of directors of *Sōka Gakkai*, citing his failure as a businessman. He took his business troubles as a sign of divine retribution incurred because of his failure to commit himself fully to the vow he had made in prison to spread the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism through *Sōka Gakkai*, and to fulfill his obligation as a faithful disciple to rebuild his mentor Makiguchi's religious organization.

The end of Toda's career as a businessman saw the real launch of *Sōka Gakkai*. On May 3, 1951, Toda stood before approximately 1,500 members to accept the title of second president. In his acceptance speech, Toda placed a challenge before the members: to convert seven hundred and fifty thousand families to *Sōka Gakkai* before his death. Otherwise, "If this goal is not realized while I am still alive, do not hold a funeral for me. Simply dump my remains in the bay at Shinagawa."<sup>16</sup>

Toda's announcement marked the start of the *shakubuku daikōshin* 折伏大行進, or the Great March of Shakubuku, a militaristic term *Sōka Gakkai* chose as the label for its aggressive conversion campaign. *Gakkai* members quickly took up Toda's challenge and committed themselves

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<sup>16</sup> Reproduced in *Sōka Gakkai Yonjūshūnenishi Hensan Iinkai* 1970: 158.

to aggressive conversion with zeal. To enable members' *shakubuku* practice, Sōka Gakkai, under Toda's strict administration, carried out several key initiatives. Among these were (1) quickly publishing doctrinal training materials; (2) attracting and mobilizing a powerful youth base; and (3) emphasizing to prospective converts the appeal of Sōka Gakkai membership as the most effective and pragmatic means of realizing this-worldly objectives.

In May 1951, Toda called on Sōka Gakkai's doctrine instructors to compile an easy-to-read manual for members. The result was a hastily-produced book called *Shakubuku kyōten* 折伏教典 (Shakubuku Doctrine Manual), first published on November 18, 1951. *Shakubuku kyōten* served for nineteen years as the most accessible source for Gakkai members to use in explaining Nichiren Buddhist concepts, and it outlined the basic ideas behind Toda's and Makiguchi's philosophies in clear, vernacular Japanese.<sup>17</sup> The book became notorious, however, for its detailed arguments for Gakkai members to employ against 'false sects' (*jashū* 邪宗) and its repeated exhortation to convert all to Sōka Gakkai and do away with other religions in order to rescue the Japanese nation from the evils of *mappō*. The book included arguments against Nichirenshū 日蓮宗 and other Buddhist denominations, as well as Shintō, Christianity, and newly established groups that stood as Sōka Gakkai's chief rivals, including Reiyūkai, Risshō Kōseikai, Seichō no Ie 成長の家, Perfect Liberty Kyōdan パーフエクトリバティーン教団, and other so-called 'new religions'. In *Shakubuku kyōten* and in other publications from this era, Sōka Gakkai stated clearly that it was not a 'new religion' (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教) or a 'newly arisen sect' (*shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教, a pejorative term that came into vogue among scholars and journalists in the early twentieth century as a means of denigrating newly established religions). Sōka Gakkai claimed instead that it was the most faithful representative of Nichiren Shōshū

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<sup>17</sup> The *Shakubuku kyōten* went through eight editions and thirty-nine reprintings between November 18, 1951, and May 3, 1969. The most systematic recent study of the *Shakubuku kyōten* is Itō Tatsunori 2004: 251–75. Itō surveys twenty-eight different copies of the text issued from 1951 to 1969 to trace changes in its content over this tumultuous era in Sōka Gakkai's development. Itō observes, among many other things, that the earliest editions begin with Toda's theory on 'life philosophy' (*seimeiron*) as a lengthy (sixty-page) first chapter and Makiguchi's 'value creation' theory (*kachiron* 価値論) as the second chapter. After 1960, when Ikeda Daisaku became third Sōka Gakkai president, the *seimeiron* chapter had been edited considerably (and reduced to less than forty pages) and Makiguchi's *kachiron* was relegated to the end of the book, first to the tenth and ultimately to the fourteenth chapter.

Buddhism, inheritor of the Dharma from the eternal Buddha Nichiren, and therefore a direct heir of the oldest teaching.

Another important Gakkai training manual published at the outset of the Great March of Shakubuku was the single-volume edition of Nichiren's complete works. Sōka Gakkai's *Shinpen Nichiren Daishōnin gosho zenshū* 新編日蓮大聖人御書全集 (New Edition of the Complete Works of the Great Sage Nichiren, or *Gosho zenshū* 御書全集) was first released on April 28, 1952, a date chosen to commemorate the seven hundredth anniversary of Nichiren's "declaration of the establishment of the sect" on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month of the year 1253. The 1952 *Gosho zenshū* remains Sōka Gakkai's most important source for its Nichiren Buddhist practice.

Toda's second key initiative was attracting and mobilizing a youth base. Members took up the new Gakkai publications as tools, fanning out through neighborhoods to convert their families, friends, neighbors, and even perfect strangers they encountered on the streets. A principal vanguard of Sōka Gakkai's growth in the years of the Great March of Shakubuku was the Youth Division. The Gakkai Youth Division was charged with primary responsibility to achieve the spread of *kōsen rufu*, or converting all people to Sōka Gakkai, and in order to inspire maximal commitment to this goal Toda organized the Young Men's and Young Women's divisions as if they were military cadres.

Sōka Gakkai's campaign of aggressive proselytizing resulted in startling growth. By 1952, Sōka Gakkai's membership had more than quadrupled to 22,324 households. After this, Sōka Gakkai experienced vast jumps in membership; by 1955 the group claimed over three hundred thousand families, and Sōka Gakkai surpassed Toda's goal of 750,000 households before the end of 1957. The majority of the people who joined the group were from the urban poor, some of the millions who were flooding Japan's cities seeking material security, social infrastructure, and spiritual certainty.<sup>18</sup> Even as Sōka Gakkai gathered thousands of new converts, it alienated many others. Members campaigned from door to door, and veteran adherents from the Toda era speak of being driven away from houses by residents who doused them with water and pelted them with stones.

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<sup>18</sup> The most comprehensive study of grassroots members of Sōka Gakkai's first two decades is Suzuki Hiroshi 1970. James White's *The Soka Gakkai and Mass Society* (1970) also remains a useful study of the primarily poor, working-class members of Sōka Gakkai in the 1950s and 60s. White's book was translated into Japanese in 1971 and it is still cited by Japanese scholars of 'new religions'.

Sōka Gakkai had few facilities in these years, so most meetings were held in members' homes; local leaders would hang red paper lanterns emblazoned with *Sōka gakkai zadankai* (Sōka Gakkai study meeting) in black ink calligraphy outside their doors, advertising their homes as locations of member gatherings. Today, study meetings are relatively tame monthly gatherings, but during the Great March of Shakubuku they were high-pitched sessions that went on long into the night, where members would anger their neighbors with loud chanting and visitors were pressured to agree to convert on the spot. Meetings resulted in masses of new converts, and a growing membership inspired Sōka Gakkai to sponsor the construction of new Nichiren Shōshū temples across Japan. Priests at Nichiren Shōshū temples stayed busy conferring *gohonzon* (objects of worship) on new Gakkai adherents; at times, prospective converts would have to make appointments days in advance in order to receive their *gohonzon*, and temples stayed open every day to accommodate the demand.<sup>19</sup>

Toda's third key initiative during the Great March of Shakubuku was attracting new members to Sōka Gakkai the practical benefits to be gained through practice. Toda was fond of metaphors that resonated with ideals of progress, opportunity for all, and optimism about the future. He likened Nichiren's *daigohonzon* to a 'happiness-producing machine', a marvelous technology that provides its user endless possibilities to realize absolute happiness in this lifetime. Toda taught that, ultimately, the solution to all difficulties was the practice of *shakubuku*. If one suffers from money woes, if one is sick, or if one has difficulties with one's family, Toda counseled, this was because of one's karmic burden; the only way to improve the situation is to chant to the *gohonzon* and to convert others to Sōka Gakkai. Those who are not converted to Sōka Gakkai are destined to misfortune in this life and in future existences, while those who join and convert others are assured of both material and spiritual awards. "I recommend that you accumulate good fortune in this life," Toda advised, "so that in the next existence of life, you can be born into a family possessing five Cadillacs" (1961: 62; 1968: 100).

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<sup>19</sup> From an interview on December 22, 2007, with a temple priest in Tokyo who now operates an independent temple with links to the Association of Youthful Priests Dedicated to the Reformation of Nichiren Shōshū (Seinen Sōryo Kaikaku Dōmei), a small breakaway association of priests who sided with Sōka Gakkai after it split from Nichiren Shōshū in 1991.

The exuberance that drove Sōka Gakkai's rapid growth also led to conflict.<sup>20</sup> The mass media began to portray Sōka Gakkai as a violent sect to be feared by the public at large. The Gakkai's unfavorable public image was exacerbated by the militaristic practices of the Youth Divisions. Less than three years since the Division's inauguration, the subgroup had grown to the extent that more than ten thousand young members could muster at Taisekiji for an October 1954 ceremony where Toda reviewed his troops from atop a white horse. As he emulated the pageantry of the wartime Japanese emperor, Toda exhorted the Youth Division to regard rival religions as enemies and he urged his young charges to seek their destruction.<sup>21</sup>

Sōka Gakkai's membership grew quickly through the early years of the Great March of Shakubuku to eclipse that of all other Nichiren-based groups. Sōka Gakkai under Toda began to regard itself as capable of realizing a goal that had been set out by Nichiren himself seven hundred years earlier: the establishment of a great ordination platform or *kaidan* 戒壇, last of the *sandai hihō* 三大秘法, or Three Great Secret Dharmas that comprise the heart of Nichiren's teaching. These are (1) the *honmon no daimoku* 本門の題目, the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, *namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*; (2) the *honmon no honzon* 本門の本尊, or true object of worship, the calligraphic mandala with the *daimoku* inscribed at its center that Nichiren had devised for his followers; and (3) the *honmon no kaidan* 本門の戒壇, or true ordination platform, to be constructed at "the most

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<sup>20</sup> Gakkai members incited conflict through their practice of *hōbōbarai* 謗法払い, lit. 'cleaning out slander of the Dharma', a measure that included eliminating items and implements related to faiths other than Sōka Gakkai from the homes of new converts. In the Toda era, new converts were required to burn Shintō talismans, Buddhist altars and images, Christian bibles, and even mandala issued by rival Nichiren sects. One result of *hōbōbarai* in the first decades of Sōka Gakkai's expansion was that the destruction by converts to Sōka Gakkai of thousands of mandala, talismans, and other items that made up the rich heritage of Buddhist practice. This wholesale destruction inflicted tremendous damage on Japan's cultural inheritance by essentially erasing centuries of grassroots-level Buddhist history (conversations with Nakao Takashi, preeminent scholar of Nichiren Buddhism, summer 2008). Sōka Gakkai has diminished the requirements of *hōbōbarai* in recent years. The group no longer requires new converts to burn items from rival religions, and while members in the Toda and early Ikeda years were prohibited from taking part in festivals sponsored by Shintō shrines (*matsuri* 祭) and sightseeing at famous religious sites, Sōka Gakkai now interprets these activities as 'culture' rather than religious worship and permits its members to take part as long as they refrain from praying to non-orthodox deities or Buddhist images.

<sup>21</sup> Described in Higuma 1971: 222–23, and Murata 1969: 100.

superlative site, resembling the Pure Land of Sacred Vulture Peak.”<sup>22</sup> For Nichiren, the *honmon no kaidan* would surpass the state-sponsored ordination platforms of his day and become the ‘spiritual center’ for all people, marking the achievement of *kōsen rufu*. The first two of the Three Great Secret Dharmas had been realized by Nichiren himself, but he entrusted the establishment of the *kaidan* to his disciples at a future time when the entire country would have embraced faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*. This remained a lofty and remote goal for Nichiren followers throughout the centuries after their founder’s passing. According to Nichiren Shōshū interpretation, the true object of worship is the *daigohonzon* housed at its own head temple, Taisekiji; there the *kaidan* would one day be established and the *daigohonzon* enshrined. This was what Toda now proposed Sōka Gakkai should accomplish.<sup>23</sup>

There is no denying the success of Sōka Gakkai’s conversion campaign. By the time Toda died on April 2, 1958 at fifty-eight years of age, Sōka Gakkai had attained a membership of close to one million households, and there was no end of growth in sight.

### *The Ascendance of Ikeda Daisaku: Sōka Gakkai Broadens its Mission*

On May 3, 1960, Ikeda Daisaku, one of Toda Josei’s disciples from the Young Men’s Division, was declared third president of Sōka Gakkai.<sup>24</sup> Ikeda was

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<sup>22</sup> See Nichiren’s “Sandai hihō bonjōji 三大秘法稟承事” (Sōka Gakkai 1952: 1022). See also Jacqueline Stone 2003: 196. The term *honmon* or ‘original teaching’ prefacing each of the Three Great Secret Dharmas refers to the second half of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which reveals Śākyamuni Buddha’s true identity as the primordially enlightened buddha transcending time and history.

<sup>23</sup> Toda described the *honmon no kaidan* in terms of a ‘national ordination platform’, or *kokuritsu kaidan* 国立戒壇, an idea that he adopted from the teachings of Tanaka Chigaku, founder of Kokuchūkai, the Nichirenist group with which Toda’s mentor Makiguchi had briefly associated. In a 1901 essay entitled *Shūmon no ishin* 宗門の維新 (Restoration of the Sect), Tanaka had urged that all Nichiren Buddhists unite as one tradition to dominate the nation’s economy and infrastructure. The mandate for the ordination platform was to come from the Imperial Diet; by converting a majority of the Japanese population to Nichiren Buddhism, both Diet houses would be able to vote in a *kokuritsu kaidan*, a national ordination platform that would serve as the seat of power in a great Dharma battle, after which the whole nation would embrace the *Lotus* and the establishment of the *honmon no kaidan* would be announced. See Tanaka 1919 [1901].

<sup>24</sup> Sōka Gakkai’s history has been thoroughly revised during the Ikeda era to create a narrative of a manifest destiny leading to Ikeda as Toda’s only rightful heir. As such, accounts for why two years elapsed before Ikeda became third Gakkai president or discussions of the lack of a clear statement by Toda that Ikeda was to be his successor are mostly found as oblique references in secondary scholarship by Japanese researchers



born on January 2, 1928, in Ebara, Tokyo (now the Ōmori neighborhood of Ōta Ward in southern Tokyo).<sup>25</sup> He exemplifies the generation of members who propelled Sōka Gakkai's expansion in the immediate postwar decades. Though intelligent and motivated, Ikeda was born into poverty, and his educational opportunities, along with their accompanying chances for social and economic advancement, were sabotaged by the war. Seventeen years old when World War II ended in August 1945, Ikeda made ends meet for a couple of years with industrial jobs near his family home in Ōmori. While he worked in the factories, he organized a private reading group of students, factory workers, civil servants, and others interested in reading works of literature and philosophy. On August 14, 1947, Ikeda met Toda Jōsei for the first time at a *zadankai*. There, he listened with interest to the forty-seven-year-old Toda, who spoke not only of Buddhism but of life-and-death matters that reminded him of the European philosophy he enjoyed reading with his friends. The Gakkai youth at the meeting succeeded in performing *shakubuku* on Ikeda, and he received a *gohonzon* on August 24, 1947.

Ikeda joined the inner circle of young men Toda cultivated as the core of his business ventures and Sōka Gakkai. Ikeda's formal education essentially came to an end in 1948, when he was twenty years old. Ikeda later characterized the ensuing decade as a ten-year education in "Toda University."<sup>26</sup> Ikeda worked as an employee of Toda's companies, and as

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working outside the movement. With a few exceptions, scholars appear to be leery of publishing material that challenges Ikeda's claim to the Sōka Gakkai leadership for fear of reprisals from the group. After Toda became ill, four Young Men's Division leaders and several members of the Gakkai board of directors visited him to ask about the matter of succession to the presidency; "You must decide this yourselves" (*sore wa omaetachi de kimeyo*), Toda responded (see Shimada 2004: 91). Higuma Takenori indicates that something like a power struggle between Ikeda and his fellow Young Men's Division leader and Toda disciple Ishida Tsuguo (1925–1992) played out immediately following Toda's death in 1958 (Higuma 1971: 240–45). Ishida was marginalized from the Gakkai leadership after Ikeda became president in 1960, and he left Sōka Gakkai in 1980, siding with a group of Nichiren Shōshū priests who formed a new religious organization called Shōshinkai 正信会 established in response to the first conflict between Ikeda and the Shōshū priesthood in 1978–1979.

<sup>25</sup> The following account of Ikeda Daisaku's biography and the development of Sōka Gakkai from 1960 is taken from Aera Henshūbu 1996; Asano 1974; Bessatsu Takarajima 1995, 2007; Machacek and Wilson 2000; Murata 1969; Shichiri 2000; Shimada 2004, 2007; Sōka Gakkai Mondai Kenkyūkai 2001; Sōka Gakkai Nenpyō Hensan Inikai 1976; Sōka Gakkai Yonjūshūnenshi Hensan Inikai 1970; Sugimori 1976; Tamano 2008; and Tōkyō Daigaku Hokekyō Kenkyūkai 1962, 1975; in addition to primary sources cited below.

<sup>26</sup> Ikeda graduated from the Tōyō Shōgyō 東洋商業 trade school in March of 1948. He enrolled in the night school extension of the college Taisei Gakuin 大世学院 (now

Toda turned to full-time involvement in Sōka Gakkai with the launch of the Great March of Shakubuku in May 1951, Ikeda advanced through the ranks of the Gakkai Young Men's Division.

Ikeda Daisaku was only thirty years old when Toda Jōsei died in April 1958. On June 30, 1958, Ikeda was appointed as the head of Sōka Gakkai's newly organized bureaucratic hierarchy in the post of *sōmushitsuchō* 総務室長, or 'general manager', and on June 30, 1959, he became head of the board of directors. When Ikeda was declared third Sōka Gakkai president on May 3, 1960, his authority over the organization was secure. As soon as he became Sōka Gakkai's top leader, Ikeda built on Toda's initiatives to expand the organization's parameters in response to the priorities of the postwar generation. By the time of Toda's death and Ikeda's rise to power within Sōka Gakkai, Japan had embarked on a path toward rehabilitation as a major player in the international order after the war, this time as an exponent of peaceful postwar diplomacy and industry. Ikeda wasted no time in capitalizing on the mood and rhetoric of these times. On October 2, 1960, Ikeda and several top Gakkai leaders departed on a mission to the United States, Canada, and Brazil, to establish Sōka Gakkai overseas. In January 1961, Ikeda followed this tour with good-will visits to six Asian countries, and he traveled to Europe in October of that year, visiting nine countries. His visits laid the groundwork for what would become the umbrella organization Soka Gakkai International in 1975. Under Ikeda, Sōka Gakkai no longer conceived of itself as just a Japanese Buddhist lay association; it had set about transforming itself into a world religion.

### *Shōhondō, Politics, and Public Backlash: A Critical Turning Point*

In 1965, Ikeda announced plans to construct a grand facility called the Shōhondō 正本堂, or the 'True Main Hall', to house the *daigohonzon*. The Shōhondō would serve as the destination of millions of Sōka Gakkai pilgrims from all over Japan, and increasingly from Sōka Gakkai branches overseas, who arrived to worship Nichiren's mandala in person. Sōka Gakkai's fundraising campaign for the Shōhondō far exceeded any other money-gathering operation the group has ever undertaken, and it is potentially the single largest fundraising project by a private organization in

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Tokyo Fuji University) in April of that year, but he devoted himself to study under Toda over schoolwork.

Japanese history. Between October 9 and 12, 1965, eight million Japanese members contributed more than 35.5 billion yen, depositing their contributions in more than 16,000 branches of the Bank of Mitsubishi in this four-day period.<sup>27</sup>

“The Shōhondō will be the virtual [*jijitsujō* 事実上] *honmon no kaidan*,” Ikeda declared on May 3, 1967, at Sōka Gakkai’s thirtieth general meeting.<sup>28</sup> Sōka Gakkai’s interpretation of the Shōhondō as the culmination of Nichiren’s seven-hundred-year-old aspiration to transform Japan into a nation that exclusively worships the *Lotus Sūtra* was a problem both for some followers of Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism, who clung to an orthodox understanding that the ordination platform was only to be constructed *after* the population as a whole embraced the *Lotus*, as well as for political enemies of Sōka Gakkai, who saw the Shōhondō as proof that Sōka Gakkai sought to install itself as a theocracy with Ikeda Daisaku as leader.

Between 1956 and 1966, Sōka Gakkai’s membership more than tripled in size to reach five million converts. This massive swell was spurred by Sōka Gakkai’s move into politics in the mid-1950s, a move that drew millions of grassroots supporters into electoral campaigns. Sōka Gakkai’s initial foray into Japanese electoral politics was driven by the institution’s mandate to erect a state-sponsored ordination platform that would mark the completion of *kōsen rufu*, or the conversion of the nation of Japan to Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism. From August 1, 1956, Toda Jōsei issued a serial essay called *Ōbutsu myōgō ron* 王仏冥合論 (On the Harmonious Union of Government and Buddhism) in the Gakkai magazine *Daibyaku rengo* 大白蓮華. In this essay, Toda wrote that Sōka Gakkai was “interested in politics because of the need to achieve *kōsen rufu*,” and that “the only purpose of our going into politics is the erection of the *kokuritsu kaidan*” (1956: 204). Sōka Gakkai expanded its political enterprises in the early Ikeda years; the group inaugurated the Clean Government Political Assembly (Kōmei Seiji Renmei 公明政治連盟) in 1961 and the Clean Government Party (Kōmeitō) in 1964.

Political engagement was seen initially by Sōka Gakkai as a means for the organization to realize its religious objectives. As Sōka Gakkai

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<sup>27</sup> Veteran members I spoke with about the fundraising campaign remembered their personal sacrifices. Elderly women sold kimono and other treasured personal possessions to raise money, and younger members donated their savings from part-time jobs, a practice that some devoted young members continue today to support Gakkai construction projects.

<sup>28</sup> Quotation adopted from Murata 1969: 133.

expanded throughout the 1960s, however, Sōka Gakkai's doctrinal justifications for entering electoral politics became increasingly problematic. Toda's writings on *ōbutsu myōgō*, the harmonious fusion of government and Buddhism, and his call for the construction of a *kokuritsu kaidan* 国立戒壇, a 'national ordination platform', appeared highly idealistic in the mid-1950s, yet a mere ten years later these ideals burgeoned as real possibilities. As Sōka Gakkai came to dominate Japan's religious landscape and established itself as a major player in the Diet, Ikeda began to redefine some key terms in its Nichiren Buddhist lexicon and to play down some of the absolutist rhetoric that he and Toda had promoted in the early stages of Sōka Gakkai's growth. From the mid-1960s, Ikeda began to caution Gakkai members to avoid excesses in their *shakubuku* efforts. By February 1968, Ikeda was describing *shakubuku* as "a heartwarming interflow of trust and mutual understanding" that emerges between a Gakkai adherent and a potential convert.<sup>29</sup> This was a far cry from the rhetoric of the *Shakubuku kyōten* and declarations of war against rival faiths that characterized *shakubuku* in the late Toda and early Ikeda years.

In January 1970, Sōka Gakkai announced that its worldwide membership stood at 7.55 million. At the end of the 1960s, Sōka Gakkai appeared to be riding an inexorable crescendo to institutional greatness, exerting itself as a force in religion, government, education, and social change. However, the end of this decade also marked the abrupt halt of Sōka Gakkai's stratospheric rise. Matters came to a head in 1969 with events surrounding the publication of a book called *Sōka gakkai o kiru* 創価学会を斬る, which came out one year later in English as *I Denounce Sōka Gakkai*. The fiasco has since been labeled as the *genron shuppan bōgai mondai* 言論出版妨害問題, or 'problem over obstructing freedom of expression and the press'. As its title promises, *I Denounce Sōka Gakkai* is a venomous condemnation of Sōka Gakkai's policies for expansion, control of Sōka Gakkai by Ikeda and the leadership from above, and the organization's political ambitions through Kōmeitō. The author, Fujiwara Hirotsu (1921–1999), was a Meiji University professor and left-leaning political commentator with no personal ties to the group. He compared Sōka Gakkai to the Nazis and the Italian Fascists and otherwise inveighed against Sōka Gakkai as a Machiavellian menace to Japanese democracy.

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<sup>29</sup> Reproduced in Murata 1969: 128–29.

Before the book went on sale in November 1969, Fujiwara claimed that he had been pressed by Kōmeitō leaders and Tanaka Kakuei (1918–1993), then Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party and later Prime Minister, to pull *Sōka gakkai o kiru* from publication. Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō suffered greatly from the scandal, and opponents of the group made gains. On May 3, 1970, Ikeda Daisaku issued a formal apology to the people of Japan and announced a new policy of *seikyō bunri* 政教分離, or the ‘separation of politics and religion’. Henceforth, he declared, Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō would be separate organizations. The Gakkai renounced its plans to construct a ‘national ordination platform’, and eliminated references to *kokuritsu kaidan* and to *ōbutsu myōgō* from its lexicon. Furthermore, Kōmeitō members resigned from all positions within Sōka Gakkai, and Sōka Gakkai removed itself from administering Kōmeitō and renounced decision-making capacities for the party’s personnel and finances.

Sōka Gakkai lost more than power among the electorate when it severed its official ties with Kōmeitō; it lost its momentum as a mass movement. After 1970, Sōka Gakkai only made modest gains in membership. The group reached 7.62 million in 1974, and since the early 1980s Sōka Gakkai has claimed a membership that hovers just above eight million households. Thus 1970 marks a watershed moment in Sōka Gakkai’s history, the point when the group began to shift from a headlong rush toward the goal of national dominance and international expansion into a new era of conserving its gains and tending to adherents it had attracted in the first decades after the war. Just as Japan’s postwar baby-boom generation was turning to the needs of its children who were beginning to come of age in the early 1970s, Sōka Gakkai also began to look inward toward cultivating the first wave of children born into the movement.

### *The Culture Movement and the Amplification of Ikeda’s Authority*

Over several days in mid-October, 1972, Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū celebrated the enshrining of the *daigohonzon* in the magnificent new Shōhondō at Taisekiji. Ikeda did not emphasize the opening of the Shōhondō as the realization of the ‘true ordination platform’. Instead, he used the occasion to announce the beginning of what he termed ‘Phase Two’ (*dainishō* 第二章) for Sōka Gakkai. The Shōhondō was not meant to be seen as a symbol of religious power, he stressed, but a facility for all people. Henceforth, he told the members, Sōka Gakkai was to be an organization dedicated to advancing world peace and culture.

In the wake of the scandal following *I Denounce Sōka Gakkai*, Sōka Gakkai overhauled its internal administrative structure at the same time as it carried out political reforms. Under Toda and the first decade of Ikeda's presidency, Sōka Gakkai maintained a 'vertical line' (*tate-sen* 縦線) administrative hierarchy. This meant that when a member converted someone to Sōka Gakkai, she or he remained in a supervisory role, attending meetings and overseeing the *shakubuku* activities of new adherents. This worked well for Sōka Gakkai when it was still in a fast-growth mode, as it encouraged members to forge and retain networks across geographical divides. Once Sōka Gakkai grew into a mass movement, however, the 'vertical line' structure began to strain. Devout members had to travel constantly to see to the needs of converts across Japan, and the membership in local areas began to complain that they knew more about the Gakkai members they had converted in distant regions than they did about the adherents in their own neighborhoods. 'Phase Two' included a general overhaul of Sōka Gakkai's bureaucratic structure that shifted the administration from a vertical to a 'horizontal line' (*yoko-sen* 横線) system, which Sōka Gakkai retains today. Beginning in April 1970, Sōka Gakkai changed its administrative structure to a 'Block system' (*burokku soshiki* ブロック組織). Local-level administration that had previously organized local members into groups (*kumi* 組) and teams (*han* 班) changed to focus on activities at the level of the Block, a sub-unit of local districts made up of approximately ten to fifteen households. This change reflected the new priority to foster relations among members and between Sōka Gakkai and non-members in local areas.

This bureaucratic shift inspired an explosion of administrative development within Sōka Gakkai that signals the organization's comprehensive transformation into an institution that mirrors modern national structures. Ikeda instituted the post of vice president in 1970, and today there are more than five hundred Sōka Gakkai vice presidents. After this, the Culture Bureau became the Culture Headquarters (Bunka Honbu 文化本部) with sub-divisions that provided for members from different vocations, such as the Artists' Division (Geijutsubu 芸術部), Doctor's Division (Dokutābu ドクター部), and Educator's Division (Kyōikubu 教育部). The institution also created a Society Headquarters (Shakai Honbu 社会本部) with sub-divisions catering to salaried employees, members of local household associations, farmers, and other workers. Now, no matter what members do for a living, and no matter their interests outside of Nichiren Buddhism, they can meet with like-minded practitioners to discuss the relevance of Sōka Gakkai to their jobs, their local communities, and their families.

As Sōka Gakkai sought to leave behind the negative image it had created during its high-growth phase up to 1970, the organization began to expand its ‘culture’ mandate in lieu of explicitly political objectives. ‘Culture’ took the form of moving beyond a central focus on Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism toward a more comprehensive engagement with modern Euro-American art (including literature, music, and other forms), international affairs, and, most importantly, the celebration of Ikeda Daisaku as an internationally celebrated public statesman and intellectual. It is around this time that the legacy of modern humanism began to supersede the significance of Nichiren Buddhism within Sōka Gakkai. Instead of being an organization dedicated to promulgating Nichiren Buddhism, Sōka Gakkai has increasingly become an end in itself, and Nichiren Buddhism is subordinated to the group’s ‘culture’ mission and centralization on Ikeda Daisaku.

In December 1974, Ikeda Daisaku met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai; Sōka Gakkai has since claimed that Ikeda Daisaku played a key role in negotiating the renewal of diplomatic ties between Japan and the People’s Republic of China.<sup>30</sup> Ikeda’s China visit recast him as not only an authority within Sōka Gakkai, but as a towering figure on the international stage who shared the company of philosophers and political greats. In 1972 and 1973, Ikeda held dialogues in London with the renowned British historian Arnold J. Toynbee. The ‘dialogue’ format proved to be a persuasive means of presenting Ikeda Daisaku in horizontal juxtaposition with respected intellectual luminaries. Sōka Gakkai started to describe *shakubuku* practice as a form of dialogue, and Ikeda’s published exchanges began to function as models for members to emulate in their interactions with potential converts. The books themselves continue to prove useful as gifts from Gakkai members to non-members in order to inspire new ‘dialogues’ in local communities.

In the course of recreating himself as an international statesman in the 1970s, Ikeda began to give lectures at universities worldwide and to forge links with powerbrokers in many countries. Between 1975 and mid-2011, Ikeda received more than three hundred honorary Ph.D.s—a world record for a single individual—as well as more than twenty-five national

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<sup>30</sup> Japan and the People’s Republic of China formally normalized diplomatic relations on September 27, 1972. On September 8, 1968, Ikeda Daisaku addressed a gathering of the Student Division (Gakuseibu 学生部) in which he called for normalization of diplomatic ties between Japan and the People’s Republic of China. Sōka Gakkai regards this speech as a pioneering move by Ikeda to initiate negotiations between the two countries.

honors and more than six hundred honorary citizenships from cities and towns across the globe.

Members had consistently celebrated Ikeda before 1970, but once the organization shifted out of high-growth mode, reverence for Ikeda Daisaku developed into Sōka Gakkai's primary *raison d'être*. Sōka Gakkai transformed from an organization headed by Ikeda Daisaku into a group devoted completely to Ikeda Daisaku. Just as Ikeda began to establish himself as an influential international figure, he solidified his position within Sōka Gakkai as the group's sole authority. By the mid-1970s, members were absorbing an ever-increasing number of Gakkai products—including publications, events, and meetings—in which Ikeda loomed large as the final authority on all issues.

### *Conflict with the Priesthood: Leadership Changes and Schism*

On January 26, 1975, Ikeda was appointed President of Sōka Gakkai International. Ikeda was leading an increasingly international movement that was moving away rapidly from Nichiren Shōshū, a conservative denomination with little interest in the political and cultural affairs that were beginning to define Sōka Gakkai.

Conflicts between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū first came to a head in the late 1970s. On January 17, 1977, the Gakkai newspaper *Seikyō Shinbun* carried a speech by Ikeda called "Speaking on Views of Buddhist History" (*Bukkyōshikan o kataru 仏教史観を語る*). Here Ikeda stated that Sōka Gakkai's facilities were essentially the temples of the present era, and that Sōka Gakkai effectively served as the true priestly authority of this age. Ikeda followed this address with similar pronouncements, contending that Nichiren Shōshū priestly claims to an exclusive lineage going back to Nichiren are not superior to the links Sōka Gakkai members forge to the Dharma by chanting *namu myōhō renge kyō* to the *daigohonzon*.

Needless to say, the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood was deeply alarmed by these developments. Shōshū chief abbot Hosoi Nittatsu (1902–1979) and Ikeda were able to negotiate a resolution to the conflict, and on November 7, 1978, Ikeda led two thousand Sōka Gakkai administrators to the Nichiren Shōshū head temple at Taisekiji on an 'apology pilgrimage' (*owabi tozan お詫び登山*). Ikeda's apology, however, was not the end of the issue. The construction of the great hall Shōhondō at the head temple Taisekiji and Sōka Gakkai's challenge to the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood had already inspired some to break with the Buddhist sect. Sōka Gakkai



was also beginning to worry about members who were leaving the group, some of whom were feeding a growing number of reports in the tabloid media about scandals that involved Sōka Gakkai and its political and religious adversaries. There was a growing movement of erstwhile Gakkai adherents whom Nichiren Shōshū had encouraged to continue their worship as *danto* 檀徒, or parishioners. Some of these organized the All-Japan Parishioner Association (Zenkoku Dantokai 全国檀徒会), a Shōshū-supported group opposed to Sōka Gakkai, and former Gakkai members began to affiliate in increasing numbers with Hokkekō Rengōkai 法華講連合会, an umbrella organization of Nichiren Shōshū lay organizations that incorporated in 1962.

Hokkekō members and some Nichiren Shōshū priests complained that Ikeda Daisaku's apology had not been sufficiently sincere. On April 24, 1979, Ikeda resigned his positions as third president of Sōka Gakkai and took the position of Honorary President of Sōka Gakkai and President of Sōka Gakkai International, posts that he retains at the time of this writing.<sup>31</sup> For approximately one year, Ikeda maintained a low profile. His speeches did not appear in the *Seikyō Shinbun* or other Gakkai media, and his only regular contact with members was indirect and 'cultural': through poems he sent to local districts encouraging their efforts toward *kōsen rufu* and recordings he released of himself playing the piano, a hobby that he turned to in this short period of semi-exile. Ikeda also became an enthusiastic amateur photographer during the year after he stepped down as third president, and in 1982 Sōka Gakkai launched an exhibition of his photographs called "Dialogue with Nature"; this has since toured Gakkai facilities and public spaces around the world. Now, the walls of every Sōka Gakkai facility are decorated with prints of Ikeda's photos, and every Culture Center maintains a piano in its main hall in case Honorary President Ikeda should arrive and wish to play.

In the meantime, Nichiren Shōshū underwent changes of its own. Sixty-sixth chief abbot Nittatsu died on July 22, 1979, and he was replaced in August by the sixty-seventh chief abbot Abe Nikken (1922–). At first, this change in priesthood leadership appeared to signal renewed good relations

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<sup>31</sup> Ikeda was replaced as administrative leader of Sōka Gakkai by fourth president Hōjō Hiroshi (1923–1981), who remained in the position until he died in July 1981. Akiya Einosuke (1930–) became fifth Sōka Gakkai president after this, a post he held until November 2006, when Harada Minoru (1941–) became sixth president.

between Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai. The relationship between the Gakkai and the priesthood remained warm after Ikeda returned to the spotlight in 1980, and Abe Nikken even reappointed Ikeda to the post of chief lay representative on January 2, 1984, Ikeda's fifty-sixth birthday.

From 1980, Ikeda steered Sōka Gakkai toward greater engagement with international affairs; in April 1981, Sōka Gakkai registered as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the organization began to recast itself as a movement for world peace and nuclear disarmament, with Ikeda as its unquestioned leader. By and large, Nichiren Shōshū did not see Gakkai members transform into faithful temple parishioners after Ikeda became Honorary President. Instead, Gakkai adherents continued to organize in the thousands to revere Ikeda as the leader of an increasingly outward-looking movement that was growing rapidly distant from its lay Buddhist roots. By the mid-1980s, the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood found itself the uncomfortable elderly companion of a dynamic international organization led by a globe-trotting public intellectual who was beginning to speak more often about the Enlightenment of European philosophy than the enlightenment promised by Nichiren Buddhist doctrine.

A decade after Ikeda took the mantle of Honorary President, tensions between him and the Shōshū priesthood reached a breaking point. In December 1990, Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai leaders exchanged a series of recriminatory letters complaining about each others' conduct, and the head priests drew up new sect regulations resulting in Ikeda Daisaku and other Gakkai leaders losing their positions as heads of the Shōshū lay association. The New Year saw an escalation of the conflict on both sides, until finally, on November 28, 1991, Nichiren Shōshū issued a "Notice of Excommunication of Sōka Gakkai from Nichiren Shōshū." Henceforth, Nichiren Shōshū parishioners who wished to enter sect temples, including the head temple Taisekiji where the *daigohonzon* is enshrined, were required to pledge that they were not affiliated with Sōka Gakkai. In one stroke, Nichiren Shōshū effectively excommunicated all but a handful of its millions of adherents.

### *Fallout from the 1991 Schism*

The years following the November 1991 split between Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai have seen battles rage between the two organizations. Accusations, acrimony, and litigation now define their relationship. Sōka

Gakkai now calls Nichiren Shōshū ‘Nikken-shū 日顯宗’, or ‘the Nikken sect’, while Nichiren Shōshū, in keeping with criticisms leveled against Sōka Gakkai in the tabloid media by many anti-Gakkai organizations, refers to the Gakkai as ‘Ikeda-kyō 池田教’, or ‘the religion of Ikeda’. Both groups deny the religious legitimacy of their opponent by demoting the other to a cult of personality, and both have sought to purge themselves of each others’ influence; Nichiren Shōshū demolished the Shōhondō between 1997 and 1998, and Sōka Gakkai denies the authority of the Shōshū abbot.<sup>32</sup>

The schism with Nichiren Shōshū created immediate dilemmas for Sōka Gakkai. Among the most obvious were that members were barred from making pilgrimages to the *daigohonzon* at Taiseikiji, and that the Gakkai lost access to its source of new *gohonzon* scrolls for converts. Sōka Gakkai was aided in part by fallout that transpired within the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood. After Abe Nikken excommunicated the vast majority of Shōshū parishioners, several groups of Shōshū priests contested his authority and broke away to form their own organizations. One of these groups, the Seinen Sōryo Kaikaku Dōmei 青年僧侶改革同盟, or Association of Youthful Priests Dedicated to the Reformation of Nichiren Shōshū, commits itself to serving the needs of Sōka Gakkai members. Association priests now operate approximately thirty temples patronized by Gakkai members and even oversee a few so-called ‘Culture Center Temples’ (Kaikan Jiin 會館寺院) where members can receive funerals, memorials, and other services. Ironically, when Sōka Gakkai split from its temple Buddhist parent, events transpired to turn Sōka Gakkai into a lay association that maintains temples and tonsured priests. On October 2, 1993, Sōka Gakkai began to confer *gohonzon* replicas made from a transcription of the *daigohonzon* mandala inscribed by the twenty-sixth chief abbot Nichikan (1665–1726) in 1720, which the Gakkai received on September 7, 1993 from priests at the Tokyo temple Jōenji 淨圓寺. Gakkai members turned in their old *gohonzon* and receive replicas from the Nichikan transcription.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sōka Gakkai has persisted in calling Nichiren Shōshū ‘Nikken-shū’ even though Abe Nikken retired as sixty-seventh chief abbot on December 15, 2005, when he appointed his successor Hayase Nichinyo (1935–), sixty-eighth chief abbot. The official Gakkai stand is that the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood has been corrupted irretrievably by Nikken, and that any chief abbot appointed personally by him follows in his illegitimate lineage.

<sup>33</sup> The Nichikan *gohonzon* has been a source of great doctrinal contention for Sōka Gakkai. Nichiren Shōshū accuses Sōka Gakkai members of worshipping a heterodox mandala, and Kenshōkai, Hokkekō and other rival Nichiren Shōshū-based lay organizations

Sōka Gakkai lost some of its membership when it split from Nichiren Shōshū in 1991. Some members were dismayed at the prospect of losing access to the Taisekiji pilgrimage, others (mostly elderly) were concerned about a future without priests to perform funerals and memorial services, and a contingent left because they were disenchanted by Sōka Gakkai's increasingly Ikeda-centered ethos. Some members who left Sōka Gakkai following the schism were convinced to continue their practice as parishioners affiliated with Hokkekō. In response, Sōka Gakkai launched the *dakkō undō* 脱講運動, 'the movement for leaving the confraternity', a campaign that developed after 1991 to draw former Gakkai members away from Hokkekō and back into the Sōka Gakkai fold. Members are encouraged to chant for 'Nikken bokumetsu 日顕撲滅', or 'Nikken's self-annihilation', praying for Abe Nikken and 'Nikken-shū' to self-destruct by means of their own degradation. Entreaties for *Nikken bokumetsu* are commonly seen on home altars and on placards in front of altars at Culture Centers, and local Gakkai chapters routinely pass out lists of Nichiren Shōshū temples in their areas for members to focus on in their daily chants, beseeching the object of worship for aid in 'wiping out' (*datō* 打倒) Sōka Gakkai's enemy.<sup>34</sup>

The years since the split have seen many lawsuits between the Gakkai and the priesthood. Many of these pertain to disagreements over the transfer of members' remains from Taisekiji and other Shōshū temples to massive Gakkai 'memorial parks'. Sōka Gakkai began to build its own grave facilities around 1977; this was, in fact, another factor that contributed to the first open conflict between Sōka Gakkai and the priesthood. After 1991, Sōka Gakkai began to construct huge cemeteries for member families. Sōka Gakkai now maintains thirteen memorial parks in Japan, from Hokkaido to Kyushu, which contain the remains of hundreds of thousands of Gakkai adherents and room for many thousands more in individual graves and 'eternal memorial reliquaries' (*eitai kuyō nōkotsudō* 永代供養納骨堂).

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use the *gohonzon* issue as a means of appealing to Gakkai members to renounce their affiliation with Sōka Gakkai and return to direct worship of the *daigohonzon*.

<sup>34</sup> Today, *dakkō undō* mostly takes the form of seeking the erasure of Sōka Gakkai's enemy not by direct confrontation but an inward-looking process of regular chanting to the object of worship in the hopes of effecting change in others through cultivating one's own religious practice. It is unclear as to how *dakkō undō* is supposed to eradicate Nichiren Shōshū. However, the practice cultivates Gakkai adherents in the ethos of the organization.

Gakkai funerals are now called *yūjinsō* 友人葬, or ‘friend funerals’. They are conducted by Gakkai administrators from the Gitenbu 儀典部, or Liturgy Division, who perform *gongyō* for the deceased and carry out the other funerary duties formerly performed by priests. Deceased members do not receive individual *kaimyō* 戒名 (posthumous death ordination names) from the Liturgy Division, and their funerals and graves are typically not elaborate affairs; emphasis is instead placed on the equality of all members before the wondrous law of the Dharma (*myōhō*) in death as in life.<sup>35</sup>

After 1991, Sōka Gakkai confirmed its identity as an organization committed entirely to Ikeda’s vision. Starting in the 1990s, Ikeda grew more likely to quote from inspirational works by canonical European and American figures such as Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Walt Whitman (1819–1892) than Nichiren. Gakkai Culture Centers are decorated with Ikeda’s photographs and images of the historical figures he finds most inspiring; typically, apart from altars that enshrine the *gohonzon*, there is nothing traditionally ‘Buddhist’ or even Japanese to be seen in Gakkai buildings. Ikeda extols Napoleon, Ludwig van Beethoven, Martin Luther King Jr., the Mahātmā Gandhi, and a host of other historical greats for having realized their transcendent visions in the face of adversity. It is they, not Nichiren, who are most likely to be lauded in Ikeda’s *oeuvre* as exemplars of the Buddhist expression *bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提: “worldly passions are, as they are, enlightenment.”

In 2002, Sōka Gakkai revised its institutional regulations. The preamble to the regulation asserts that the standard for the Sōka Gakkai spirit will eternally be the “indivisible bond of master and disciple” (*shitei funi*) expressed by Sōka Gakkai’s first three presidents Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda. According to the new regulations, the Gakkai president is to serve a single five-year term, oversee the vice presidents, and supervise committees that report directly to his office.<sup>36</sup> These new Gakkai regulations

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<sup>35</sup> Every deceased person interred in a Gakkai memorial park receives the posthumous title *zokunin* 俗人 (layperson), reaffirming the division of Gakkai members from the priesthood in death as in life. See Bessatsu Takarajima 2007: 88. *Kaimyō*, or posthumous Buddhist ordination titles, were another point of contention leading to the 1991 split; Sōka Gakkai accused Nichiren Shōshū temples of profiting from bereaved families by charging outrageous fees for a ranked series of posthumous titles. Though there is now an official Sōka Gakkai policy of not conferring *kaimyō*, tonsured clerics affiliated with the Association for Youthful Priests continue to bestow posthumous titles for free on members during memorial services if requested (interview with an Association priest, Tokyo, 22 December 2007).

<sup>36</sup> April 1, 2002, Sōka Gakkai institutional regulations. See Sōka Gakkai, “Kaisoku.”

make clear what Sōka Gakkai rhetoric has implied for decades: charismatic leadership of the organization ends with Ikeda Daisaku. Ikeda will not appoint a successor, and the organization has forsworn the possibility of upholding another leader who would approach Ikeda's stature.<sup>37</sup>

*Sōka Gakkai Today and Tomorrow*

As it looks to its future, with its ever-increasing emphasis on 'culture', social engagement through politics, and artistic pursuits, Sōka Gakkai has, in a curious sense, returned to its roots as an early twentieth-century intellectual movement. Yet the group has clearly moved far beyond its origins in the aspirations for social legitimacy and religious salvation that drove its founders to combine modern educational ideals with Buddhist soteriology. Euro-American liberal humanism and Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism, which emerged as two influential strains in Makiguchi's time, merged over the course of Sōka Gakkai's postwar development and inspired its millions of members to construct a fully-realized alternative modern society.

In the decades of Sōka Gakkai's rapid growth from the 1950s up to the early 1970s, Nichiren Buddhism served as the principal foundation of the Gakkai's religious and political campaigns. Since that time, it appears that the organization's Nichiren Buddhist legacy has been enfolded within a culture-focused Gakkai program of ever-increasing Ikeda centrism. The history of Sōka Gakkai makes it clear that calling the group a lay Buddhist movement is an inadequate description, and has for some time been an inadequate way to account for the full range of the organization's activities and ideals.

Sōka Gakkai owes its tremendous success as a mass movement in part to its manifestation of the ideals of an early twentieth century expansionist, aspirational ethos. However, what was once its greatest strength is now one of its greatest weaknesses. The group has maintained its program of mass participation toward institutional greatness through forceful proselytizing, an ethic of heroic self-sacrifice in the name of discipleship, and large-scale cultural expression even as contemporary industrialized societies at large and Japanese society in particular have turned away

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that the 2002 Gakkai regulations offer one possible loophole for appointing another leader-for-life. Chapter Two, Article Seven states that Sōka Gakkai reserves the right to appoint an Honorary President "based on a decision made at a general leaders' meeting." See *ibid.*

from these modes toward individualized forms of personal cultivation and embrace of social change. Its most devoted members appear increasingly to inhabit a time capsule that preserves within organizational boundaries the drive and values of Sōka Gakkai in the immediate postwar era. The rigid hierarchies and types of activity maintained by Sōka Gakkai's adjunct state apparatus are increasingly at odds with its majority second- and third-generation membership, which is socially diverse, largely unmotivated by the material wants and spiritual anomie that attracted the first generation of members, and otherwise driven by individual aspirations not necessarily accommodated by the mass movement focus of the centralized organization. Perhaps most importantly, Sōka Gakkai faces a looming crisis; when Ikeda Daisaku passes away with no clear successor, the organization will inevitably be forced to reconcile the gap that yawns between members' regard for Ikeda and their view of Gakkai bureaucrats who are responsible for overseeing the group's day-to-day activities.

Ultimately, Sōka Gakkai will remain a defining influence on Japanese society. No matter how Sōka Gakkai may change in the future, it is difficult to imagine that the group will ever completely lose its appeal as a forum for realizing aspirations for social legitimacy, or that an organization this skilled at cultivating loyalty in its members will simply fade away. As Japan in the twenty-first century moves away from its twentieth-century history of mass movement activism, Sōka Gakkai, despite its daunting complexities, will remain a model for other organizations to emulate in the hopes of attracting millions of devotees.

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AMBIGUOUS IDENTITIES:  
NEGOTIATING CHRISTIANITY AND 'JAPANESENESS'

AIKE P. ROTS

*Introduction*

The topic of Christianity in Japan has received considerable scholarly attention. One of the central issues addressed in several studies, asked by sociologists as well as historians and missionaries, is the question as to why Christianity in Japan has failed to be successful in converting a significant proportion of the citizens of that nation.<sup>1</sup> In sharp contrast to neighbouring Korea (where Christians make up approximately 30 percent of the population), and despite the continuous presence of a large number of missionary organisations since the second half of the nineteenth century, the total number of registered Christians in Japan has never been more than one percent of the population.<sup>2</sup> This relative lack of success has traditionally been attributed to the perceived otherness, or 'cultural deviance' (Mullins 1998: 169) of Christianity.

Christianity has long been seen and portrayed—by potential followers, by opponents, as well as by scholars—as simply too different from, and, therefore, fundamentally irreconcilable with Japanese culture and society. This somewhat simplistic explanation has been nuanced in recent years by sociologists of religion Mark Mullins and John Clammer, who have pointed to other, more complicated social and historical factors explaining the lack of growth. Examples include the unwillingness of many Japanese Christians to participate fully in some of the rituals and events of civil society (Clammer 2001: 172–74), or the lingering historical associations of Christianity with Western colonial respectively occupying powers (Mullins 1998: 170–72). However, the basic assumption that Christianity is essentially a culturally and ideologically deviant religion incompatible with Japanese worldviews and social structures continues to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Sherrill 2003 and Dale 1998.

<sup>2</sup> For recent statistics on Christianity in Japan, see the chapter by Mark Mullins in this *Handbook*.

be widespread. This deviant nature is often considered the main reason Christianity has not managed to grow significantly.

From a scholarly point of view, one might question whether membership rates should be considered the main issue. Certainly, they are worth taking into account, as patterns of increase and decline may point to certain developments in religious organisations as well as society as a whole. However, the question “why did Christianity not succeed in Japan?” suggests a rather limited understanding of success and influence, and reflects a Christian obsession with quantitative growth—the underlying assumption of which seems to be that a religion can only be considered successful if it succeeds in making as many converts as possible.

In fact, it can be argued that Christianity in Japan has been quite successful in a number of ways. For instance, the number of Christian educational institutions (schools and universities), as well as hospitals and other organisations contributing to social welfare, points to a significant influence in society, even though this influence may not have materialized in terms of higher church attendance. Christians have been actively involved in political issues and constitute a powerful—if not always united—group in Japanese civil society (see Steele 2003). Furthermore, some of the country’s most prominent writers and intellectuals are or were Christians. And, significantly, some Christian rituals have succeeded in gaining widespread popularity among large numbers of people—in particular, Christian-style wedding ceremonies seem to have found a niche in the Japanese religious marketplace (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 206–33; Mullins 1998: 192–93). While puritans may question the motives behind these ceremonies, they do serve to improve the visibility (and economic power) of Christian institutions. Thus, the position of Christians and Christianity in Japan is ambiguous. On the one hand, Christians are perceived as different from the mainstream, as ‘others within’ the Japanese nation and society. On the other hand, Christianity has a prominent position in that same society, in particular in but not limited to the fields of education, politics and literature. In fact, it is this very ambiguity that can be considered one of the defining features of Christianity in Japan.

From the time of the implementation of Christianity by Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century until today, Christians in Japan have struggled to make sense of their double identity. At times, the political situation has made this struggle between conflicting loyalties and identities even harder. In the course of pre-modern and modern history, there have been periods of relative freedom, but also of serious opposition and persecution. In particular during the early Tokugawa Period persecutions were severe,

and many Christians were killed. The few who did survive and continued practicing their religion secretly, the so-called Kakure Kirishitan 隠れキリシタン, could only do so by being highly accommodating and flexible (see Turnbull 1998). In the early Meiji period, as a result of foreign pressure, the ban on Christianity was lifted, and in subsequent decades a great number of missionaries entered the country. They did succeed in making some converts, but not to the extent many of them may have expected.<sup>3</sup> Rather than simply contributing this relative lack of success to cultural differences, it can be explained by referring to the widespread anti-Christian discourse that had existed and had been developed in Japan for several centuries, which influenced (and, possibly, continues to influence) public opinion and anti-Christian rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, compared to the preceding period from the 1870s to the 1920s, Japanese society and politics were characterized by religious freedom, at least to a certain extent. Freedom of religion was constitutionally recognised in 1889, and during the Meiji period a variety of missionary organisations and new religious movements emerged that actively competed with each other. Simultaneously, however, state institutions were experimenting with various new types of state control over religious organisations. Consequently, from the 1920s onwards, the situation deteriorated; the regime increasingly restricted the freedom of religion, demanded all citizens to participate in 'State Shintō' rituals, and persecuted some Christian groups (in particular those with millenarian tendencies, such as the Holiness movement) as well as some other new religions (Hardacre 1989: 114–32; Mullins 1994: 261–80).

After the war, the situation improved significantly, as the new constitution guaranteed full freedom of religion. Missionaries returned to Japan, new denominations were founded and the overall presence of Christianity in society increased. However, as compared to some of the so-called 'new religions' claiming impressive membership rates, their appeal has remained limited. Moreover, tensions between Christian organisations and other religious (in particular Shintō) organisations have continued to divide society, and resurface periodically (Breen 2003: 267–69). As before, Christians continue to struggle in their efforts to negotiate their seemingly contradictory identities. On the one hand, they are members

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<sup>3</sup> On Meiji-period Christian mission, see Mullins 1998: 12–19.

<sup>4</sup> In Tokugawa Japan, Christianity came to be seen and depicted as a potentially threatening Other, and a vehicle of Western imperialist aggression— notions which were reemployed and reinforced during the Meiji period. For an excellent study of this anti-Christian political discourse, see Paramore 2009.

of a universalist but exclusivist salvation religion, demanding their full moral and spiritual loyalty; on the other, they belong to and take part in a society characterized by its strong social structures and ritual obligations, not necessarily compatible with the demands of their religion. The existential dimensions of this struggle are well expressed in the works of several prominent Christian writers, such as Endō Shūsaku (1923–1996), who stated that:

As a Christian, a Japanese and an author, I am constantly concerned with the relationship and conflict created by these three tensions. Unfortunately, I have yet to reconcile and create a certain unity between these three conditions in my mind and, for the most part, they continue to appear as contradictory.<sup>5</sup>

To cope with this situation and reconcile these seemingly conflicting identities, Japanese Christians have employed different strategies, some of which have proved more successful than others. In this chapter, I will examine two such attempts. As John Clammer stated in his essay on the position of Christians as an ideological minority in contemporary Japan, most of the studies on Christianity in Japan have dealt with topics such as church history, theology and so on, but “rarely is the question raised of the internal dimensions of being a Japanese Christian” (Clammer 2001: 166). Following his suggestion, this essay attempts to look at those internal dimensions, in particular in terms of identity construction and negotiation. As noted by Endō, the Japanese Christian experience is characterised by a certain ambiguity, caused by different identities that can be perceived as contradictory or even conflicting. Of course, *the* Japanese experience does not exist, and not all Christians may consider these different aspects of their identity as contradictory. Nevertheless, this ambiguity does seem to be one of the underlying motives of much Christian literature, scholarship and theology, as well as many personal narratives.

The responses to the ambiguity have varied widely, and numerous strategies for negotiating identities have been employed. Different periods in history have given rise to different issues and concerns, and, accordingly, to different solutions. Furthermore, there is great denominational variety within Japan, and members of different churches may have their own particular issues which are not necessarily shared by others. The Japanese Christian landscape includes the Roman Catholic church, the Russian Orthodox church, traditional ‘Western’ Protestant churches, ‘indigenous’

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Williams 1996: 160.

Japanese churches, a wide variety of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, migrant churches and so-called Christianity-derived new religions, and all these churches differ considerably in terms of size, belief system, organisation, social position and so on.<sup>6</sup> Hence, generalizations are problematic—in fact, the variety is such that it may be more adequate to speak of Japanese Christianities, in the plural. Nevertheless, despite their mutual differences, it is probably safe to assume that most Christians in Japan do share some basic experiences, albeit it to varying degrees and with varying responses. One of these may be the aforementioned experience of having to deal with the ambiguity of being simultaneously Christian and Japanese, and the need to somehow reconcile these two identities.

The ambiguity should not be reduced to a simple East-West dichotomy, for it is much more complicated and multi-faceted. The suggestion that the challenges facing Christianity in Japan can be explained adequately and completely by referring to cultural discontinuity, and the perceived incompatibility of Japanese society and the 'Western' character of Christianity, is problematic. Japanese society, with its supposed 'Eastern' emphasis on social relationships, ancestralism, harmony with nature, religious 'syncretism' and so on, is often perceived as incompatible with and diametrically opposed to 'Western' worldviews such as Christianity, with its so-called exclusivist attitude, individualistic soteriology, and notion of nature as being subordinate to man. However, such a rigid dichotomy does not do fully justice to the particular social and historical reality of Japan, and its internal diversity. Moreover, it reflects a questionable cultural essentialism and reductionism, and it fails to explain why Christianity did manage to be comparatively successful in some other Asian countries (in particular the Philippines and Korea, but also, to a lesser extent, China and Vietnam).

In fact, the view of Christianity as essentially a Western religion, transmitted to other cultures by active missionaries who are responsible for its translation, is no longer considered adequate by most scholars of global

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<sup>6</sup> This list is meant to give an indication of the variety of Christian movements and denominations in contemporary Japan, not as a rigid categorization. While, say, the Russian Orthodox or the Lutheran church are easily identified and categorized, this is not the case for some of the relatively new, independent movements. Depending on one's perspective, a single movement may be defined simultaneously as Pentecostal (or Charismatic), 'indigenous', or as a new religion based on Christian ideology. Even within churches, there are significant differences, as exemplified by the case of Catholic immigrants challenging and transforming established Japanese Catholic practices. Thus, Christianity in Japan is a dynamic and by no means unified religion, of which the different expressions are difficult to categorize.

Christianity. On the contrary, the growing 'non-Western' dominance (demographically at least) in Christianity worldwide has given rise to an increasing awareness and acceptance of a wide variety of 'glocal' Christian expressions, not necessarily inferior to Western traditions. They are seen as the outcome of the interplay between globalization (in this case, the spread of Christian ideology by missionaries, as well as the influence of mass media) on the one hand, and local religious practices, socio-economic structures, cultural epistemology and political issues, on the other. Accordingly, converts are no longer seen as passive recipients, but rather as active agents, responsible for accommodation and adaptation. In particular, the revolutionary growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Latin America, Africa and Asia has led to significant changes in global Christianity's power balance.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, when studying Japanese expressions of Christianity, it is important to go beyond simplistic binary oppositions, and bear in mind the fact that Japanese Christians have been and continue to be agents not only of incorporation, but also of interpretation, adaptation and change. Rather than perceiving Christianity as merely a foreign import not particularly well suited to the Japanese religious market, we should recognise the existence of a variety of original Japanese Christian expressions, created by people who may have drawn on the ideas of foreign missionaries, but have interpreted these in their own terms. Several of the conflicts and challenges facing Japanese Christians reflect local, rather than global, issues, and are caused by internal dynamics that cannot be explained in terms of a simplistic East-West dichotomy. Other issues do reflect international developments, but these, too, cannot be reduced to, say, the 'essential irreconcilability' of 'Eastern and Western' culture and their respective worldviews.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a comprehensive overview of the variety of different 'glocal' Japanese expressions of Christianity and accommodation strategies. Mark Mullins has discussed a number of these in his fascinating survey of so-called 'indigenous' (that is, organizationally and doctrinally independent) Japanese Christian movements, *Christianity Made in Japan*. I will limit myself to the following question: what are some of the ways in which Japanese Christians have attempted to construct their identities as members of an influential, yet in some ways marginalized ideological minority within Japanese society? In particular,

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Martin 2002 and Anderson 2004.



what strategies have they developed for reconciling Christianity and ‘Japaneseness’? I will attempt to answer this question by discussing two case studies, which, while perhaps not representative of Japanese Christianity as a whole, will hopefully serve as useful illustrations of some of the challenges and concerns facing Japanese Christians, as well as some of their coping strategies. At first sight, the studies may seem quite different, in subject matter as well as methodology—however, both cases represent genuine attempts to negotiate Christian and Japanese identity and ‘glocalize’ Christianity, and an analysis reveals that the concerns and agendas underlying these attempts are quite similar indeed. Therefore, I do believe that a comparison may shed some light on the social dimensions of modern and contemporary Japanese Christianity.

First, I will look at the issue of cultural adaptation, and the incorporation of a Christian worldview into a Japanese context, through the re-appropriation of the past; in other words, the writing of alternative, Japanese-Christian historical narratives. In particular, I will discuss the topic of Japanese-Jewish common ancestry myths, of which Japanese Christians have been, and continue to be, the main advocates. Recently, these ideas have regained popularity, but most of what is now presented as sensational new evidence goes back to pre-war texts. I will retrace the background of these ideas, with special emphasis on the work of an influential Christian leader and minor founder, Nakada Jūji (1870–1939). Second, I will discuss the case of one particular independent Pentecostal community. I will examine some of the movement’s strategies for defining their identity *vis-à-vis* mainstream society and its religious expressions, and for negotiating a delicate balance between rejection and accommodation.

*Alternative History: Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theories*

One of the best-known Japanese Christian intellectuals in history, in his own country as well as abroad, was Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930). He was the founder of the Mukyōkai 無教会 or Non-Church movement, generally considered the first fully independent Japanese Christian movement. His ideas have captured the imagination of a number of Western (Protestant) scholars, who may have felt attracted to its radical egalitarianism, individualistic emphasis on moral and spiritual self-cultivation, and rejection of several of the rituals and organizational structures of the mission

churches.<sup>8</sup> Besides, he was a prolific writer of essays, sermons and letters, in Japanese as well as English. One of the main *leitmotifs* in his work is his constant struggle to appropriate Christianity as a genuinely Japanese religion, no longer corrupted by European cultural additions, as illustrated by his statement that

God does not want our national characters attained by the discipline of twenty centuries to be wholly supplanted by American and European ideas. The beauty of Christianity is that it can sanctify all the peculiar traits which God gave to each nation. A blessed and encouraging thought that *J[apan] too is God's nation*. (Uchimura 1895: 147; emphasis in original)

To this end, Uchimura employed two strategies. On the one hand, he tried to distinguish artificially between the pure essence of Christianity and its later additions and 'aberrations'. This is a strategy reminiscent of the approach of several so-called fundamentalist adherents of religions today, who claim to go back to the original teachings of their religion—while strongly condemning those practices and beliefs not considered part of this core essence, labeling them as 'superstition' or 'corruption'. Thus, Uchimura's implicit assertion that his movement constituted the fulfilment of the Reformation can be seen as a justification for his uncompromising attitude *vis-à-vis* a large number of Christian practices (Mullins 1998: 59; cf. Uchimura 1895: 140, 144–45).

Simultaneously, however, instead of defending the notion of a pure Christianity free from any cultural influences, Uchimura made serious attempts to associate Christianity with Japanese culture by claiming a Christian-Japanese shared heritage. In other words, he created an alternative historical narrative, in which traditional Japanese cultural and religious elements were reinterpreted from a Christian perspective. Significantly, the creation of a new origin narrative, in which the European and/or American historical influences are marginalized and the own non-Christian history and religious traditions are somehow incorporated into a Christian narrative framework (or vice versa), is a strategy for indigenization employed by numerous independent Christian movements worldwide. That is, several non-Western movements have created alternative historical narratives as a means to reconcile their Christian

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<sup>8</sup> The Mukyōkai movement became relatively well-known in Western academic circles after the publication of the study by Carlo Caldarola, *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (1979); discussed and complemented by Mark Mullins (1998: 54–67). In addition, his life and works are discussed in the biography written by John F. Howes (2005).

identity with original religious and cultural traditions. Following scholar of African Christianity Kwame Bediako, Mark Mullins refers to this process as the “Christianization of the pre-Christian past” (Bediako 1995: 75–87; quoted in Mullins 1998: 61). Uchimura did so by asserting the similarities between ‘pure Christianity’ on the one hand, and Confucianism, Pure Land Buddhism and *bushidō* 武士道 (the ‘way of the samurai’) on the other. He claimed that the developments of these traditions in Japan had been providential, and now that Christianity had come to Japan it would be perfected by modeling it after these traditions (Mullins 1998: 60–66).

Uchimura was by no means the only Christian writer who attempted to reconcile Christianity with Japanese identity by providing his audience with an alternative historical narrative. For instance, Teshima Ikurō (1910–1973), founder of the nationalist-Pentecostal Makuya 幕屋 movement, referred to the ancient Japanese mythological chronicles (such as the *Kojiki* 古事記 and the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀) as the ‘Japanese Old Testament’, and claimed that the gods and spirits mentioned in these chronicles correspond to the angels mentioned in the Bible (Mullins 1998: 123–24). Another notable example of a narrative that has been employed by Japanese Christians to Christianize their national history, and lay claim to the heritage of ‘original’ (that is, non-Western) Christianity, is the myth that the Japanese share a common ancestry with today’s Jews. In fact, a number of such theories exist, but their basic argument and agenda are very similar. Their central claim is that the Japanese descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. This identification of the Japanese nation with the Jews from the Old Testament can be interpreted as part of a strategy to assert the originally Jewish (that is, ‘Eastern’) character of Christianity, and discredit European Christianity as a later aberration. Furthermore, in some cases at least, it is used as justification for the claim that the Japanese nation is divinely elected, as illustrated below. Let us briefly discuss the ideological pedigree of this myth, before looking at its implementation and use in the Japanese context.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between Christian societies in Europe and their Jewish minorities has always been highly contentious. In pre-modern and modern times alike, Jews have regularly been the victims of violent oppression; yet, at the same time, their status as the descendants of God’s original

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout this chapter, I do not use the word ‘myth’ in the meaning of ‘fallacy’. Rather, I use it in the Barthesian sense; i.e., to refer to a type of narrative that serves to depoliticize certain ideas and their underlying agendas by presenting them as self-evident or ‘natural’ truths. See Barthes 1957: 216–19; cf. McCutcheon 2000.

chosen people, as narrated in the Bible, has made them the object of continuous Christian fascination and envy. Accordingly, one of the myths that has figured prominently in the European Christian imagination, and continues to intrigue groups of Christians (and others) worldwide today, is the myth of the Lost Tribes of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Torah, the Israelites were divided into twelve tribes, which were the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. As a result of forced invasions and exile, ten of the tribes 'disappeared', thus becoming the Lost Tribes, which have exercised a profound influence on the Christian imagination. In the Middle Ages, it was a recurring topic in much Christian literature, and in the course of history many 'strange' (that is, non-Christian) people were identified with it. What is of particular significance for the purpose of this study is Tudor Parfitt's explanation of the persistence of the myth: it "has become such a useful channel for understanding unknown peoples and races. . . . The myth has been used in the Western world as a device for understanding the 'other'—often the savage 'other' that is the imagined opposite of ourselves" (2002: 20). As the Jews were 'archetypal others' (ibid.: 21), the myth of the Lost Tribes served as a useful tool for categorizing the unknown—thus, it was a myth of differentiation, which allowed for the projection of racist and anti-Semitic notions onto a variety of non-European people.

Significantly, however, in modern history, several 'non-Western' communities (including tribes in South Africa, Uganda and Ethiopia; minorities in India and China; and African Americans) have identified themselves with the Lost Tribes. By doing so, they have actively re-appropriated the myth to create their own distinctive identity, positioned *vis-à-vis* the West and/or a dominant national culture. Moreover, by identifying themselves with the Jews, they share in the Jewish myth of divine election and a glorious past, and, accordingly, in the hope of messianic intervention and regeneration. In the context of Christianity, the myth is sometimes employed by non-Western Christians (and Christianity-derived new religions) as a strategy to challenge lingering power structures. That is, by claiming direct descent from God's original people, they implicitly

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<sup>10</sup> According to Tudor Parfitt, who studied a wide variety of expressions of the myth of the Lost Tribes, it is "one of the great universal myths. Its power to persuade is colossal. It has proved both potent and persistent and has allowed itself—volunteered itself—to be recruited to all sorts of causes, in every continent and just about every country" (2002: 2). On its implementation in Japan, see Parfitt 2002: 157–72; Goodman and Miyazawa 2000: 37–75; Shillony 1991: 134–42; Clammer 2001: 189–216.

challenge Western ecclesiastic power, as well as the self-evidence of Western interpretations of Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Thus, a myth that started out as a tool for labeling inferior others has come to be employed as a strategy to symbolically empower marginalized religious and ethnic minorities. In the words of Goodman and Miyazawa, “[common ancestry theories] have been espoused by alienated, marginal, oppressed peoples throughout the world as part of their effort to reject the authority of European Christianity while still laying claim to the empowering heritage of monotheism” (2000: 63). Arguably, similar subtexts underlie the expressions of the myth as they have been developed and retold by Japanese Christians (as well as by some missionaries sympathising with their case), as we shall see in the following discussion.

Despite the relative absence of Jews and Jewish culture in Japan, and the geographical and cultural distance between the two nations, throughout the twentieth century Jews have figured quite prominently in the imagination of several Japanese authors. They have produced an impressive quantity of anti-Semitic conspiracy literature, and surveys have shown that the Jews are generally held in low esteem by the Japanese population (Goodman and Miyazawa 2000: 1–5). Paradoxically, however, so-called philo-Semitic ideas are widespread as well, as illustrated by the success of the bestseller *The Japanese and the Jews* (essentially a *nihonjinron* 日本人論-style treatise on Japanese national identity,<sup>12</sup> but told from the perspective of a sympathetic Jewish outsider)<sup>13</sup> and, in particular, the popularity of aforementioned Japanese-Jewish common ancestry theories (*nichiyu dōsorōn* 日猶同祖論), which claim that the Japanese people descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel.

These ‘theories’ linger on, and seem to have recently acquired new popularity, within Japan as well as abroad. As recently as 2010, a new publication claimed to have found new evidence that “Christianity was introduced to Japan through the Lost Tribes of Israel, who were converted to Christianity through the missionary efforts of the Assyrian Church of the East around A.D. 500” (Lee 2010, back page). The book is marketed as ‘highly recommended’ and ‘extremely well-documented’, but the author,

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<sup>11</sup> Examples include Rastafarianism and the Black Hebrews. See, respectively, Chrystides 1999: 269–77; Goodman and Miyazawa 2000: 61–63.

<sup>12</sup> *Nihonjinron* can be defined as the pseudo-scientific, nationalist discourse on the defining characteristics and essence of the Japanese people. See Befu 2001.

<sup>13</sup> The author, Yamamoto Shichihei, called himself Isaiah Ben-Dasan, and pretended to be a Jew writing about Japan. See Ben-Dasan 1972. The book, which was originally published in Japanese in 1970, sold over a million copies in 1971 (Goodman and Miyazawa 2000: 5).

an Amsterdam-based evangelist who seems to sympathize with the efforts of Japanese Christians to indigenize their religion, mainly reemploys and combines existing Japanese-Jewish origin myths.<sup>14</sup> In Japan, too, several popular works have appeared recently in which the 'Jewish origins' of the Japanese nation and culture are reasserted; Kubo Arimasa, for instance, has written a number of esoteric works on the supposedly Jewish roots of Shintō and Buddhism (Kubo 2008).

In addition to esoteric books, the resurgence of the popularity of these ideas is no doubt partly due to its spread on the internet, which is full of pseudo-scientific articles providing 'evidence' for these claims.<sup>15</sup> There is also a number of documentary films online, featuring 'scientists' arguing in similar ways.<sup>16</sup> Most of what is proudly presented in these documentaries as sensational new evidence (such as the idea that the Hata 秦 clan, one of Japan's ancient clans, was actually Jewish—'evidenced' by such things as the size of the nose of a mask, a decoration resembling a menorah and superficial similarities between Japanese and Hebrew words) was already suggested by pre-war advocates of the common ancestry theories. However, the documentaries do show two interesting things. First, they show the resurgence of the popularity of the common ancestry myth in Japan today, which raises questions about the confusion and need for a new collective identity in contemporary Japanese society, and the possible influence of Christians on this discourse. Second, they suggest that there is some serious Israeli interest in the alleged Jewish origin of the Japanese—apparently, nowadays there are Israeli scholars using archaeology as well as DNA technology to retrace the 'Lost Tribes'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> To be clear, the purpose of this chapter is not to engage in a dialogue with the advocates of these common ancestry myths, and my intention is not to prove them wrong. Whereas the lack of sound scientific evidence supporting these ideas, the geographical distance between Japan and Palestine, and a general scepticism *vis-à-vis* groups claiming genealogical kinship going back thousands of years would lead me to believe that it is highly unlikely that the claims reflect actual historical developments, I do not intend to falsify them here. After all, I am not an archaeologist, nor a specialist in Japanese early history, so I am in no position to do so (significantly, however, neither are the advocates of these views). For the purpose of this essay, what matters is not whether the truth claims are true in an absolute sense or not; what matters is the way in which the claims are made, formulated, and employed, as this may help us gain some insight in the use of religious narrative for the construction of social identity in the context of Japanese Christianity.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Kubo n.d.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, the documentary "Japanese are Jewish?," which can be watched online at *YouTube*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00BP86cks4w> (accessed 02/07/2012).

<sup>17</sup> A trend going back to the publication of a book by Joseph Eidelberg, *The Japanese and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel* (1980), an Israeli reformulation of the Japanese-Jewish common ancestry theories.

In fact, many of these ideas go back to the writings of a nineteenth-century Scottish missionary, Norman McLeod, who first suggested that the Japanese might be the descendants of the Lost Tribes, pointing out what he considered to be the similarities between Shintō and ancient Jewish religion (McLeod 1875). His ideas were adopted and elaborated by Christian scholars and ministers in the early twentieth century, who used the genealogical identification between the Japanese and the Jews as a strategy to reconcile Japanese tradition with 'original' (that is, non-European) Christianity. Saeki Yoshirō (1871–1965) was the first to identify the Lost Tribes with the Hata clan, and to find 'evidence' of their Jewish origin in a small Shintō shrine near the village where they settled, Uzumasa (near Kyoto). Saeki believed that the name Uzumasa was derived from the words *Iesu* and *Meshia*; Jesus and Messiah. Such pseudo-linguistic associations are typical for the type of evidence used in common ancestry theories, as is the identification of Japanese religious locations (such as old shrines and sacred mountains) with ancient Jewish religion. According to Goodman and Miyazawa, Saeki's type of reasoning "became the cornerstone of all subsequent Japanese common ancestry theories and set the paradoxical precedent for identifying purportedly ancient Christian sites in Japan as evidence of early Jewish settlements in the country" (2000: 65).

His ideas were further developed by another Christian writer, Oyabe Zen'ichirō (1867–1941), who claimed that the Japanese emperors were the direct descendants from the tribes of Gad and Manasseh (two of the Lost Tribes), and claimed that "[t]he Japanese and the Hebrews are virtually identical, particularly in regard to the pious way in which we observe our religious holidays."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Oyabe identified Shintō with original Christianity, and predicted an imminent, apocalyptic war between Asia and the West. He considered the Jews an Asian people, who would be saved by the Japanese. These ideas strongly resembled those of his contemporary, the missionary, evangelist and leader of the Japanese Holiness movement, Nakada Jūji. Nakada may well have been the most influential of Japan's pre-war Christian leaders: his radical ideas on the divinely ordained mission of the Japanese nation and the providential relationship between the Japanese and the Jews not only contributed to millenarian discourse at the time, but also continue to inform some Christian minority movements today, as we shall see shortly.

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<sup>18</sup> Translated by and quoted in Goodman and Miyazawa 2000: 66.

Nakada grew up as a member of the Methodist church in Hirosaki, present-day Aomori prefecture, but studied at a fundamentalist Christian school (the Moody Bible Institute) in Chicago. In 1905, he founded the Oriental Missionary Society (Tōyō Senkyōkai 東洋宣教会), together with two American missionaries; later, however, he split off and started his own denomination, officially registered in 1917 as the Oriental Missionary Holiness Church (Tōyō Senkyōkai Hōrinesu Kyōkai 東洋宣教会ホーリネス教会), which reportedly grew from 1,500 to approximately 20,000 members in fifteen years time (Ikegami 2003: 132). In the course of his career Nakada's thought became increasingly nationalistic and anti-Western. As he grew older, he came to see nations as absolute, primordial, even providential categories, which all had their part to play in God's plan—hence his collectivistic soteriology, according to which entire nations would be saved or condemned.<sup>19</sup> Besides, he had strong millenarian expectations, and he perceived the apocalyptic confrontation leading to the thousand-year reign of Christ as imminent. Following a peculiar Biblical exegesis in which all references to the East and the rising sun were reinterpreted as prophecies regarding Japan, he concluded that the Japanese nation was divinely elected to save the Jews—an Asian nation, in his dichotomy—from their colonial oppressors, the corrupted Western powers. Hence, he came to justify Japan's militarization and imperialist annexation of parts of Asia as just and providential; for it would eventually lead to the 'liberation' of British Palestine, the 're'-establishment of the State of Israel and, thus, pave the way for the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen, Nakada was not the only pre-war ideologue who used Biblical sources to legitimise notions about the divine election and superiority of the Japanese nation. It should be noted that these ideas were not limited to Christian missionaries and theologians. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several Japanese scholars and religious leaders became familiar with the Bible and other Christian sources, and some of them creatively combined reference to these with nationalist ideas about

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Nakada 1973: 6:430–41.

<sup>20</sup> As outlined in a number of essays and sermons, but two of Nakada's works in particular: first, a series of lectures, published in 1932 as *Seisho yori mitaru Nihon* 聖書より見たる日本 (Japan Seen From the Bible), which contains his Bible exegesis; and second, published soon thereafter, the even more strongly millenarian *Kokumin e no keikoku* 国民への警告 (Warning to the Nation)—respectively, *Nakada Jūji Zenshū*, 1973: 2:29–166, 171–275. The former was translated into English soon after its publication as Nakada 1932, but this translation is not very adequate. For a more in-depth discussion of Nakada's ideas and their significance, see Rots 2008, summarized in Rots 2010.



Japan's uniqueness. It has been argued, for instance, that the well-known Kokugaku 国学 scholar Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) was influenced by Catholic ideas about the afterlife (Devine 1981; Harootunian 1988: 452 n. 28). Likewise, several of the 'new religions' that emerged in this period combined Shintō and shamanist elements with Christian-style ideas about monotheism, eschatology, and worship practices. For example, Deguchi Onisaburō (1871–1948), the charismatic founder of the new religion Ōmoto 大本, explicitly referred to Biblical sources in his writings, using them as 'evidence' for his notion that Japan was divinely elected (Stalker 2008: 71–72). Ōmoto gained widespread popularity during the same time Nakada started sharing his ideas with a wider audience, and succeeded in achieving full denominational independence; it is therefore not unlikely that Nakada was somehow influenced by Deguchi's ideas (or, possibly, vice versa). The exact nature of this influence remains a topic for future research, however.

Similarly, Nakada was a contemporary and acquaintance of Uchimura, and notwithstanding the obvious differences there are some significant similarities between their ideas, possibly as a result of mutual interaction. Nakada's millenarian-nationalist ideology was in accordance with what scholars have called the 'triadic structure of nationalist rhetoric': he interpreted the present political and social condition as one of degeneration and corruption, which was contrasted to an idealised (mythical) glorious past, and a utopian future in which this glorious past would be recreated and perfected (Levinger and Lytle 2001: 175–94; cf. Rots 2008: 17–18). Thus, in order to legitimize his utopian belief in the divine election of the Japanese people to bring about the reestablishment of God's reign on Earth, he needed a historical narrative linking the Japanese nation (a primordial entity) not only to the Christian promise of salvation and regeneration, but also to the Biblical heritage. For instance, in a way that reminds one of Uchimura, he argued that Mahāyāna Buddhism was in fact derived from Christianity, which had been brought to India by the apostle Thomas: "as in Europe and America, there are pagan religions that wear a Christian coat, so in the East Christianity wore a Buddhist coat. . . . Buddhism in Japan is mixed with Christianity" (Nakada 1973: 7:80–81).

This reinterpretation of Japanese Buddhism as essentially an indigenous expression of Christianity can be seen as another attempt to 'Christianize the pre-Christian past', in order to overcome the ideological dominance of European and American interpretations of Christianity, and the cultural and epistemological deviance between Christianity and his own tradition. However, this claim to Christianity's ideological heritage apparently was

not sufficient. In line with the nationalist discourse at the time, which was closely connected with notions of origins and 'race', Nakada was also looking for a genealogical origin myth.<sup>21</sup> That is, in accordance with his nationalistic orientation, Nakada wanted to lay claim to the heritage of 'original' Christianity not only ideologically, but genealogically as well. Therefore, he was very interested in the common ancestry theories developed by Saeki and Oyabe, as they suggested that the Japanese were the descendants of the original, non-European 'Christians': God's chosen people, the Jews.<sup>22</sup> Following his predecessors, Nakada provided ample historical 'evidence' for the Jewish migration to Japan. For instance, he stressed the apparent similarities between Japanese and Jewish traditions, such as religious festivals and shrine architecture, which he considered an unmistakable proof of the shared heritage.<sup>23</sup>

However, Nakada went a step further. Combining creatively the Japanese-Jewish common ancestry theories with European racist myths of ethnic descent in vogue at the time, he arrived at the conclusion that the Japanese were the only people in the world 'composed of' all different races. He based this thought on the paradigm, then dominant in Europe, that the three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham and Japheth) were the early ancestors of the world's 'three races', according to which, it was believed, all nations could be categorized.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Nakada wrote:

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Anthony D. Smith's distinction between ideological and genealogical myths of ethnic descent; "between ethnic myths that trace descent through cultural and ideological affinity with presumed ancestors and epochs, and those that draw on a more strictly genealogical pedigree and links of alleged kinship" (1999: 71).

<sup>22</sup> For instance, he wrote that "2500 years ago, the descendants of Jacob were released from Babylon. The people who returned to Judea were only two tribes; those are the Jews, of whom there are now 15 million, everywhere in the world. However, where did the other ten tribes go? This is a great problem for Biblical scholars, archaeologists, and historians. . . . Now, as the result of many years of research, it has been discovered that two of the tribes of Israel have mingled with the Japanese people [*Yamato minzoku* 大和民族]. . . . So we can make the claim that we are Japanese Israelites" (Nakada 1973: 7:106-7).

<sup>23</sup> For instance: "The structure of a Japanese Shintō shrine resembles the structure of the Jewish Temple, especially when it comes to the division between the holy and the holy of holies. The habit of washing one's hands before appearing before God is also similar" (Nakada 1973: 2:71). For the entire list of 'proofs', see *ibid.*: 68-76.

<sup>24</sup> As Nancy Stalker points out, Deguchi Onisaburō made reference to the same racial origin myth in a way reminiscent of Nakada, suggesting some mutual influence (2008: 71-72). The work referenced by Stalker was not published until 1935, however, whereas Nakada published these ideas three years earlier. It is possible, then, that Deguchi was familiar with Nakada's work. Alternatively, both authors may have had similar sources on which they based their ideas.

The Japanese people are made up of the three races of Shem, Ham and Japheth. That is, the Jews are descended from Shem, the Hittites of Ham, and the Ainu, who are of the white race, from Japheth. . . . There are no places like Japan, where these three races have mingled and created a whole new people. Longing for the East, these races have come together and become one, and now the blood of Shem, Ham and Japheth runs in their veins. The Japanese nation truly is unique. I believe that this nation has a great mission to fulfil for the entire world. (1973: 2:75)

Thus, the myth of the unique genetic make-up of the Japanese people not only identified the Japanese with the Jews, thereby suggesting that the Japanese were a chosen people as well; it also implicitly stated the racial superiority of the Japanese to the other peoples of the world. In other words, it is a powerful genealogical origin myth, which asserts the unique and superior character of the Japanese *vis-à-vis* their Western Other. Ultimately, this was used as a simultaneously racial and theological justification for the claim that the Japanese people were given a special, God-given mission. Nakada believed that eventually, supported by the prayers of the nation, the Japanese army would rescue the Jews from the Western powers—which were in name Christian, but actually represented the Antichrist—and help them establish the State of Israel.<sup>25</sup> This, according to him, was the ultimate purpose of the imperialist ideology. Hence, despite his condemnation of the Western oppression of the Jews and occupation of ‘their’ land, he was strongly supportive of Japanese imperialism—including the occupation of other parts of Asia, which were not directly related to his eschatology (but, perhaps significantly, did constitute some of his favorite mission territories). Unsurprisingly then, according to Nakada’s exegesis, even Japan’s military rise and intervention was prophesied in the Bible:

This time, a people from the east will rise bravely. . . . Isaiah 46 says ‘from the east I summon a bird of prey’. This ‘bird’ refers to airplanes. The surprisingly powerful airplanes rising up from the country in the east will meet with the Antichrist and rescue the troubled nation [i.e., the Jews]. . . . I do not want to idly praise Japan’s continental policy or flatter the Military Department. But I am only saying what is already illuminated in the Bible. Japan is not a great country when it comes to physical strength, but it has always been protected by God’s divine providence. To this nation, God has given His special task, and He has protected the country from foreign invaders during 2500 years. . . . We should be aware of this providence, be grateful for it,

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<sup>25</sup> For clarity’s sake: at the time of writing, the area of present-day Israel, Palestine, was ruled by the British; the modern state of Israel was founded later, in 1948.

and pray that it will also protect us next time. The annexation of Korea and Manchuria, which could not remain independent without the help of Japan, already points to this. (1973: 2: 122–23)

In other words, the imperial policy of annexing great parts of Asia was considered providential and just, as it would lead eventually to a final war between the East (led by the divinely elected and protected Japanese nation) and the Western nations (ruled by the Antichrist), thus bringing about the rescue of the Jewish people. Nakada's theological project, which had started off as an attempt to dissociate Christianity in Japan from Western ideological power and make Christian soteriology and eschatology more compatible with Japanese tradition and identity, thus developed into a myth of differentiation between East and West, and a Christian-Zionist ideological legitimization of Japanese militarism and imperialism. The Jews, it turns out, were not really the focus of Nakada's ideology—they were merely the passive object, whereas the West was the evil Other and Japan the great rescuer. Thus, Nakada's identification with and sympathy for the Jews—his alleged philo-Semitism (Kubota 2002)—ultimately was little more than a rhetorical device to make the association between a Christianity-derived eschatology, a radical condemnation of the Western Other, and a justification of Japan's imperialist behaviour.

Ironically, during the war, the Holiness movement suffered seriously from government oppression, as many churches were closed and ministers imprisoned (Mullins 1994). In the post-war period, Nakada's militarism and radical millenarian nationalism did not attract many followers anymore, as Christians engaged primarily in pseudo-universalistic and pacifistic discourses on 'world peace'.<sup>26</sup> However, his (as well as his predecessors') claims regarding the common ancestry of the Japanese and the Jews did continue to attract significant numbers of believers, and not only among Japanese Christians. Moreover, the notion of a special, divinely ordained bond between the Japanese and the Jews continues to influence two domestic Christian movements, the Sei Iesu Kai 聖イエス会 (an offshoot of Nakada's Holiness church, founded by Ōtsuki Takeji (1906–2004) soon after the war) and the Makuya movement mentioned earlier. The former, which considers prayer for Israel its most important religious duty, has been responsible for such things as the establishment

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<sup>26</sup> A feature they have in common with many of the so-called new religions. On the discourse on 'world peace', and the nationalist subtexts underlying it, see Clammer 2001: 203–9. Cf. Kisala 1999.

of the Japan Holocaust Museum and Education Centre, the organization of guest houses in Kyoto and Hiroshima (called 'Beit Shalom', 'house of peace') where Israeli visitors can stay for free, the founding of a chair at the Hebrew University, and so on. Moreover, it has incorporated Jewish symbols (such as the menorah and the Star of David), rituals and festivals into its own religious practices. The same is true for the Makuya, which is famous for its annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem (where members parade the streets singing Hebrew songs, and pray at the Western Wall), and for sending its young members to Israel in order to study Hebrew and work in kibbutzim.

In sum, the identification of Japan with the Jews and the State of Israel lingers on, especially within these independent Christian movements. By identifying themselves with the Jews, Western Christianity's 'archetypal others', some Japanese Christian groups attempt to re-appropriate their own ambiguous, even marginal position as ideological minorities within Japanese society. They do so by laying claim to 'original' (Eastern) Christianity as it supposedly existed before it spread through Europe, and dissociating themselves from their own main Other, the West. Thus, this alternative historical narrative, which continues to be employed and periodically regains popularity, can be seen as a powerful strategy for redefining one's identity by claiming an authentic Japanese Christianity.

*Local Identity Politics: The Case of the Sei Iesu Kyōkai*

The creation of alternative historical narratives is one strategy to re-appropriate Christianity ideologically, and negotiate ambiguous identities. However, it is by no means the only one. In fact, to many individual Japanese Christians, these narratives may remain rather abstract as they do not directly influence daily life. Thus, now that I have discussed some of the ideological aspects of the incorporation process, I would like to change my perspective and look at the social reality of one particular Japanese Christian community, the Sei Iesu Kyōkai 聖イエス教会, and the actual experiences of its members.<sup>27</sup> In particular, I will look at the ways in which notions of belonging and otherness are employed as a means to

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<sup>27</sup> Despite the resemblance in name, reportedly there is no relationship between the Sei Iesu Kyōkai and the Sei Iesu Kai mentioned earlier. *Sei Iesu* 聖イエス means 'Holy Jesus'; *kyōkai* 教会 is the Japanese word for a Christian church, whereas the more general *kai* 会 can refer to any group, congregation or meeting of people.

strengthen the community's social ties, and its distinctive collective identity. This analysis is based on fieldwork research I conducted during a period of several months in the spring of 2005, in which I regularly visited their church, attended services and other events, and interviewed several church members.

Given the limited scope of the research, many of the conclusions are necessarily tentative; and, as with any ethnographic research, my interpretations of the things I saw and heard may have been influenced by my own interests, expectations and preconceptions. However, I do believe some of my findings are relevant for an understanding of the social context of Japanese Christianity, in particular at the level of actual personal experiences, and the ways in which these are influenced by local identity politics. After all, the vast majority of studies on Japanese Christianity are written from a (church) historical perspective, and focus on issues related to ideology and belief, as well as organization and politics, rather than personal experiences and community life. Whereas several excellent monographs have been written based on ethnographic fieldwork among Japanese religious movements, none of these discuss Christian groups. As stated in the introduction, one of the defining features of Japanese Christianity is its diversity; therefore, a case study of a particular community is not necessarily representative of the whole. On the other hand, issues and patterns characteristic of Japanese Christianity in general may well be reflected in particular situations, so a case study may at least provide some insight into these. In the words of John Clammer,

the anthropological study of this small minority of Japanese Christians is not only of ethnographic interest in its own right, but even more significantly throws considerable light on the mechanisms through which social exclusion is accomplished in Japanese culture and minority status is established and maintained, not in relation to some foreign community, but in relation to a group. . . . (2001: 166)

The Sei Iesu Kyōkai, which defines itself as Pentecostal, is organizationally completely independent. Whereas mainstream Christianity, even though it has remained relatively small in terms of number of adherents, has to a certain degree succeeded in gaining general respect and a stable position in Japanese society, independent Christian movements such as this one tend to have more marginal positions and be stronger opposed to dominant society and its religious system than mainstream Christianity. Not surprisingly, then, they share some or most of the general features of new religious movements, such as the rejection of the legitimacy claims

of other religions and a tendency towards an exclusivist stance.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, though, these movements in general have been more successful in incorporating certain ‘indigenous’ religious elements into their doctrine and belief system, and in combining these with ‘imported’ elements, than the mainstream churches. Significantly, most independent Japanese Christian movements have adopted elements from so-called Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, a range of movements in global Christianity that, according to Pentecostal scholar Allan Anderson, can be characterized by their emphasis on “the working of the gifts of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and theological grounds” and their “ability to ‘incarnate’ the gospel in different cultural forms” (2004: 13–14). This last feature is also stressed by sociologist of religion David Martin, who goes even further by stating that Pentecostalism is “a repertoire of religious explorations controlled, though sometimes barely, within a Christian frame and apt for adaptation in a myriad indigenous contexts” (2002: 6). Apparently, Pentecostalism is able to provide different religious movements with a conceptual framework that suits their particular religious needs and interests. As we shall see, this feature of Pentecostal Christianity is especially significant in the context of Japanese Christian movements.

The incorporation of indigenous elements, however, is not an easy process, and definitions stressing the ability of Pentecostalism to easily adopt and adapt are somewhat one-sided as they tend to overlook the conflicts and tensions that come with the indigenization process. In particular, those elements that are *not* incorporated (and, accordingly, those religious needs that are not catered for), tend to be rejected fiercely, which may severely influence and challenge the relationships between members and non-members, as well as among members themselves. For instance, the rejection of traditional religious practices and ceremonies such as funerals and ancestral rituals can cause tensions in communities and families, as it often implies a neglect of social obligations. Polarization and conflict are very real consequences of the often fundamentalist Pentecostal worldview, as we shall see shortly. Church authorities and individual members constantly have to renegotiate their stance *vis-à-vis* both Christianity and the outside world—for instance, to decide which ritual and cultural practices are compatible with their belief, and which are not. Disagreement

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<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, some scholars choose to define them as Christianity-derived new religions, rather than Christian denominations. See, for instance, Shimazono 2003: 291–92.

over these issues is a common feature of Pentecostalism in general, as evidenced by the ever-growing number of (semi-)independent movements and denominations worldwide. Thus, paradoxically, conflict and rejection are as much part of the incorporation process as compromise and accommodation.

The Sei Iesu Kyōkai is a small, independent religious movement, founded and managed by Japanese, which defines itself as Pentecostal. The church is based in Wakōshi, a small suburban town in Saitama prefecture, approximately one hour by train from Tokyo. It has a few branch congregations in other cities in the country, but ties seem to be loose. In my research, I focused on the Wakōshi community, which consists of approximately 300 members who regularly attend services and events. Reportedly, the church does not have any formal ties with foreign missionary organizations, nor with mainstream Japanese Christian institutions. It was founded by Kokubu Kiyoshi, consistently referred to in speech and church publications as Kokubu *bokushi* 牧師 (Reverend Kokubu). Kokubu was a professor in hydropower, who came from a Buddhist background but converted to Christianity. According to his own account (1978: 11–13), the history of the church goes back to 1954, when he came in touch with missionaries from an American military camp in the city of Daiwa, Saitama prefecture. At the time, he was member of what he diplomatically refers to as ‘a certain church’—the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai イエス之御霊教会, the largest and best-known of Japan’s independent Pentecostal movements (see Mullins 1998: 97–104). However, under the influence of the American mission, he decided to begin his own church in a small house in Daiwa. The precise role of the missionaries in the process is unclear. They may have convinced Kokubu that some of the practices of the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai were quite uncommon and frowned upon by most Christians, and they may have taught him some new ideas. But it is noteworthy that Kokubu did not abandon his former church in favour of the missionaries. Instead, he decided to start his own group, so that he could dispose of the practices and ideas he did not agree with, while retaining full independence from Western mission churches, including Pentecostal ones. Thus, already in this early period (or, to be more accurate, in Kokubu’s later reconstruction of this period), we see two basic attitudes which would be decisive for the development of the Sei Iesu Kyōkai: first, a striving for full independence, and second, a rejection of all practices that he considered non-Christian. It seems that, as a result, Kokubu’s early church had a negative stance towards other churches and religions, as well as towards mainstream society.



Kokubu's criticism of the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai concerned one practice in particular: vicarious baptism (the practice of baptizing deceased family members). In addition, he disapproved of their habit to worship the Sabbath on Saturday. On the other hand, there are several similarities between the Sei Iesu Kyōkai and the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai, such as their belief in the work of the Holy Spirit, as expressed in speaking in tongues and Spirit baptism; their theology (both churches belong to the 'Oneness' current in Pentecostalism and, therefore, reject the doctrine of the Trinity); and, significantly, their fierce rejection of non-Christian Japanese religious practices and places considered 'idol worship' (*gūzō sūhai* 偶像崇拜). In fact, in the early period, Kokubu's church was still officially a Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai congregation, even though Kokubu did not practice vicarious baptism and Sabbath worship and was basically going his own way. In this period, he actively engaged in proselytizing activities, and the membership of the church gradually increased. However, it was not until January 10, 1969, that the Sei Iesu Kyōkai was officially registered as a religious organization and that Kokubu had gained full independence for his church (1978: 12). By the end of that year, the church was approaching a membership of a hundred, and the building that was used at the time had become too small. Before long, however, Kokubu succeeded in finding a piece of land in the city of Wakōshi, where the present church building was built (*ibid.*: 3, 12–13).

The Wakōshi church has one leader, who in theory has absolute power but in reality is assisted by a board of five elders that are responsible for most practical decisions. However, when it comes to issues of faith and worship, it is indeed the leader alone who is in charge. When the founder of the church passed away, his wife, Kokubu Sayuri, took over. Now, she is responsible for all sermons and she decides the liturgy of the services. Apart from her late husband, she is the only one who may be called 'Reverend' (*bokushi sensei* 牧師先生), and, accordingly, it is by this honorific title she ought to be addressed. She is held in high esteem by the members of the church, and as she is considered to be a messenger of God, all members are expected to obey and follow her unconditionally.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This last ideal, of absolute obedience, was well exemplified by a slideshow for newly baptized church members. In this slideshow they were urged, now that they had become members of God's family and their salvation had been secured, to sincerely live a life of faith by completely obeying their guide and leader, *bokushi sensei*.

Significantly, her position and corresponding role performance are in accordance with patterns in other Japanese Christian and new religious movements. The late Kokubu Kiyoshi can be considered a ‘minor founder’,<sup>30</sup> whose ‘charisma’ resembled that of the Weberian archetypal ‘shaman’ or ‘prophet’, rather than ‘priest’—that is, somebody who receives divine revelations, and has a special function as the mediator between this world and the divine world (Morris 1987: 69–72). After he died, this charisma was, one might argue, inherited by his wife (or “institutionalized along the lines of the traditional household (*ie* 家) system,” as Mullins (1998: 187) calls it), a pattern quite common in Japanese popular religion. Her gender seems to have been no problem; on the contrary, it may have strengthened her credibility as a shaman-type mediator between two worlds.<sup>31</sup> This is somewhat surprising given the church’s generally conservative stance regarding gender relations and roles, and strong disapproval of working mothers—of which, paradoxically, Mrs. Kokubu herself seems to be the strongest advocate, as evidenced by her sermons in which she publicly scolds working mothers, and encourages her female flock to obey and worship their husbands. Apparently, however, as a leader and religious mediator, these rules do not apply to her.<sup>32</sup>

One of the Sei Iesu Kyōkai’s central doctrines (that is, the most concrete and relevant to the daily lives of its members) is the prohibition of anything considered ‘idolatry’, or *gūzō* 偶像, as mentioned before. That is, any object, image, place or ceremony associated with Japanese religion (in particular Shintō or Buddhism) is considered dangerous and taboo.

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<sup>30</sup> Mullins (1998: 44) defined a ‘minor founder’ as “a charismatic individual who gives birth to a new religious movement in an effort to address the needs of a new type of member, while at the same time conceiving of the movement as an extension, elaboration, or fulfillment of an existing religious tradition.”

<sup>31</sup> Japan has a rich tradition of shamanism, and traditionally most of the practitioners have been women. In fact, several of the (co-)leaders of religious movements founded in the nineteenth century, such as Tenrikyō 天理教 and Ōmoto 大本, were female shamanists. On Japanese shamanism, see Blacker 1975.

<sup>32</sup> Yet, the question remains as to why a woman would strongly advocate a religious ideology that explicitly states that women are inferior to men, as is the case here. This is an interesting paradox, which is by no means unique to this church, but can be observed in many (new) religions. For instance, Helen Hardacre was confronted with a similar situation when she conducted field research among the Reiyūkai 霊友会, a Japanese new religion. According to her, the ‘sexist ideology’ (women are considered to have greater karmic burdens than men and, accordingly, are seen as inferior) that is actively propagated by female members paradoxically conveys “strategies for managing men and for providing support to other women” (Hardacre 2003: 81).

In order to understand why, it is important to realize that ideas and taboos are always shaped and get their meaning in a particular social and cultural context. Biblical bans on idol worship and the importance attached to these bans reflect a historical situation in which different religious systems were competing with and trying to discredit each other. Alternative, polytheistic religious systems only need to be demonized when they are perceived to constitute a potential threat to the existence of the community, and it is especially in such situations that bans on idol worship are emphasized and polytheism is considered a significant concern.

Usually, in religious movements, the issues that are at stake are the ones that *distinguish* the movement from mainstream society and its religion. By stressing these often symbolic issues, movements can create a distinctive profile for themselves. In most Western, predominantly Christian societies, polytheism is not so much of an issue, so Pentecostal movements do not need to react against this. In Japan, however, the opposite is the case: a large number of more or less divine beings (gods, ancestral spirits, bodhisattvas and more) are believed to exist and influence human life, and rituals are usually addressed to one or several of these beings. Thus, it is exactly this issue of the worship of 'idols' that is central to the beliefs and rules of the Sei Iesu Kyōkai, as it is a way to keep the community together and reject other Japanese religions. In practice, this means that people are prohibited from attending any Buddhist or Shintō ritual, and even from merely entering temple or shrine precincts. For instance, when children visit famous historical and religious sites on school trips, they are supposed to wait outside. Needless to say that it is very embarrassing to stand out in this way, especially when we bear in mind the stress placed on uniformity in the Japanese educational system.

The taboo is preserved by means of invoking fear. I was told by an evangelist with a strong interest in traditional architecture that he once 'committed the sin' of visiting the temple town of Narita, but got very ill afterwards. Several more examples were given to me of people who were 'punished' for visiting Buddhist or Shintō places, by illness, misfortune or even death. It is striking that a church which continuously stresses that all its members are saved by their baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, who 'washed away their sins', does not believe that its members are forgiven when they commit the 'sin' of visiting a non-Christian place of worship—but, on the contrary, are punished for their behaviour. Whether this is explained in terms of a direct punishment by God, or rather as an act

of Satan, does not really matter. The bottom-line is that acts committed in this life will get their 'immediate retribution in this life' as well. This clearly reflects the this-worldly attitude of the movement.

It may be strange to speak of a movement with some clear world-renouncing features as having a this-worldly attitude, but I do so deliberately. When we consider its harsh rejection of several aspects of Japanese culture, in particular its religious traditions, we would be inclined to classify the Sei Iesu Kyōkai as a world-renouncing movement.<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically, however, it constitutes a continuity with that same culture, including its religious system, especially when it comes to the importance that is attached to *genze riyaku* 現世利益, so-called 'this-worldly benefits'. According to Reader and Tanabe (1998: 14), a focus on this-worldly benefits is "a normative and central theme in the structure and framework of religion in Japan." Thus, the Sei Iesu Kyōkai did establish a certain continuity with the mainstream Japanese religious orientation, despite the fact that the concrete practices and symbols of the latter are usually rejected.

Not only are members punished for their sins in this world, they also get rewards in this life for what is regarded as good behaviour. The focus on this-worldly benefits is well illustrated by the fact that even the practice of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) is seen not only as a means to communicate with God, but also as an act of worship which enables the practitioners to gain religious merit. Baptized church members speak in tongues regularly, collectively as well as individually, with a particular request in mind. They are encouraged to do so as often as possible; for instance, during a special service for young church members, the evangelist strongly recommended us to pray in tongues every day while commuting to work or university by train. Furthermore, when the church held their annual church bazaar, right before the bazaar was opened members came together in small groups and held brief sessions of speaking in tongues, to make sure everything would go well. It all strikingly resembles the practice in Japanese Buddhism (especially in Buddhist new religions such as Sōka Gakkai) to repeatedly chant divine lines from, for instance, the Lotus Sutra as a means to gain religious merit and, consequently, receive the *genze riyaku* one has requested.

There are more examples of religious needs which are catered for by means of alternative, Christianized rituals. One of these is the organization

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<sup>33</sup> Following Roy Wallis' typology of new religious movements. See Chryssides 1999: 26–28.

of so-called *shukufuku no inori* 祝福の祈り ceremonies: blessing ceremonies of new houses, cars and motorbikes, reminiscent of Shintō purification ceremonies. In addition, the church organizes memorial services on death anniversaries of deceased relatives. Whereas these are not considered core rituals by the church elders (as are baptism—by full immersion—and Holy Communion), and despite the fact that more far-reaching types of ancestor-related rituals (in particular, as we have seen, vicarious baptism) are disapproved of, the church does provide its members with such memorial services, arguably to meet with its members' needs and concerns regarding the souls of their departed relatives. This is hardly surprising, for in a country where many ritual practices are somehow related to caring for and maintaining good ties with ancestral spirits—from daily offers and prayers in front of the *butsudan* 仏壇 family altar to the annual *obon* お盆 festival, or rituals to pacify *muen botoke* 無縁仏 (wandering spirits)—Christians have long struggled to make sense of their socio-ritual obligations *vis-à-vis* deceased family members. Protestant missionaries in particular (who tend to be stricter with regard to this issue than Catholics) have often complicated matters by uncompromisingly rejecting any rituals related to the deceased, labeling them as 'ancestor worship'. Hence, the issue of rituals related to death and ancestors has long been one of the most prominent and fiercely discussed challenges facing Japanese Christians, and, accordingly, one of the areas where the perceived ambiguity between Christian and Japanese identity is at its most pronounced. Incidentally, this tension between Christian beliefs and ancestral rituals is by no means limited to Japan—on the contrary, it is a recurring theme in the history of Christian mission and indigenization, as illustrated by the Chinese Rites Controversy, which divided the Roman Catholic Church as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In any case, given the sensitivity and existential importance of the issue, it comes as no surprise that the topic has received some scholarly attention, although perhaps not as much as one would suspect. Some authors have approached the topic normatively, from theological and/or missiological perspectives, either refuting most ritual behavior on the base of theological arguments;<sup>34</sup> or, on the contrary, arguing for a somewhat simplistic reinterpretation of ancestral rituals not as a type of worship, but as a Japanese way to obey the Biblical command to honor one's parents.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For instance, Berentsen 1985.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Yagi 1995.

Others have approached it from a sociological perspective. For instance, David Reid (1991) has conducted a survey suggesting that many Japanese Protestants do in fact possess *butsudan* and/or display memorial photos, in front of which memorial services may be performed, the Bible may be read, and to which flowers and fruit may be presented.<sup>36</sup> More informatively, Mark Mullins has devoted one chapter of *Christianity Made in Japan* to the topic, providing an intriguing overview of the creative ways in which Japanese Christians have come up with alternative rituals to fulfill their social obligations towards their dead family members. These range from Christianized Buddhist-style memorial services and family altars, to prayer meetings to pacify wandering spirits by guiding them to Jesus, and the already mentioned vicarious baptism as it is practiced by the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai. His basic argument is that, as a rule, the so-called ‘indigenous’ Japanese churches have managed to cope with religious needs concerning the dead much better than the Protestant mission churches (Mullins 1998: 129–55).

As for the Sei Iesu Kyōkai, the conclusion seems justified that in certain aspects the church undeniably constitutes a continuity with mainstream society and religion, both in terms of social structures and religious practice, as is the case for other independent Japanese churches. Like any other new religion, the Sei Iesu Kyōkai has adopted elements from the society in which it has emerged and has had to find ways to meet with the culturally specific religious demands of its members. As a rule, these adopted elements are not explicitly recognized as such by most church members, who tend not to distinguish between, for example, ‘imported’ Christian rituals and ‘incorporated’ (or ‘Christianized’) ones—and perhaps such a distinction would be somewhat artificial indeed. In any case, one of the ways in which the church negotiates Christian and Japanese identity is by means of its ritual practices, such as memorial services for the dead, and the reinterpretation of glossolalia as some sort of Christian chanting, used not only as a way to communicate with the divine but also as a means to gain religious merit.

However, as I stated earlier, incorporation and accommodation are not always easy processes, and at times they can cause serious tensions and suffering. For instance, the uncompromising rejection of a great number of

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<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, while this study does provide quite some data, it is rather limited when it comes to the interpretation of these, lacking a sound theoretical framework. Cf. the critique of Clammer (2001: 176–78).

Japanese religious practices, events and locations seriously challenges the church members in their daily lives. No matter how many Christianized versions of commonly performed Japanese rituals the church invents, if people are not allowed to attend rituals and ceremonies of others, they inevitably come across situations in which they have to choose between either betraying their beliefs or violating social mores. For instance, one church member told me how once, when she went to a funeral of a friend's mother who had passed away, she was not allowed to light a piece of incense and pay her respects, much to the disappointment of her friend. Somebody else works for a company which regularly has purification rites performed by Shintō priests, causing him constant fear of divine retributions.

The taboo on idol worship has a strong function in demarcating the community from the outside world and (literally) demonizing other religious expressions and places, thus contributing to a social identity that is markedly distinct from mainstream society and religion, despite all the continuities. It is central to the community's discourse, enforced by constant repetition in sermons as well as casual conversation, invoking fear for the Other to the effect that church members remain loyal to their community and the boundaries between the community and the outside world remain clear. Thus, it is in this issue that we find the main tensions between the movement and its social environment, and it is here that, sociologically speaking, the sectarian attitude of the church manifests itself. By rejecting all other religious expressions as 'idol worship' and strongly condemning it, the Sei Iesu Kyōkai not only challenges these other religions, but also, implicitly, Japanese society itself, where many (semi-)religious elements pervade the public sphere.

However, the fact that the taboo is constantly stressed and needs to be enforced by telling stories that invoke fear paradoxically points to its problematic status, also within the community, and its lack of self-evidence. That is, on the one hand it is one of the main markers of the church's own, distinctive collective identity, but on the other it poses great practical problems and social dilemmas for members, and is therefore constantly challenged, as the examples discussed above suggest. If the church were to let go of or loosen this ban, several aspects of the personal lives of its members would be much easier, but that would also mean loosening its monopoly on religious truth, on salvation and, above all, on the promise of *genze riyaku*. Yet, this uniqueness and truth monopoly, as well as the fierce rejection of other religious practices, are some of the main providers of social ties and a strong sense of community. The church

defines its own identity in reaction to society at large, in particular its religious expressions, by rejecting and demonizing these and claiming to have the right way to salvation and practical benefits. Thus, mainstream Japanese society in general and its Buddhist and Shintō traditions in particular are the Others against which the church reacts and in relation to which it defines itself.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, the rejection of other Japanese religions does not equal the full rejection of all aspects of Japanese culture. However, members do need to make clear distinctions between which aspects of Japanese culture they consider religious, and which they do not. This is problematic, considering the fact that in the Japanese context it is not always possible to distinguish between what is merely 'cultural' and what is indeed a 'religious' expression. In fact, it can be argued, the very categories are problematic as they do not accurately reflect the Japanese situation. Therefore, such distinctions are often to a certain degree artificial and arbitrary. However, as it is linked to the key taboo on idol worship, for the church members this distinction is very important and real, and it tells them what they are allowed to do and what not.

Thus, while the mere acts of visiting a temple or shrine on a school trip, or burning incense and paying respects during a funeral ceremony, are prohibited as 'religious' acts, people do dress up dolls for the *hina matsuri* 雛祭 feast (traditionally related to spirit belief and shrine worship), practice the tea ceremony (despite its historical connection with Zen Buddhism), and even attend local *matsuri* 祭, as these are considered

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<sup>37</sup> This point can be illustrated by the interesting example of a family who kindly invited me for dinner, and showed me pictures of their vacation in Egypt. Among them were pictures of the mosques and pyramids they had visited, which surprised me, so I asked if these were not considered dangerous places. Not really, I was told. Clearly, Islam or ancient Egyptian religion would also be considered 'heretical', but visiting some of their sites is not considered dangerous, whereas visiting a Buddhist temple in Japan is. I would suggest that this is exactly because Japanese Buddhism and Shintō are the relevant Others to which the church has to relate, whereas Islam or ancient Egyptian religion are irrelevant, abstract notions that do not constitute any potential threat to the social position of the community. The doctrine of idol worship, then, mainly is a social construction that is only relevant in the particular context of Japanese society, and loses its urgency as soon as one leaves this context. An even more striking example confirming this conclusion is the case of a church member who was on a trip to Europe, and did not mind visiting the Chinese Buddhist temple in Amsterdam. Even though the temple contained a large statue of the bodhisattva Guanyin (Kannon 觀音), who in the Japanese context would be considered a dangerous idol, she did not really consider this visit dangerous because she was on a trip abroad. She even took some pictures of the place to show her family, who were radically opposed to any visit to a place worshipping 'idols' in Japan, but, apparently, did not mind visiting similar places outside of their own country.



'cultural' activities. Hence, they are allowed, as long as people do not attach any religious meaning to them. In sum, in order to keep life in Japanese society possible, the Sei Iesu Kyōkai and its members have constructed an artificial distinction between, on the one hand, the 'religious' elements of this society (notwithstanding their social, artistic and other aspects), which are considered demonic, dangerous and off-limits (thus enforcing a strong, distinctive collective identity); and, on the other, its 'cultural' elements (notwithstanding their historical ties to religious traditions), that are in principle perfectly safe, thus allowing church members to uphold their Japanese identity and participate in major public events.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have discussed two case studies to illustrate some strategies employed by certain groups of Japanese Christians to make sense of their ambiguous position as being simultaneously a member of the Christian religion, demanding their exclusive loyalty in religious issues, and of Japanese society, with its strong social obligations and normative notions of homogeneity and belonging. I do not suggest that these cases are representative of Japanese Christianity as a whole. On the contrary, the particular expressions of Christianity discussed in these chapter can be considered marginal, not only within Japanese society, but also within the context of Japanese Christianity. Members of mainstream churches would probably dismiss them as too radical; that is, whereas common ancestry theories may hold some appeal, many would not want to be associated with Nakada's version of it, while Pentecostalism is equally frowned upon. Nonetheless, the issues discussed in this chapter do reflect patterns and concerns shared by many Japanese Christians, even though they may not agree with these particular responses. The re-appropriation of the past and the construction of alternative historical narratives can take different shapes, but the necessity of a narrative providing one with a sense of origin and belonging is universal, and particularly urgent among members of minority religions who do not fully belong to mainstream society.

Likewise, the acculturation of Christianity by means of the Christianization of commonly practiced Japanese rituals, as discussed in the second part of this chapter with regard to the Sei Iesu Kyōkai, is widespread—even though, again, this may take various shapes. Thus, while fully acknowledging the fact that diversity is one of Japanese Christianity's defining features and that, for several reasons, these two case studies cannot be considered representative of the whole, I do believe that they are

relevant—not only as interesting cases in their own right, but also as examples of Japanese Christian attempts to make sense of the ambiguity inherent in their identities, that do reflect more widely shared patterns.

It is not up to the researcher to decide whether or not these attempts can be considered successful. Nakada Jūji's ideas may have been largely forgotten after the Second World War, but his ideological heritage lives on—not only in Christian-Zionist movements such as the Sei Iesu Kai, which has incorporated a number of Jewish rituals and symbols and actively supports Israel, but also in popular, pseudo-scientific publications repeating the old myth that the Japanese are the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Apparently, then, these ideas continue to provide some Japanese Christians (and, quite possibly, some non-Christians, too) with an alternative historical narrative, laying claim to the heritage of 'original' Christianity while dissociating Christianity from European cultural influences and 'corruptions'. As for the Sei Iesu Kyōkai, its fierce rejection of mainstream Japanese religious events, places and rituals may at times complicate its members' lives, in particular with regard to relationships and social obligations. However, the church does seem to succeed in meeting the religious needs of its members, and in creating a strong sense of collective belonging. Apparently, conflict and accommodation can go hand in hand.

This ambiguity, this constant looking for a balance between rejection and incorporation, seems to be central to the Japanese Christian experience. Paradoxically, Christians in Japan simultaneously do and do not belong—in other words, they are full members of their nation and society, yet somehow they are fundamentally different. Of course, as such they are by no means unique in the world—however, what makes their situation different from that of many other minority groups is, as Clammer states,

that it is the religio-cultural context in which Christians find themselves that is the primary source of marginality in a religious sense. This point is important as there is no evidence in Japan that Christians are of lower income or status than anybody else. . . . The marginality is consequently of a peculiar kind: an ideological deviance reflected in selective non-participation not in the institutions of civil society, but in the religiously inspired rituals of local communities and in secular practices considered to be ethically unacceptable. (2001: 173)

In other words, the position of Japanese Christians as 'others within' Japanese society is, at least to a certain extent, self-imposed. What is significant about the position of Japanese Christians is that whereas they constitute an ideological minority that, by its nature, challenges notions of

national homogeneity, they are not economically or politically deprived. On the contrary, their marginality can serve as an effective strategy for self-empowerment, especially when it is combined with notions of exclusivity, moral superiority and, possibly, divine election. The rejection of elements of Japanese society by Japanese Christians may frustrate efforts to attract greater numbers of people, and complicate relations with neighbours and relatives, but it does serve to strengthen their distinctive identity. Thus, perhaps the ambiguity characterizing Japanese Christians' social position and identity is not as widely perceived as a problem that needs to be overcome as the literature may lead one to believe—for it seems as if this ambiguity and the 'otherness' that comes with it are actively cultivated, at least by some, and employed as a means to empower the own community. This is a tentative conclusion, but, I believe, one that deserves further investigation.

I do not suggest that Christianity and Japaneseness are fundamentally irreconcilable, as is the case for cultural essentialist explanations of Christianity's 'lack of success' in Japan. As I do not subscribe to any normative statements regarding what 'real' Christianity is (or ought to be), I consider 'indigenous' Japanese Christian expressions—historical narratives as well as ritual practices—as legitimate and 'authentic' as any other. As illustrated by the two case studies discussed briefly in this chapter, Japanese Christians have come up with a variety of strategies to appropriate Christianity, and to renegotiate both Christianity and Japaneseness. This is a continuing process, that is by no means easy or without conflicts. The interesting paradox of Japanese Christianity is that, on the one hand, it is defined by this constant struggle to find adequate ways to incorporate Christianity within the Japanese socio-cultural (if not religious) context, while on the other, the deliberate rejection of significant aspects of that very context leads to a unique, self-imposed position as ideological minorities within Japanese society. The ambiguity itself seems to have become a strategy for symbolic empowerment.

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RECONSTRUCTING PRIESTLY IDENTITY AND ROLES AND  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM IN  
CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

JONATHAN S. WATTS AND REV. MASAZUMI SHOJUN OKANO

*The Development of Socially Engaged Buddhism in Japan*

Good governance, poverty, and discrimination may not seem like typically 'Buddhist' themes, but we do find these topics in some of the earliest teachings of the Buddha (Swaris 2008). The connection between Buddhist teachings and practice and issues of social justice is today referred to as socially engaged Buddhism. Although there is this perennial aspect to it dating back to the Buddha, socially engaged Buddhism has been defined and can be properly circumscribed as a movement that began in response to the influences and dislocations of western colonialization and modernization a little more than one hundred years ago (Queen 1996: 20). Although Japan never came under direct colonial rule, the forces of the colonial era in Asia had a major influence on it. In 1868, the so called 'Meiji Restoration' brought an end to the international isolation of the Tokugawa feudal dynasty and created a more modern type of representative government, albeit based in the 'restorative' ancient mythology of the divine rule of the emperor. At this time, Shintō ideas and rituals were co-opted and fused into a new form of state religion and national ideology, while the control and patronage of Buddhism as almost a state religion under the Tokugawa dynasty was swiftly ended accompanied by a brief period of severe Buddhist persecution (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈).

Japan's major Buddhist denominations subsequently initiated a wide variety of reform and revitalization strategies to prove their usefulness to the new Japanese nation state. While local conditions were different, these revitalization movements in Japanese Buddhism were similar to ones that took place at the same time in Sri Lanka led by Henry Steel Olcott and Anagarika Dharmapala,<sup>1</sup> who are seen as the forerunners of today's

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Olcott and Dharmapala visited Japan together in 1889 and 1891 to promote the unification of all Buddhist traditions. Although they were initially received by large crowds, the major Japanese denominations used especially Olcott's conversion to

socially engaged Buddhist movement (Queen 1996). Both these and other such movements in Buddhist Asia sought not only to address the influence of Christianity and modern scientific and material values but also to revitalize their own Buddhist traditions that had grown decadent under centuries of feudal patronage. A number of different eminent monks in Japan, like Shaku Unshō (Shingon—Tantric) and Fukuda Gyōkai (Jōdo—Pure Land), as well as laymen, like Daidō Chōan (Sōtō Zen), addressed the decline in monastic standards and practice by calling for a return to a more ‘original Buddhism’ (*genchi bukkyō* 現地仏教) through the stronger practice of both lay and monastic precepts.

Further, in parallel to the secular leaders advocating modern institutions of this time, there was a group of Buddhist writers and scholars like Kiyozawa Manshi (Jōdo Shin—True Pure Land), Inoue Enryō (Jōdo Shin), Suzuki Daisetsu (Rinzai Zen), and Shaku Sōen (Sōtō Zen) who sought to rearticulate Buddhism in modern ways by referring to western philosophy and thought. For the most part, however, their writings did not seek to create new modern interpretations of Buddhism but rather reaffirmed conservative, traditional Japanese Buddhist understandings, like ‘discriminating equality’ (*sabetsu byōdō* 差別平等), retributive karma, filial piety, ‘repaying benefits’ (*hōon* 報恩) to the nation and emperor, and the use of meditation for armed combat (Davis 1992: 39; Victoria 1997: 182–88). In this way, mainstream Japanese Buddhism’s response to the era was largely reactionary in developing its own nationalist theology for supporting rising Japanese colonialism and militaristic nationalism (Davis 1992: 171).

However, as the changes and dislocations of modernization in the Meiji period grew and developed around the turn of the century, more progressive and radical responses from lay Japanese Buddhists and individual priests also emerged. The New Buddhist Movement, which began in the 1890s, was made up of young, middle class, and largely unaffiliated Buddhists, such as Furukawa Rōsen and Sakaino Kōyō, who denounced the use of Buddhist rituals by the old denominations for ensuring good fortune and ‘repaying benefits’ to the state and the emperor instead of the Three Treasures of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. They also had a keen social conscience, specifically in addressing the increasing dislocations of industrial capitalist development, such as the rising gap

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Buddhism as a Caucasian westerner to prove the superiority of their own nationalist form of Mahāyāna Buddhism over Christianity (Yoshinaga 2009).



between rich and poor and the exploitation of workers, women, and social outcasts known as *burakumin* 部落民 (Davis 1992: 179).

A small but dedicated number of priests also engaged in such campaigns for the socially exploited and became directly involved in the socialist and anarchist movements. Uchiyama Gudō (Sōtō Zen) and Takagi Kenmei (Jōdo Shin) are two significant examples of priests who thought that the Buddhist Sangha provided an ideal social model for communal lifestyle. Their activism, however, was met by swift resistance from state authorities, and both died in prison after their purported involvement in the High Treason Incident of 1909 (*taigyaku jiken* 大逆事件) (Victoria 1997).

A final, short-lived but progressive movement that succeeded these was the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism (Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei 新興仏教青年同盟) founded in 1931. Like the New Buddhists, they were young laypeople from largely unaffiliated backgrounds who criticized the conservative and outdated Buddhism of the old denominations, were anti-capitalist and promoted a socialism based on the Buddhist Sangha model, and advocated international cooperation rather than nationalist confrontation as a path to world peace. Their leader was a remarkable Nichiren lay activist named Seno'o Girō who had come to reject the reactionary nationalism of his 'Nichirenism' (*Nichirenshugi* 日蓮主義) mentors Tanaka Chigaku and Honda Nisshō. However, he too was imprisoned after only a few years of activism and forced to recount all his views, though he did re-emerge after the war to continue his Buddhist activism for socialist agendas (Kawanami 1999: 110, 116; Lai 1984). These movements, however small and temporary, parallel the ferment of radical Buddhist Socialism in countries like Burma and Sri Lanka at this time.

It is interesting to note that in response to oppressive colonial regimes Buddhist movements in other Asian countries also developed a strong sense of ethnic nationalism like the reactionary Japanese Buddhists we have profiled above. Although aspects of these movements have become part of a post-war ethnic nationalist Buddhism in places like Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, strong progressive strands have also developed. These have been characterized by non-violent forms of civil disobedience, both as anti-colonial movements and later as anti-war and pro-democracy movements. Because such movements could not develop fully in Japan in the pre-war era nor have any meaningful impact in the decades following the war, many people have felt that Japan has lacked a true socially engaged Buddhist movement. However, it is still important to note the self-critical attitude toward ethnic nationalism and vision of an ecumenical, international Buddhist peace movement by the few dedicated engaged Buddhists of this period.

In the immediate post-war era, the continuation of armed conflict either for national independence, as result of Cold War conflict, or for democratic regime change kept many Buddhists in Asia deeply engaged with political and social issues. Many Japanese Buddhists also became involved in the movement for global peace in the face of the escalating tensions of the Cold War. However, since Japanese Buddhism had been deeply complicit in the Pacific War effort, many progressives inside and outside of Japan doubted the sincerity of this sudden about face (Victoria 1997: 148, 159). Indeed, it would not be until 1987 that any of the traditional Buddhist denominations came forward with an official apology for their wartime complicity. It has taken now more than fifty years since the end of the war for five of the major traditional denominations<sup>2</sup> to make any such substantive declarations. On the other hand, many of the new Buddhist denominations that have roots in conservative and nationalist Nichiren teachings of the early 1900s have continued to develop programs in peace dialogue and exchange, if not actual social and political activism.

In this way, the legacy of nationalist complicity and lack of substantive reform from the Meiji and pre-war eras has continued to haunt traditional Japanese Buddhism in the post-war era. There seems to be an inability or lack of concern to engage in critical social issues facing the country. Furthermore, the changing landscape of modern Japanese society has increasingly marginalized Buddhist temples and priests from their central roles in the nexus of traditional rural community life. Specifically, during the mass shift of the Japanese population to urban eras over the past sixty years, many Japanese have abandoned their traditional family temples in the countryside. Curiously, the traditional denominations have been unable to coordinate the transfer of temple membership to affiliated denominational temples in these urban areas, which for some denominations is due to the lack of such temples in urban areas. While there have been a number of attempts at internal reform and restructuring, most of these efforts have not led to any substantive change in the nature of traditional Japanese Buddhism (Covell 2006), which maintains its antiquated style of ancestor veneration based around funerals and memorial services or what is now pejoratively dubbed as ‘funeral Buddhism’ (*sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教). The increasing modernization and professionalization

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<sup>2</sup> Both the Higashi (1987) and Nishi (1992) branches of the Jōdo Shin denomination, the Sōtō Zen (1992) denomination, and the Myōshinji and Tenryūji branches of the Rinzai Zen denomination (2001) issued apologies (Victoria 2007), as well as the Jōdo denomination (2008) (see Jodo Shu 2012).

of social institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and even funeral homes, and the subsequent loss of social roles for priests coupled with outdated forms of monastic education based on the study of ritual and doctrine has meant that priests are no longer regarded as public intellectuals and opinion leaders in Japanese society. In sum, most Japanese Buddhist priests themselves will admit that the Japanese Buddhist world is very inward looking and lacking in confidence to confront mainstream society.

It was in response to these conditions that the Buddhist Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) movement emerged in the early 1980s. Organizations such as the Renge International Volunteer Association (ARTIC, Shingon), the Shanti Volunteer Association<sup>3</sup> (SVA, Sōtō Zen), the Buddhist Aid Center (BAC, Nichiren), Relief, Assist, Comfort, Kindness (RACK, Rinzaï Zen), and the AYUS Network of Buddhists Volunteers on International Cooperation (predominantly Jōdo & Jōdo Shin) were created by small groups of priests outside of the confines of denominational management or influence (Watts 2004). Fundamentally, these priests were seeking a way to express their frustration with the inwardness of their denominations and, in turn, to revitalize the identity and social roles of priests. They were outwardly looking enough to notice the international stature that the new Buddhist groups had gained through their peace activities. They were also becoming aware of not only the remarkable non-violent political protest campaigns of Buddhists in countries like Vietnam and Cambodia but also the new kinds of responses to modernization and economic development by Buddhists in places like Sri Lanka and Thailand. Japanese Buddhist NGOs attempted to link to these issues through creating emergency aid and social welfare programs in these countries.

One of the pioneers of this movement was Rev. Arima Jitsujō (1936–2000) (Sōtō Zen), the founder of the most prominent of these NGOs, the Shanti Volunteer Association, which has worked primarily in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. He serves as a link to the radical, pre-war Buddhist activists, in that he became socially engaged through his awareness of *burakumin* discrimination perpetuated by his own Sōtō Zen denomination<sup>4</sup> (Arima 2003). He was able to articulate, in a way that most Japanese priests are unable, how traditional Buddhist teachings connect with modern social problems, and he also introduced Japanese Buddhists to socially

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<sup>3</sup> It was originally named the Sōtō-shū Volunteer Association. It changed its name after qualifying for direct funding support from the Japanese government, which technically cannot support religious organizations.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this issue, see Bodiford 1996.

engaged Buddhists in other countries, like the development monks of Thailand (Arida 1993). Arima's contribution was critical, because Buddhist NGO priests have continued to struggle to articulate the kinds of Buddhist-based critiques of society and alternative visions that socially engaged Buddhists have in other countries. If there has been any criticism of this movement, it is that the largely material aid projects of these Buddhist NGOs do not differ in any substantive way from secular NGOs, calling into question the need to even declare them as 'Buddhist' NGOs.<sup>5</sup>

Up to this point in the post-war era, Japanese Buddhist social engagement had been largely limited to international activities for peace and humanitarian aid while lacking a critical stance towards its own domestic issues. However, the bursting of the Japanese economic bubble and the great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 created a watershed moment for socially engaged Buddhism in Japan to make a new shift inward. The well-known paralysis of governmental bodies in responding to the earthquake in a timely manner led to a huge and spontaneous outpouring of relief work by common Japanese, including many Buddhist temples and Buddhist NGOs, who to this point had been largely focused on 'international cooperation activities'.<sup>6</sup> In responding to the crisis, Buddhist priests, temples, and organizations had a renewed experience of their traditional roles in providing relief to the common public. This experience combined with the increase in social problems during the post-bubble depression made Buddhist NGOs and Buddhist priests in general not only more sensitive to domestic issues but also more confident that they could offer something to the average person besides funerary rituals (Arima 2003).

The development of the domestically focused Non-Profit Organization (NPO) movement<sup>7</sup> and an increased consciousness of engaging in domestic social problems since 1998 parallels the present, full onslaught of social dislocations brought about by the economic downturn of the 1990s. While

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<sup>5</sup> One of the few exceptions in Japan to this generalization is the work of Rev. Ōkōchi Hidehito, a Jōdo priest living in Tokyo and co-founder of the Buddhist NGO AYUS. Unlike his contemporaries, his experience doing social welfare work in Southeast Asia motivated him to develop a comprehensive structural analysis of global issues and to launch a variety of social ventures within Japan from the basis of his temple to confront Japan's complicity in as well as victimization from globalization (Watts 2012).

<sup>6</sup> In the Japanese context, NGO has been defined and usually refers specifically to a group engaged in 'international cooperation activities' (*kokusai kyōryoku katsudō* 国際協力活動) (Shimizu 1999: 699).

<sup>7</sup> In 1998, the Non-Profit Organization (NPO) Law, amongst other things, enabled NGOs and NPOs to raise funds by appealing to the tax write-off afforded to donors—a fundamental legal right that is essential to the financial viability of most non-profits around the world—and thus to develop more rapidly.

we can identify individual priests and general Buddhists engaging in similar problems back in the 1990s, there has been a marked increase of engagement since roughly 2004. In turn, we are seeing the emergence of a new young generation of Buddhist priests, both male and female, who are taking the Buddhist NGO movement to another stage. This present generation of young Buddhist priests has grown up in post-bubble Japan, filled with community and family breakdown, alienation, and the deterioration of human relationships. In this way, their frustration with the continuing inwardness of the traditional Buddhist world and their own crisis of identity as priests is even stronger than that of the Buddhist NGO priests. The heightening of these tensions has begun to express itself in the establishment of new organizations and networks devoted to Buddhist reform and revival, which are in some ways reminiscent of the pre-war movements. Below we will profile a few of the most significant and conspicuous of these groups.

- **Bōzu (Priests) Be Ambitious:**<sup>8</sup> The group began in 2003, ironically, out of the efforts of a lay university professor named Ueda Noriyuki of the Tokyo Institute of Technology. He has become a well-known social figure through the publication of a popular book on exceptional priests involved in society (Ueda 2004) and numerous public appearances. The group, however, is largely organized and self-run by young priests, both male and female, who arrange bi-annual, all day seminars and workshops on a variety of themes such as: suicide prevention, confronting the problems of Funeral Buddhism, the social role and potential of the temple, and the identity of the priest. These meetings are conspicuous for attracting priests of all ages from a wide variety of denominations and also for their formats that focus less on speeches and more on workshops and close inter-personal contact with the participants.
- **Tera Net Sangha:**<sup>9</sup> Begun in late 2007, this is a group coordinated by a young Jōdo Shin priest named Nakashita Daiki, who previously worked at the Jōdo Shin initiated Vihara Hospice in Niigata prefecture and presently works supporting the homeless in Tokyo. Terra Net Sangha is a network of priests, temple related persons, graveyard managers, tombstone merchants, morticians, and other such persons trying to reform the role of Buddhism in the daily life of the people by reforming the

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www5.ocn.ne.jp/~seishoji/bouzbeiframe.html>. All website URL addresses were accessed for accuracy in July 2012.

<sup>9</sup> <http://teranet.web.fc2.com/>.

Funeral Buddhism industry. The group has general meetings three to four times a year. Although it is moving slowly, the very creation of such a self-critical working group on this issue represents a major move forward within the Buddhist world itself.

- The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism:<sup>10</sup> Begun in early 2008, this group runs on largely the impetus and energy of Rev. Jin Hitoshi, the director of the Buddhist based Zenseikyō Foundation for Youth and Child Welfare, where he is also very engaged in suicide and youth issues. The Institute evolved from the Engaged Buddhist Study Group begun by Jin and a few other Buddhist NGO priests and staff in 2004 that would meet every two months to discuss issues in engaged Buddhism, often with noted foreign socially engaged Buddhists. The Institute has held three major public symposiums focused on the ‘public benefit character’ (*kōeki sei* 公益性) of the Japanese Buddhist temple and the meaning of ‘Buddhist development’ (*kaihatsu* 開発) for Japan, which included prominent foreign socially engaged Buddhist leaders A.T. Ariyaratne, Joanna Macy, and Phra Phaisan Visalo.
- Tōkai-Kantō Network of Women and Buddhism: Established in 1994, this network well predates the previous three groups. Although still small and marginal, it marks a slowly growing trend to confront the huge issue of patriarchy in Japanese Buddhism. The network also is confronting the problem of temple wives (*jizoku* 寺族) and their ambiguous status and rights. Kawahashi Noriko, Associate Professor at the Nagoya Institute of Technology and also a Sōtō Zen *jizoku*, is a noted participant and writer on these issues (Kawahashi 2003).

One of the ways that priests have tried to cope with these identity issues is by actively creating new identities through social engagement and reviving their temples as community centers. In the past five years, there has been a growing movement of holding new types of ‘events’ (*ibento* イベント) at temples covering a wide range of activities from concerts to bazaars and flea markets to therapeutic workshops. While in some ways such events do not seem to address the more fundamental problems of traditional Buddhist denominations, they do show a sense of trying to rebuild community networks of which the Buddhist temple had been the center. In general, Japanese Buddhism still lags far behind the diverse and creative developments that have emerged elsewhere in the Buddhist

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.zenseikyo.or.jp/japa/thinktank.html>.

world over the last twenty to thirty years, such as Buddhist environmental movements in both the West and Asia, the fusion of trends in alternative and holistic education with Buddhism, the application of Buddhist practices for dying in the global hospice movement, etc. However, the seeds planted in the Buddhist NGO movement and the experiences of the 1995 Hanshin earthquake appear to be sprouting in a recent increase of creative social engagement by Buddhist priests concerning various pressing issues in Japan today. The following profiles are some of the more notable examples:

- The Vihara Movement: Groundbreaking work was done in the area of Buddhist terminal care in the mid 1980s by two Jōdo Shin priests, Rev. Tamiya Masashi and Rev. Tashiro Shunkō. The movement began as a series of study groups about spiritual care for the elderly and dying, and then developed into actual training for spiritual care professionals. Finally, two Buddhist based hospices were established, one at Nagaoka Nishi Hospital<sup>11</sup> in Niigata in 1993 and the other as the Asoka Vihara Clinic<sup>12</sup> in Kyoto in 2008. A third Buddhist hospice was established in 2004 by the lay Buddhist denomination Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会 as part of their Kosei Hospital complex in Tokyo.<sup>13</sup> Similar such Vihara study and care groups have been established by an independent group of Nichiren priests called the Nichiren-shū Vihara Network<sup>14</sup> in 1994 and by a group of Sōtō Zen priests in the northern region of Tohoku in 1992.<sup>15</sup> This latter group was initiated by Rev. Hakamata Toshihide, a priest actively involved in suicide prevention work who will be profiled in detail later in this chapter. More recently established groups in this area are: the Professional Association for Spiritual Care and Health (PASCH)<sup>16</sup> in 2005 by Buddhists, Christians, and non-religious persons to develop and train chaplains; the Japan Association for Buddhist Nursing and Vihara Studies<sup>17</sup> (Bukkyō Kango Bihara Gakkai 仏教看護ビハーラ学会) in 2004, and the *Ōjō* 往生 and Death Project<sup>18</sup> in 2006 by the Jōdo Shū Research Institute.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sutokukai.or.jp/nagaokanishi-hp/kannwakea.html>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.asokavihara.jp/>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.kosei-hp.or.jp/hospital/consultationozo.html>.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.nvn.cc/>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://vihara.main.jp/>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://web.mac.com/tanimjp/iWeb/PASCH/Welcome.html>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://jabnvs.com/index.html>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.jsri.jp/English/Main.html>.

- Tera Net EN:<sup>19</sup> Begun in 2004 and coordinated by the aforementioned Rev. Jin Hitoshi through the Zenseikyō Foundation for Youth and Child Welfare, it is a network of temples across Japan that mostly deals with youth issues, such as school drop outs, juvenile delinquents, and shut ins (*hikikomori* 引き籠り). One of the main purposes of the network is to provide portals for counseling whereby especially families facing these problems can better connect to resources in their own region. While Rev. Jin runs a regular telephone counseling service out of the Zenseikyō office in Tokyo, the network also features some of the most exceptional socially engaged Buddhist priests in Japan, such a Rev. Noda Daito<sup>20</sup> in Shikoku, who run shelters for the young out of their own temples. The network also holds symposiums to educate the public on these issues, training programs in counseling skills, and study tours amongst members.
- The ‘One Spoonful’ Association (Hitosaji no Kai ひとさじの会):<sup>21</sup> Begun in 2009, this is a group of young, mostly Jōdo denomination, priests and volunteers who do street patrols for homeless people in the Asakusa area of Tokyo. Unlike a soup kitchen which receives and feeds the homeless, these priests walk the streets to find the homeless and provide them with basic medicine and small meals that they prepare themselves from donations of rice to the temple. Some of the priests involved in this activity are also doing suicide prevention work, and have connection with the aforementioned Nakashita Daiki,<sup>22</sup> who is working on the relationship of suicide with poverty and works with a local NGO on feeding the homeless in Shinjuku, Tokyo.
- Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem (Jisatsu Taisaku ni Torikumu Sōryo no Kai 自殺対策に取り組む僧侶の会):<sup>23</sup> Begun in late 2007, this group has assembled a variety of priests who individually came to work on the issue of suicide prevention. It will be the focus of the second half of this paper.

These movements are significant in the Japanese Buddhism landscape for three reasons. First, the priests show a strong sense of self-awareness and self-criticism in addressing the character and identity of their own Buddhist institutions. Second, they pair this critical perspective with an

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.teranet-en.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.kappa.or.jp/>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://hitosaji.jp/>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.inochi.or.jp/>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://homepage3.nifty.com/bouzsanga/>.



outward looking awareness of real social issues and the willingness to risk their own comfort in getting intimately involved with the suffering of people on spiritual and emotional levels. Finally, they indicate a substantive change from activities by generally isolated individuals to cooperative like-minded organizations and networks, which could be described as a socially engaged Buddhist movement if it continues to develop along these lines. In the second half of this paper, we provide a more in depth illustration of these trends through the issue of suicide.

*Suicide as a Flashpoint of the Japanese Social Crisis*

March 1998 was marked by a sudden and disturbing upturn in suicides in Japan.<sup>24</sup> March is the end of the fiscal year in Japan when budgets are reviewed and employee redeployment is very high. 1997 had brought the Asian economic crisis that hit some of Japan's closest trading partners, such as Indonesia and Thailand, particularly hard. On the heels of this crisis was Japan's own banking meltdown in November 1998 with the dissolution of some of Japan's longest standing financial institutions, like Yamaichi Securities.

Looking back, we see a 26% spike in suicides from the previous year; 24,391 in 1997 to 32,863 in 1998. The total number of suicides has remained stubbornly over 30,000 for the past eleven years (highest 34,427 in 2003, lowest 31,042 in 2001), ranking Japan well above the rest of the G-7 nations at a rate of 25 suicides per 100,000 people, compared to the respective rates of France 17.8, Germany 13.0, and the United States 11.0. The major at risk group is, not surprisingly, the unemployed at roughly 47% of all suicides. Employees (24%) and the self-employed (13%) are also high-risk groups; and, somewhat disturbingly, bureaucratic managers and administrators are one of the lowest at risk groups at only 2%. The most at risk age group are middle aged men from their 40s to 60s, whose rate is about 4.5 times higher than women in the same age group. However, Japanese women commit suicide at the third highest rate in the world as compared to Japanese men who do so at the eighth highest rate. The youth and the elderly are also very susceptible to suicide, and suicide is now the most common form of death for people in Japan under the age of thirty (National Police Agency 2008).

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<sup>24</sup> Suicide figures by month for 1998 are: January: 2,100, February: 2,300, March: 3,300, April: 2,900, and May: 4,000. In general, over the past eleven years, suicide spikes by between 500–1,000 people in this March period of employee turnover (Honkawa Yutaka).

The Center to Support Measures Against Suicide (Jisatsu Taisaku Shien Senta 自殺対策支援センター), more commonly known as Life Link, is a major NPO involved in suicide prevention and public awareness that has published an extensive report on the problem. It has outlined a classic pattern in suicide that begins with economic and work related problems, like bankruptcy, overwork and exhaustion, poor worker relationships due to competition, and anxiety around change in the workplace. These strains cause further health problems, mounting debt, and the breakdown of family relationships. The eventual result is various lifestyle hardships, alienation, depression, and eventually suicide (Jisatsu Taisaku Shien Senta 2008: 21). This particular analysis focuses primarily on economic and work related issues and does not directly address the high rates of suicide in the young and elderly. Although these economic triggers may be an essential key to the problem in Japan, they are also a reflection of deep structural problems in Japanese social relationships.

The core of this structural problem is the breakdown of Japanese communities and social networks. As noted in the opening discussion, the mass shift of the Japanese population to urban areas since the end of World War II has dismantled many rural social networks, especially those based around the Buddhist temple. For a period, large corporations and new religious organizations, especially mass Buddhist based ones, provided new social networks in urban areas. The Japanese government, primarily under the direction of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), relied heavily on these institutions and the extended family to provide social safety nets, while spending less on social welfare institutions than most European countries. However, the company as a community and almost family type container has eroded since the 1990s with the restructuring of the once heralded lifetime employment system to the present heavy reliance on part-time labor with no benefits and little security (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006). The extended family has also become diluted through urbanization, divorce, and the effects of communications and entertainment technology to a state beyond the nuclear family, a type of post-modern 'dormitory family'. In this way, more and more people have lost the social networks that used to help them in times of need and have become increasingly dependent on the government social safety net system. This system is in increasing crisis with tax revenues down due to declining birth rates and expenses up with a rapidly aging population.

This deterioration of social networks, as reflected in the high rates of suicide amongst all groups, has had a huge impact on how Japanese form their sense of personal identity. The Japanese are of course well known

for their thick, intimate, and sometimes closed communities based on a strong emphasis on harmony (*wa* 和) with others, self-sacrifice for the group (*mushi* 無私), repaying the benefits of elders (*hōon*), and dependence on others for support and care (*amaeru* 甘える). What this system lacked in individual autonomy, it made up for in intimacy—there was always someone who would notice and support you in times of crisis. In fact, it was such intense intimacy that necessitated the individual virtues of harmony, non-confrontation, and self-effacement, because there were so few boundaries between people.

However, since the end of World War II and especially in the last twenty years, there has been an increasing emphasis among Japanese on the neo-classical economic values of self-determination (*jiko kettei* 自己決定) and self-responsibility (*jiko sekinin* 自己責任). The baby boomer generation of the late 1940s and 50s inculcated this in their children as part of Japan's economic drive to recover from the war. These children have now come of age and have already passed these values onto a third generation as source of identity formation. Furthermore, the gradual erosion of the seniority system in companies with a merit-based system has also instilled the values of taking personal responsibility for one's career and life rather than depending on others for mutual support and aid.

The problem has been not so much the rise of such values but the juxtaposition of them alongside the core Japanese values of harmony, cooperation, and self-sacrifice. For example, the combination of feelings towards needing to take personal charge for one's advancement in a company with the sense of needing to sacrifice for oneself for the advancement of the company leads to the Japanese tendency towards overwork and the phenomenon of death by overwork (*karōshi* 過労死). Further, the value of harmony (*wa*) means one should keep up an appearance of vigor and well being, even though the underlying ethic of the group is no longer one of cooperative mutual support but of competitive individual advancement. This creates intense stress and ultimately alienation, because there is no support coming from outside while from within there is withdrawal due to fear of being judged negatively. In such a situation, Japanese are still reluctant to reach out for help, because the tradition of intimate community was sensitive enough to personal distress to discourage the direct expression of it. Traditional internalized Japanese social values thus increase alienation in an era where intimate communities have for the most part disintegrated, and structural barriers to intimacy are much stronger because community must be sought out rather than inherited. For the young, especially, a lack of confidence ensues, because they have

not been brought up in intimate relationships and social networks where conflict takes place but is resolved internally. Young Japanese generally do not know how to express themselves, and this leads to a high rate of social withdrawal (*hikikomori*). Meanwhile the elderly experience a sense of abandonment by younger generations no longer interested or willing to take the time to maintain social bonds.

As we have noted, traditional Buddhist temples used to form a major nexus for the social support networks of rural society. Like other nexuses for social support, such as the company and extended family, they too have lost their ability to sustain intimate relationship. As such, the young Buddhist priest, like the average young Japanese, also suffers from alienation and identity issues. These issues are exacerbated by the larger marginalization and alienation of temples and priests from mainstream, modern Japanese culture.

### *The 'Suicide Priests'*

As we noted earlier, some priests are confronting their own personal issues of alienation and the larger social marginalization of their denominations in creative identity formation through social engagement. One of the most conspicuous forms of this new wave of social engagement is suicide prevention. In the five short profiles<sup>25</sup> of priests working in suicide prevention that follow, we will catch a glimpse of how they have used their own struggles and personal crises as a basis for confronting the alienation of many others in wider society. In these profiles, we will see many of the themes that we have discussed come together. Like the progressive Buddhists of the pre-war era, these priests are confronting the dislocations of modernization through addressing the suffering of the common people most victimized by these forces. Furthermore, through this activism, they are seeking to redefine and revitalize the role of Buddhist priests in modern society, as well as the role of Buddhist temples and the larger Buddhist denominations. Although the latter two potentialities have not yet been fully realized, the work of these priests points to the rebuilding of social networks of support and intimacy based around the Buddhist temple.

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<sup>25</sup> Where not noted, all information and quotes in these profiles come from private interviews done with each individual priest by the four-man IBEC research team. The translations are by the authors.

1. *The Salary-Man: Rev. Fujisawa Katsumi*

Rev. Fujisawa Katsumi is the abbot of Anraku-ji 安楽寺, a Jōdo Shin temple in Tokyo, and the Head Representative of the Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem. Born in 1961, he is somewhat unusual for a Japanese priest in that he did not attend a Buddhist university and receive a degree in Buddhist studies, but rather graduated from one of Japan's top secular schools, Waseda University. As in other Buddhist countries, monastic education used to offer the highest form of public education in society, but now lags behind secular education. In Japan, a bright young priest will choose a stronger secular school over his own denomination's university. In this way, Rev. Fujisawa represents a small group of priests with top-level educations who have a wider view of society than the more typical inward looking priest educated by his own denomination. These priests may enter the professional world and stay somewhat aloof from temple life, as did Rev. Fujisawa who worked as a computer engineer in an IT company for twenty-three years after graduating.

During this time, he experienced first hand the hardships and dissatisfactions of the typical Japanese salary man, relating that

if a salary man faces a problem and cannot do his work well, he then develops a kind of inferiority complex. At this time, he never thinks about what kind of teaching Buddhism could provide; which was true even for me when I faced this situation. When my personal evaluation was low and inferiors humiliated me, I got depressed and asked myself, 'Why can't we develop human relationships well?' I had a feeling that Buddhist teachings had no direct connection to my situation. However, if there could appear at these times a priest who has concern and radiates a feeling of personal intimacy, I think Buddhism could become part of this world and not be aloof. If we could talk about real 'refuge temples' [*kakekomidera* 駆け込み寺], for example setting up a café or place to hang out in a temple that anyone could visit, I think it's possible. [We could] create a place to talk which can open up the heart and mind and which could apply not only to the suicide problem but to other situations, like in companies when people get humiliated.

While he was still working in his IT company, he began to train as a volunteer telephone counselor at the Tokyo Suicide Prevention Center (Tōkyō jisatsu bōshi senta 東京自殺防止センター). He chose this path rather than working out of his temple because he feels that

people who are filled with anxiety, when walking past a temple, might suddenly feel like going in and confiding in the priest. But from the gate to the entrance seems far. In order to restore the temple as a community center

there needs to be preparation. At this stage, telephone consulting is something we [priests] can do outside of the temple. (*Jimonkōryū* 2006a: 42)

In March 2006, Rev. Fujisawa quit his job in his company to attend full-time to the activities of his temple and to become increasingly active in the suicide issue. He was part of a petition campaign to demand for basic government legislation for suicide prevention, which passed in June 2006. He has also been one of the driving forces behind the Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem and their attempts to both build a nationwide network of priests engaged in this issue and to expose and educate a society largely unaware of these priests' activities.

## 2. *For the Greater Public: Rev. Maeda Yūsen*

Rev. Maeda Yūsen is the abbot of Shōsan-ji 正山寺, a Sōtō Zen temple in Tokyo and is the Vice Representative of the Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem. Born in 1971, Rev. Maeda's background is also somewhat unusual. He is the third son of the abbot of a Shingon temple in northeast Tokyo. As his oldest brother was set to become successor to that temple, it was decided that he would take over an abandoned parishioner temple in southern Tokyo connected to his mother's family. This necessitated him to ordain and train in a different denomination, Sōtō Zen, than his father and brothers. While having certain reservations about his Sōtō Zen training experience, Rev. Maeda received a major influence from his father and the way his home temple was run—not as a typical parishioner (*danka* 檀家) temple focused on funerals but as a believer (*shinja* 信者) temple focused on the spiritual needs and interests of the members who visited the temple. In the world of Japanese Buddhism filled with priests who often show very little monastic comportment, Rev. Maeda maintains a stricter (yet open) comportment that he feels is a reciprocal duty for living off the fees and donations of his parishioners.

This particular background led Rev. Maeda, unlike Rev. Fujisawa and others involved in this issue, to base his work out of the temple. About eight years ago, he put up a poster outside the front gate of his temple saying, "We will listen carefully to what you have to say. Although it may seem a trivial matter to others, it is a serious problem for you." Further indicating this gap between Rev. Maeda and the typical parishioner temple priest, a neighboring abbot challenged him once about the sign, saying it was unnecessary since parishioners assume they can come to the temple for such consultation. However, Rev. Maeda felt such a sign was important to communicate with the everyday people in the area not

connected with the temple as a parishioner. Indeed, the result was that people who had no connection to the temple came one after another to visit, and Rev. Maeda has developed regular (free of charge) consulting work at the temple and through a telephone call-in service.

In this same period, Rev. Maeda completed a five year course for gaining a license as a conversational therapist—a private course created by some top ranked doctors from Keio and Tokyo Universities called the Mental Care Cooperative Group (Mentaru Keya Kyōkai). The program has incredibly demanding standards with a certification rate of only 15%, as compared to 70% for normal clinical psychologists (*Jimonkōryū* 2006b: 87–88). Nationwide there are now more than 600 of these therapists, of which Rev. Maeda believes there are only three Buddhist priests. Ironically, when discussing his method of counseling with people, he eschews psychoanalytical models and methods because he feels they create a wall between the clinician (as ‘normal and healthy’) and the patient (as ‘disturbed and ill’). Instead, using a process he says is inspired by the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, he encounters the person as a fellow comrade in suffering in which together they search for a resolution to their collective suffering.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. *Open 24–7: Rev. Shinohara Eichi*

Rev. Shinohara Eichi is the abbot of a Sōtō Zen temple called Chōjuin 長寿院, located in a rather remote area of Chiba yet near the massive Tokyo-Narita International Airport. Born in 1944, he was influenced by the Buddhist NGO movement and has been involved in overseas aid and support for children since he was young. He first started getting involved with the problem of suicide and the larger issue of alienation and depression twenty years ago. Two traumatic life experiences have emboldened Rev. Shinohara to sacrifice the comforts of a typical parishioner temple priest’s lifestyle to take on the very demanding work of dealing with the suicidal. The first was as a young boy he survived his mother’s attempt to kill him as she tried to kill herself (Taniguchi 2007). When he was forty-two, he developed a brain hemorrhage which required serious surgery and has left him with visible scars.

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<sup>26</sup> Maeda Yūsen in a private talk given to Keio University students on field trip with author. Shōsan-ji Temple, Tokyo, Japan, 29 May 2009.

Operating out of his temple and from the basis of his Chōjuin Sangha Association, Rev. Shinohara provides 24-hour telephone consultation as well as offering his temple as a refuge to anyone at anytime. Chōjuin is predominantly a believer and not parishioner temple, and Rev. Shinohara maintains a private residence for his family at some distance from the temple so that it can remain as open as possible to the Chōjuin community. If someone visits suddenly or calls in the middle of the night, it is Rev. Shinohara's policy to never refuse them. On average, he estimates that he receives three to five calls per day with that total spiking to over ten per day on the weekends. Per month he receives about twelve to fifteen personal visits by appointment and another five without notice, including salary men. He even permits overnight stays at the temple when the situation warrants. Rev. Shinohara stresses that it's important to make clear at the beginning and to remind them that the temple is "for you, a place you can come to freely anytime. It's fine to just hang out and do nothing" (*Jimonkōryū* 2006a: 47).

Rev. Shinohara remarks that Japan has become a difficult place to create human relationships. There is a serious problem of indifference or apathy (*mukanshin* 無関心) among all ages. He believes that young people and adults who grow up in such an environment are cut off from the continuity and connection to life that Japanese have traditionally understood as coming from their ancestors. This lack of a sense of continuity and connection to life appears to be making it much easier for Japanese, especially the young, to consider suicide as a means for dealing with their alienation and apathy. There is a strong sense in Japanese spirituality of the other side of death (*anoyo* あの世) as a realm of ancestors or a Buddhist Pure Land where one can meet with departed loved ones again. Rev. Shinohara warns against the mentality of those who consider suicide as a way to reunite with loved ones on the other side of death. He counsels that Buddhism offers no final word on this matter and that there are many vital relationships, such as raising one's own children, to take care of before we depart this world.

Finally, Rev. Shinohara sees the potential of the priest as counselor (rather than as ritualist). Not only does a counselor support a heavily burdened national medical system, he also offers an alternative means of therapy and cure based in developing an intimate relationship with a counselor as a friend,<sup>27</sup> who is in turn connected with an authentic

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<sup>27</sup> This derives from a traditional Buddhist model of 'spiritual friend and counselor' (*zenchishiki* 善知識).



temple community. While most people, including priests, feel counseling can only be done by licensed professionals, Rev. Shinohara encourages other priests to confront the problem of alienation even if they don't have a license by using listening skills and a concern for others.

#### 4. *Mr. Coffee: Rev. Hakamata Toshihide*

Rev. Hakamata Toshihide, born in 1958, is the abbot of Gessō-ji 月宗寺, a Sōtō Zen temple in the area of Fujisato-chō in one of Japan's most northern and remote areas of Akita with its stunningly beautiful nature and brutal winters. Akita is also notorious in Japan for suicide, having had until recently the highest suicide rate in the country for eleven years running. The area of Fujisato-chō itself had the highest rate of suicide within Akita, specifically among the elderly. Some still consider that the rural areas in Japan preserve the traditional community values of Japanese culture. However, the huge depopulation of these areas over the last eighty years has led to high rates of suicide related to solitude, especially among the elderly living in depopulated mountainous regions. Rev. Hakamata notes that suicide is common among old people who don't just live alone but also live with their families. Although they live with others, they still develop feelings of being neglected and isolated.

In the countryside as well, human relationships have become fractured. For example, farm work is no longer done cooperatively. Children have become fewer, and in these households, children aren't disciplined. The real meaning is that there is no connection across generations. (*Jimonkōryū* 2006b: 89–90)

In 2000, Rev. Hakamata organized a meeting called “Thinking about Our Hearts and Lives” at which twenty-eight people attended, including housewives, health professionals and public health officials, members of the social welfare organization, district welfare officers, and priests of his own denomination. Since then, they have organized further such meetings, lectures, and activities in other cities and towns in the region. In 2003, in Fujisato-chō itself, Rev. Hakamata and a group of residents established a café called *Yottetamore* in the back of the city hall in the lobby of the Three Generations Exchange Center. In this age where Starbucks and other such high-end cafés can be found in practically every rail station and on every corner in the cities, it is a statement about life in this region that there was not even a single café in Fujisato-chō. The *Yottetamore* café with its modern, yet warm and very inviting ambience, thus provides not only a place to talk about problems but simply to get a good cup of coffee. Rev. Hakamata comments that, “Whoever comes here will find someone

who will listen to them carefully. People know that once a week at this place there will be someone that will surely give them some mental support" (*Jimonkōryū* 2006b: 89). In response to the needs of working men who are only free at night and prefer the atmosphere of a bar to a café, Rev. Hakamata has recently created a 'business trip' bar to extend and compliment the *Yottetamore* café.

In 2004, for the first time in seventeen years, there wasn't a single suicide in the town. In 2005, there was one person who took their own life, which happened again in 2006. Rev. Hakamata feels that this decline in the suicide rate isn't because they always talk about the issue at the café, but rather when people have problems, there is always an open window for them. Indeed, the cultural taboos around discussing suicide make it very difficult to confront at the temple during a funeral or memorial service. The café enables Rev. Hakamata to address the issue from a different angle and in a different context that is more amenable to open communication. In this way, it is interesting to note that while Rev. Hakamata shares some of the same concerns about the loss of community life as Rev. Shinohara, his work resembles Rev. Fujisawa's in that it is done outside of the environment of the temple. Like Rev. Shinohara, he also feels he must be careful about over exposing his family to this kind of work, but rather in a mirror image to Rev. Shinohara, he keeps his family at the temple and works on this issue away from the temple.

##### 5. *Virtual Reality: Rev. Nemoto Jotetsu*

Rev. Nemoto Jōtetsu is the abbot of Daizen-ji 大禪寺, a Rinzai Zen temple in a rural region of Gifu in central Japan. Rev. Nemoto represents yet another totally different background and approach to the suicide issue. Like Rev. Fujisawa, Rev. Nemoto was born and raised in Tokyo and attended one of the top schools in the country, Keio University. However, Rev. Nemoto did not grow up in a temple and is one of a minority of priests, only about 25%, who do not come to the priesthood through succession. He was born in 1972, growing up during the height of the bubble economy and its subsequent collapse. Thus his manner, speech and sentiments are more representative of the present young generation of Japanese, many of whom are alienated and have a hard time creating a meaningful life.

After taking an interest in western philosophy and existentialism at university, he eventually dropped out of school and entered a strict Rinzai Zen meditation temple. After four years of living in a very secluded

environment, Rev. Nemoto came back out into the world and found that since the time of his own school friends' and uncle's suicides, the number of suicides all over Japan had increased. Part of his re-integration experience was working as a temp in a MacDonalld's on the west side of Tokyo, where he came into contact with this young generation of alienated students and 'slacker' (*freeter* フリーター) youth. Rev. Nemoto found that many expressed doubts or little hope about their futures and what to do after graduating from school. He remarks, "They really have no hopes, and I discussed this with them. There is this gap between what they feel they are and can do and what they are expected to be as a model person."

At this point, Rev. Nemoto began to visit and write comments on internet sites created by young people who had some connection to suicide. After a year and a half of this reintegration back into society, Rev. Nemoto moved to Gifu in central Japan for more training and to become the abbot of a local temple. In 2004, with the various people he had met through his web surfing, he created a 'community group' on the internet called "Those Who Want to Die" (*shinitai hito* 死にたい人). It was a support group where suicidal people who didn't want to be by themselves could talk about any kind of thing from daily living to death. They would actually meet to talk face to face, as well as to visit famous places where people like to commit suicide, sometimes to chant and pray for the dead. After only two years, the group became quite popular and had assembled over four hundred members. However, because of matters of privacy and impressions that the site might be condoning suicide (i.e. the name "Those Who Want to Die"), the server forced the group to shut down. Shortly afterwards, Rev. Nemoto initiated a new group which didn't advertise itself as a 'suicide group', drawing back many old members and now holding a steady membership of around ninety-four. When he began these chat groups, he jumped into counseling individual mails. He used to answer up to sixty e-mails a day, but he has now found that thirty per day is a more manageable level. Besides this basic e-mail work, Rev. Nemoto has developed some unique spiritual practices using the internet, like e-mail sutra copying and virtual Zen meditation sessions using the Skype camera software.

As compared to the popularity of telephone counseling we saw in the cases of Revs. Fujisawa and Shinohara, this use of the internet appeals to a different kind of person. Rev. Nemoto has many members who are 'shut ins' (*hikikomori*). They rarely leave their houses and find the internet a more comfortable medium than actually talking by phone. For a generation that has grown up using the internet, such forms of communication are perhaps more usual and appealing than for those who feel computers

and the internet lack intimacy. The common denominator with all the priests we have seen is their commitment to engaging in an intimate personal relationship with those suffering, neither out of evangelical interests nor as therapeutic saviors, but as 'spiritual friends' (*zenchishiki*) walking the same road of suffering towards enlightenment.

*The Building of a Movement through Cooperative Action*

In the initial stages of our study, it became apparent that contrary to popular and even expert opinion there was a fairly significant amount of grassroots activity in Japan that could be characterized as socially engaged Buddhism. However, this activity has been largely out of the mainstream, because it is so localized. Also, until very recently, information has not been disseminated effectively in a way that promotes networking among like-minded activists. The Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem, Tera Net EN, Bōzu Be Ambitious, and the Tōkai-Kantō Network of Women and Buddhism, all demonstrate a marked change in this situation. Internet technology with websites and user lists for networking are not only greatly increasing exposure to the actions of individuals but also enabling the mushrooming of priestly and general Buddhist networks on a variety of social issues. Additionally, while the secular media has not paid much attention to Buddhist-inspired activism, the priests working on suicide have begun to appear frequently in print and television media.

The Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem came together through the mutual exposure of the priests profiled above and others in various public forums and meetings held in the Kantō area during the previous years.<sup>28</sup> Eleven priests began the group in May 2007 with Rev. Fujisawa taking a leading role in directing its activities. At the beginning, they did not have enough members to run a telephone-counseling group nor did their memorial services for families affected by suicides attract many people. Thus, in March 2008, they put an advertisement in one of Japan's largest national newspapers, the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, calling on the suicidal and troubled to write them letters that they would read and respond to carefully. Surprisingly, this initial appeal attracted many letters. At this time, there were only eight priests actively involved in this

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<sup>28</sup> This included a major public symposium held on October 22, 2007, and sponsored by IBEC that featured Rev. Jin Hitoshi, and Revs. Fujisawa, Shinohara, Hakamata, and Nemoto (*Jimonkōryū* 2007).

activity, and there was no training to participate in the group. Obviously, a number of the priests like Rev. Fujisawa had previous experience in counseling, but it was a more training on the spot type of affair. Rev. Ogawa Yūkan, a young Jōdo priest and doctoral candidate at Tokyo University who participates regularly in the group, notes that even at this early stage the members were quite skillful in their letter writing.

Two years later, the group had received 1,060 total letters from all over the country. Many of these are by repeaters; for example, out of a sampling of sixty-five letters, there were nineteen people in total. The age group has varied, although many of the letters come from women. Depression is a common issue, but also family problems and the core issue of grieving families connected to suicides often arises. In some cases, the writers have wanted to meet face to face with one of the priests, and such meetings have been arranged. At this point, the group has developed a set process in which three to four priests read and discuss one letter. One of them takes responsibility to individually write the response, which is then reviewed and finally approved by the others for mailing. The group has now swelled to twenty-five members, including five nuns and five members outside of the Kantō region including all the priests profiled in the previous section. They meet as a whole once every two months to discuss a specific issue and case study, a process that Rev. Maeda often organizes.

As mentioned, the group has held specific memorial services for bereaved families (*izoku* 遺族). Such memorial services were first performed specifically for groups of people affected by suicide perhaps around 1996 by a Rinzai Zen priest in Ehime Prefecture named Rev. Asano Taigen. The office manager for the group, Rev. Yoshida Shōei, a Nichiren priest who lives an hour south of Tokyo, held such a service in 2007 that attracted eight bereaved families. Since 2008, on the nationally designated “Life Day” (*inochi no hi* いのちの日), December 1, the group holds such a service at the large Jōdo Shin Tsukiji Hongan-ji Temple 築地本願寺 in Tokyo, which attracted 127 bereaved families in 2008. In June of 2009, they held another service at the large Jōdo Zōjō-ji Temple 増上寺 in Tokyo attracting twenty-one bereaved families. Rev. Ogawa recounts that just the work of receiving registrations by phone turned out to be complex as the people who called in had questions which involved emotional counseling. The Jōdo Shin, Sōtō, Nichiren, Jōdo, and Shingon denominations have all begun to show interest in holding their own such memorial services in the near future. However, at a February 2010 symposium on this issue sponsored by the Jōdo Shū Research Institute, both Rev. Fujisawa and Rev. Maeda warned that quickly putting together such events is not

enough and that a more systematic approach needs to be taken by the denominations. Rev. Fujisawa feels that an infrastructure needs to be developed for priests to properly study and train to do this work.

These comments strike right at the core issue of Funeral Buddhism and the crisis of the traditional denominations. Carl Becker, a leading international scholar in death and dying at the University of Kyoto and also part of the aforementioned *Ōjō* and Death Project, has noted that the elaborate Japanese funeral and memorial system, which includes a seven week period of initial services followed by an extended thirty-three year period of services, is a profound and meaningful form of grief care for bereaved families (Becker 2012). However, due to the aforementioned breakdown of extended families and social networks based around the temple, as well as increasing apathy towards ritualized temple based ancestor worship, these ceremonies are being abbreviated and scaled down to only immediate loved ones. Becker has commented that this situation reflects the disturbing shift from 1960 to 2000 of Japanese being some of the most intimate and least death denying people in the world to some of the *least* intimate and *most* death denying (Becker 2012).

As seen in Rev. Fujisawa's comments above, the Association of Priests Grappling with the Suicide Problem's has a critical attitude towards their own traditions and the simple formalism of holding memorial services for families affected by suicide. By connecting these services with other activities, they seek to develop a more comprehensive response to the problem. Thus, they are promoting the various creative activities developed by the priests that we have already profiled, such as Rev. Hakamata's *Yottetamore* café and 'business trip' bar, Rev. Nemoto's internet counseling, and Rev. Maeda's in-temple counseling for non-temple members. They have also begun a series of "Getting to Know One Another" (*wakachi-ai*) events that serve as opportunities to do grief care counseling. On the last Thursday of every month at the aforementioned Tsukiji Hongan-ji Temple, they hold individual counseling sessions starting at 10:30 in the morning, followed by meetings of the whole group in the afternoon.

By connecting funerals and memorial services to social problems and the real life suffering of common people, there is the potential of liberating these practices from their empty formalism. These core activities of the Buddhist temple and priest thus could serve as a fulcrum for revitalizing the community temple system by re-building human relationships through grief care and counseling. Integrated with the other kinds of human outreach activities like cafés and internet and telephone

counseling, there is the potential to rebuild the temple as a nexus of social networking. Rev. Fujisawa has articulated a similar such vision, calling it a 'Ribbon Temple Net' (*ribbon-no-tera-net*), which connects like ribbon a group of affiliated 'refuge temples' (*kakekomidera*) offering care and counseling. In fact, Rev. Shinohara has already begun such a network in 2009 called the *Ka'ze* Suicide Prevention Network,<sup>29</sup> and we have also seen that Tera Net EN has developed such a network for youth issues.

### *Conclusion*

The advance of modernization—principally the giving way of mythical, religious worldviews to secular, scientific ones and the shift from rural communities based on reciprocal, intimate, and hierarchical human relationships to urban communities based on individualistic, diffuse, and horizontal relationships—has been perhaps the greatest challenge ever faced by the world's great religious traditions. Socially engaged Buddhism is a concept to express some of the common ways that Buddhism has sought to respond to modernization through the reform of its own traditions and institutions and through developing new ways of being a part of society. Japanese Buddhism, as we have seen, has certainly attempted to respond to modernization in a variety of ways. However, the vast majority of traditional priests, temples, and denominations have yet to develop a substantive response to modernization's challenges. For the most part, their responses have been reactionary, supporting the prevalent social attitudes of both the pre-war and post-war periods in an attempt to hold on to their slowly deteriorating social status.

In this way, certain critics, like Sulak Sivaraksa, the leading founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), feel that Japan has lacked a full-fledged socially engaged Buddhist movement. At a public symposium held at the Jōdo Shin Tsukiji Hongan-ji Temple in Tokyo in June, 2010, Sivaraksa stated that most Buddhist organizations in the world are afraid to get involved in social change and that Buddhist organizations from affluent East Asian countries, especially Japan, have often gotten involved in social welfare but rarely in social change. The difference between social welfare work, which remedies the symptoms of social

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.soudannet-kaze.jp/>.

injustice, and social change work, which gets at the structural roots of such injustice, is the key point in distinguishing the more radical, socially engaged Buddhist movements of South and Southeast Asia from the more conservative ones of East Asia.

The recent trends in Japanese Buddhism over the last decade, however, show a more complex interplay of these two modes of engagement. As we noted, since the mid 1990s, Japanese Buddhists have increasingly shifted their social welfare activities from international crises to the growing number of domestic ones afflicting Japanese society. These domestic social welfare activities, such as supporting the homeless, the dying, and the suicidal, are slowly leading to a deeper understanding and critique of the problems of Japanese society by these engaged Buddhists, which seem to be heading towards a more comprehensive engagement that addresses the deeper causes of these social problems.

An important aspect of a deeper engagement would be the impact such activities have on wider society. For Japanese Buddhism, a major step towards emerging from its inwardness and social marginalization would be to work cooperatively on these pressing social issues with government and civil society groups, who have been reticent to work with religious groups. In 2010, an important such initiative was begun by the Jōdo Shin Nishi Hogan-ji branch in establishing the Kyoto Suicide Prevention Center (Kyōto Jisatsu Bōshi Senta 京都自殺防止センター) in collaboration with the Kyoto city government. The Association of Religiously Affiliated Research Institutes (Kyōdan Fuchi Kenkyūjo Konwa-kai 教団付置研究所懇話会) has added their backing to this endeavor making it now a cooperative inter-religious endeavor. This is the type of model—in which Buddhist individuals and organizations create cooperative networks with other religions and secular groups to work for the greater good of society as opposed to the benefit and growth of their own institutions—that shows the importance of socially engaged Buddhism in Japan as a means to both reinvigorate Japanese society and Japanese Buddhism itself.

Japanese Buddhist denominations are still fundamentally reactive in their stance towards larger society. In the same way that they followed the social trends of the Meiji and pre-war eras in order to prove the worth of their continued existence to society, today they are showing a sudden interest in social engagement and public benefit activities. This is a direct response to the looming threat of losing their tax exempt status as 'public welfare corporations' (*kōeki hōjin* 公益法人) through a new, government reform movement. However, in the specific case of the suicide issue, we have seen the influence and potency of a group of



individual priests who work at the grassroots level coming together to exert a true influence on both their own denominations and society at large. The coming decade will be critical in terms of deciding whether this nascent engaged Buddhist movement will have substantial meaning for the general Japanese Buddhist world and for Japanese society at large.

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## BUDDHIST ENVIRONMENTALISM IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN\*

DUNCAN RYŪKEN WILLIAMS

*To the Honorable Mitsui Real Estate Company:  
Plants and Trees Have Buddha Nature*

Riding Tokyo's Den'entoshi Subway Line due west, one emerges from the underground section of the train line just before Futako Tamagawaen Station. Before reaching the station's platform, one can see a large temple on the hill to the left side. During the mid-1990s, for a period of several years, one would have also noticed a series of massive signboards along the temple hillside which collectively read "*Mitsui fudōsan dono, sōmoku busshō ari* 三井不動産殿草木仏性あり" (To the Honorable Mitsui Real Estate Company: Plants and Trees Have Buddha Nature).<sup>1</sup>

This prominently displayed message to one of Japan's largest real estate conglomerates had been put up by Shunnō Watanabe, the chief priest of Gyōzenji 行善寺 Temple. This Jōdo sect temple had been established in the 1560s on this hilltop in Tokyo's Setagaya Ward and in the centuries that followed became well known for its view of the plains below. The priest had launched a campaign against the construction by Mitsui Real Estate Company of a massive apartment complex right next to the temple that would not only obstruct the view from the temple, but would involve the clear-cutting of 130 of 180 ancient trees.

Watanabe rallied not only his temple members, but over the course of several years, organized a major petition drive (eventually collecting over 12,000 signatures submitted to the Ward Office) opposing the destruction of one of Tokyo's few remaining wooded sanctuaries. Employing the slogan, "Plants and Trees Have Buddha Nature," the Buddhist priest appealed to the conscience of the residents in the Ward (serving as the new head of the Seta no Kankyō Mamoru Kai 世田の環境守る会 or the Association

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the discussion of the Gyōzenji Temple case comes from an interview with its abbot, Shunnō Watanabe (Gyōzenji Temple, Tokyo, 26 June 2003).

to Protect Seta's Environment), the Ward officials, and Mitsui Real Estate Company. Declaring that his group was "not anti-construction, but simply for the preservation of trees," the campaign successfully pressured the company to build the apartment complex with minimal environmental impact.

Today, most of the ancient trees next to Gyōzenji Temple still stand and the view from the temple over the region is still panoramic. This case highlights the increasing role of Buddhist priests, temples, and lay associations in environmental activism in Japan, which had historically been associated with local citizens groups and environmental organizations that came out of the left and labor movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Buddhist temples have often served as stewards for much of the natural landscape of Japan since the early medieval period. But explicitly linking Buddhist doctrine with environmental protection is relatively recent. Historically the consumer rights movement and other environmental activism in Japan has been driven by local citizens groups and environmental organizations that were born from the left and labor movements of the 1960s. However, beginning in the late 1970s, a number of Buddhist priests, temples, and lay associations dropped their traditional resistance to what had been perceived as a leftist cause, developing new forms of Buddhist environmentalism that resonated with a more conservative worldview. For example, in the 1980s Shōei Sugawara, a forward-thinking abbot of the Sōtō Zen Senryūji 泉龍寺 Temple in Komae, proposed to his parishioners a way to make the temple more ecological.<sup>2</sup> As the abbot of the Sōtō Zen Senryūji Temple in Komae, Sugawara was appalled to learn of a major development project right next to his temple that would destroy the forest that his temple had protected for over 400 years. With a keen sense of responsibility as the caretaker of this forest, which was partly on temple land and partly on private land, he was determined that the successive prior abbots of Senryūji Temple who had guarded the forest as a sanctuary would give him strength and guidance so that it would not be destroyed during his tenure as abbot.

During 1981–82, he was one of the leaders in a citizen's movement to promote a vision of the town's future development that would be more 'green' (*midori no machizukuri* 緑の町作り). The group collected the

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<sup>2</sup> The discussion of the Senryūji Temple case comes from an interview with its abbot, Shōei Sugawara (Senryūji Temple, Komae, 8 August 2003). The maintenance of nature preserve today is jointly conducted by Komae City and a volunteer citizen's group.

signatures of nearly 10% of the entire town's populace (7,800 signatures) on a petition demanding a halt to the project. Their efforts won widespread support—of the most left-wing activists to the most conservative town assembly members—by appealing to both the local citizen's groups and those concerned about preserving the traditional landscape of the Senryūji Temple. Not only was the development severely restricted, the 20,000 hectare forest and temple grounds were designated a nature preserve (*ryokuchi hozen chiku* 緑地保全地区) by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, which bought the section of the forest which had been privately owned. Today, this nature preserve is open to the public only once a month to minimize human impact (unlike a park designation, a nature preserve under Japanese law is much more highly regulated). Roughly 100–300 people visit the preserve on those days to enjoy nature and educate themselves about the forest ecological system (though the August open preserve day draws many more people given that it has been arranged to coincide with the temple's famous O-Segaki Festival, the "Hungry Ghost Festival").

Once environmental awareness at Senryūji was raised in the 1980 campaign, the abbot followed up with a proposal to make the temple more ecological. Since one of the main characteristics of a Japanese Buddhist temple is the large roof on the main hall (*hondō* 本堂) containing the primary image of worship (*honzon* 本尊), Sugawara thought that if that broad space was used for solar paneling, most temples should be energy self-sufficient. He explains that even though Buddhism has traditionally advocated friendly relations between humans and nature, the modern world has disrupted this relationship. His idea for solar 'temple', using an energy friendly to both nature and humans, took many years before it would be actualized. In the year 2000, his advocacy of solar temples among those in his sect culminated in regional meetings of 400 Sōtō Zen temples in western Tokyo. The gathering had, as its plenary speaker, Kōichi Yasuda (abbot of Eisenji 永泉寺 Temple), who spoke on the practical steps to install solar paneling at Buddhist temples.

When Senryūji Temple finally installed the solar panels on top of the abbot's quarters, it produced more than enough energy for the electrical needs of the entire temple complex. The excess energy was sold to Tokyo Electric Power Company at its daytime peak rate, while the temple bought back energy when necessary (cloudy days and nights) at the cheaper off-peak rates. This arrangement proved to be beneficial to the environment (no pollution), the temple (cheaper energy costs), and the power company (which was in power deficit during the peak hours which is precisely

when solar energy produces most energy). Today, the temple is working with an architectural firm, Taisei Kensetsu 大成建設, to develop solar roof tiles made in the traditional Japanese Buddhist temple style. This is because many abbots who suggest placing solar paneling on temple roofs face strong resistance from parishioners who prefer the traditional architecture of their temple. With nearly 15,000 temples affiliated to his sect, Sugawara sees the solution to this problem as the key to a majority of Buddhist temples, not only of his sect, adopting solar energy in the future.

These two success stories of Buddhist priests spearheading a local environmental initiative represent a small portion of the many individuals who understand their commitment to Buddhism and the traditions of temple life as requiring engagement in environmental issues. This chapter will provide an overview of this type of 'Buddhist environmentalism' in Japan and offer some preliminary ideas on how the Japanese case can be understood primarily as a 'conservative conservationism'.

*Establishment Buddhism and Sect-Wide Environmentalism:  
The Case of the Sōtō Zen 'Green Plan'*

While the energy advocacy of Sugawara stemmed from his personal interests, they were not out of line with the denomination to which he belongs. Since 1995, Sōtō Zen has maintained a nationwide campaign for the environment, taking up key issues of energy use and consumer waste. The earliest of Japanese Buddhist denominations to promote environmentalism throughout the organization, they developed and promoted a comprehensive 'Green Plan' to the more than 15,000 temples of Sōtō Zen Buddhism.

The 'Green Plan' has been part of the official Sōtō Zen strategy to engage pressing contemporary issues under the slogan "*Heiwa* 平和, *Jinken* 人權, *Kankyō* 環境" (Peace, Human Rights, and the Environment). Through pamphlets, books, and symposia, the sect has encouraged both individual priests and temples and sect organizations (such as regional districts, women and youth associations), to take up the environmental cause as a part of one's affiliation with the Sōtō Zen sect. The promotional materials emphasize the teachings of Dōgen and Keizan that promote sensitivity to the natural world (such as Dōgen's view that grasses, trees, and forests are manifestations of Buddha-nature). They also point to conservation measures (such as monastic rules on not wasting water and

food).<sup>3</sup> In one pamphlet, the 1998 *Green Plan: Kōdō no tame no Q&A* 行動のためのQ&A (The “Green Plan”: Q&A for Action) the question is asked, “Why does a Buddhist sect like Sōtōshū get involved with environmental issues?” In response, the official doctrine highlights eco-friendly teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, Dōgen, and Keizan that encourage increasing wisdom and decreasing desire (e.g. Keizan’s ‘heijōshin 平常心’ or ‘mind of equanimity’).

The Plan also draws on teachings from the traditional lay-oriented manual, the *Shushōgi* 修証義.<sup>4</sup> Mimicking the traditional five line verse (*gokun* 五薰) used by monasteries before a meal, the sect advocates the following verses for reflecting on the environment:

(*Green Plan gokun*):

Save the Earth! Five Verses to Living the Green Plan in Everyday Life

- 1) Let’s Protect the Green Earth. The Great Earth is the Home of All Life.
- 2) Let’s Use Water Sparingly. Water is the Source for All Life.
- 3) Let’s Limit Our Use of Heat. Heat is What Propels All Life.
- 4) Let’s Maintain Clean Air. Clean Air is the Open Space for All Life.
- 5) Let’s Live in Harmony with Nature. Nature is the Buddha in Form.<sup>5</sup>

The pragmatic character of these verses reflects a general tendency of the Green Plan to focus on everyday acts at the individual or temple level, rather than doctrinal justification for its advocacy of green thinking. Green Plan pamphlets for member households and temples include items such as checklists to monitor the use of TV and other electrical appliances. To meet a goal set by Sōtō administrators of reducing energy use among all member households, by 1% Sōtōshū is distributing information on purchasing ‘eco-products’, warnings on genetically-modified foods, and detailed guides on how to properly separate recycling from general garbage (see Kyara 2001b). As a sign of the times, the denomination manufactured and distributed to parishioner households over 1,500,000 cell phone straps with the slogan “Sōtō Zen Buddhism, Green is Life.”<sup>6</sup>

To chart progress on these initiatives, the denomination established a fund, the Sōtōshū Green Plan Kikin 基金, to raise money for nonprofit environmental groups in Japan. To measure carbon emissions output,

<sup>3</sup> The pamphlet *“Jinken, heiwa, kankyō ‘Green Plan’” no susume* (Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 1996) highlights Dōgen’s appreciation of nature.

<sup>4</sup> See Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 1998: Questions 3–4, 6–14, 30.

<sup>5</sup> These verses can be found on most pamphlets, including Sōtōshū Shūmuchō n.d.

<sup>6</sup> See Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 1998: Questions 15–30.

headquarters distributed a chart to calculate the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> each household produces per year. For each activity such as washing dishes, car idling, bath use, and aluminum can recycling, the member household is encouraged to calculate the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced and to donate the equivalent savings to the fund (e.g. 10.2 kgC of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced is equal to Yen 2,010). Based on the Buddhist teachings of using less (*chisoku* 知足) and donating (*fuse* 布施), the fund has been a way to link Buddhist practice, environmental awareness and action, and fund-raising. By focusing on carbon emissions reductions, the Sōtō Zen Green Plan supports the goals of the Kyoto Protocol, addressing consumption concerns in a global warming context.

Individual temples have also been sites of Buddhist environmental practice. At a 1997 Green Plan symposium attended by 1,600 people in Ōmiya City (Saitama Prefecture), one participant stated that, “The temple should be a ‘*kakekomidera* 駆け込み寺’ for environmental problems” (Hayafune 2000: 18). From the medieval period, a *kakekomidera* (‘a temple to run away to’) was a temple where women seeking a refuge from their husbands ran away to seek a divorce. However powerful the husband might have been in the secular world, the temple served as a sanctuary for desperate women seeking refuge. The speaker at the symposium might have meant that the Buddhist temple was the last refuge for the environment in a time of crisis.

Whether it be the establishment of a green corridor and biotope at Kōzen’in 興禅院 Temple (Kawaguchi City, Saitama Prefecture), collaboration with forest ecologists in the large-scale reforestation campaign at the head temple Sōjiji (Yokohama City) as part of the ‘Sennen no mori 千年の森’ (the 1000-Year Forest), or the installation of a nationwide acid rain monitoring system at 650 Sōtō Zen temples, the Buddhist temple as a site for environmental practice has become increasingly accepted.<sup>7</sup> As the abbot of Kōzen’in Temple, Hayafune Genpō, has suggested: “A temple is not only a sanctuary for future human life, but for all living beings” (Hayafune 2000: 17).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The figures on the cell phone straps and the temples involved in the acid rain monitoring project comes from an interview with Rev. Shungen Itō of the Green Plan section at the Sōtō Zen Headquarters, Tokyo (28 July 2003). The acid rain project measures the average ph. level of the rain in 9 regions of Japan as a basis for future work on bettering water quality (see Kyara 1998).

<sup>8</sup> The biotope at Kōzen’in, ‘*Kōzen’in furusato no mori*’ (the Kōzen’in Temple Hometown Forest), is an experiment to maintain a mixed species forested area on temple grounds, which include not only foxes and owls, but reminders of the Buddhist character of the



In the case of Sôtō Zen, while individual households and temples have made efforts to implement the Green Plan, probably the most active group in promoting the campaign has been the so-called Fujinkai (women's associations) that are organized at most temple and in various districts across Japan. Over a hundred districts have been involved in 'street campaigns' promoting the Green Plan in front of schools and shopping areas, riverside trash clean-ups, promoting the use of kenaf and other eco-friendly products for housewives, and tree-planting projects.<sup>9</sup>

*Japanese Engaged Buddhism and the Search for an Alternative Paradigm:  
The Case of Jukōin 寿光院 Temple*

In contrast to activities of established Buddhist organizations, a number of individual priests and their temples have developed alternatives outside the sectarian establishment and the mainstream economic system. A good example is Ōkōchi Hideto, a Jōdo priest, and a leading figure in the Japanese 'engaged Buddhism' movement. As abbot of Jukōin Temple, founded in 1617 with a current parish membership of 250 families, he could easily have settled for the life of a typical parish priest performing funerary rites and organizing annual services around the temple calendar.<sup>10</sup> But over the years, he has served in all kinds of social and environmental justice movements including the JVC (Japan Volunteer Center), Kokusai Kodomo Kenri Senta 国際子ども権利センタ (JICRC, a children's rights group), AYUS (Bukkyō Kokusai Kyōryoku Nettowaku 仏教国際協力ネットワーク), and has authored a number of books on small-scale

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project (stone Buddha and bodhisattva statues and a monument memorializing the life of plants and trees (a 'sōmoku kuyōtō 草木供養塔')). The temple has also collaborated with ecologists to maintain ecological balance of the two ponds in the forested area: the Benten Ike (the Pond of Benten) and Tombo Ike (Dragonfly Pond).

The abbot's inspiration for maintaining a pond where dragonfly and butterfly can flourish came from the abbot of the Jōdo sect temple, Tokushōji 徳正寺 (Ashigara City, Tochigi Prefecture), whose was the head of the Association Against the Use of Aerial Pesticide Spraying to Prevent the Outbreak of Insects that Eat Ashigara's Pine Trees, a local environmental group.

<sup>9</sup> For the role of the women's associations in the Green Plan, see Kyara 1999, 2000, 2001a. The riverside cleanup campaigns in Shizuoka Prefecture were organized by the women's association of Chōrenji Temple. Nomadera Temple in Ehime Prefecture also started a 'recycle shop' selling second-hand products. Honkōji Temple in Saga Prefecture sponsored workshops on how to use kenaf products for the kitchen and shopping bags.

<sup>10</sup> The biographical data on Ōkōchi comes from an article he wrote (see Ōkōchi 1998), as well as from interviews I conducted with him in July and August 2003 at Jukōin Temple.

development. Though some of the groups are Buddhist-inspired, many are secular, non-governmental organizations working on social welfare issues in Japan and around the world.

The key to Rev. Ōkōchi's engaged Buddhism is his interpretation of the Buddhist teaching of 'suffering'. Over the years, he has made numerous trips to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. From the effects of warfare in Rwanda and Palestine to genocide in Cambodia, coming into contact with the palpable suffering of people encouraged Ōkōchi to reflect on the relative comfort of Japanese Buddhists. For him, Buddhism is based on feeling the teaching of suffering not as an abstract concept, but as something in one's guts. In war-torn countries and poverty-stricken regions, Ōkōchi experienced the type of conditions that inspired Hōnen, founder of the Jōdo sect, to develop a Buddhist approach to suffering for the common people. At the same time Hōnen was responding to the severe socioeconomic conditions of medieval Japan which left many people starving and impoverished.

Working with suffering, Ōkōchi draws on Buddhist teachings such as the Four Noble Truths for inspiration. In an essay explaining his involvement with a local environmental group, he states:

When Shakyamuni Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) gained enlightenment, his first teaching was the Four Noble Truths, that is, first, get a solid grasp of suffering (the problem), second, ascertain its causes and structure, third, form an image of the world to be aimed for, and fourth, act according to correct practices. Then, one gains a sense of the meaning of life in modern society as a citizen with responsibilities in the irreversible course of time. The suffering of the southern peoples and nature, from which we derive support for our lives even as we exploit it, has caused the Edogawa Citizens Network for Thinking about Global Warming to think, and therefore we have achieved concrete results. The problem is structural in nature, so by changing the system and creating measures for improvement, we achieve results. (Ōkōchi n.d.: 2)

Ōkōchi interprets suffering as existing not only on a personal level, but at a deep structural level in the modern socioeconomic system. This brings him in line with the analysis of many engaged Buddhists such as Sulak Sivaraksa or A.T. Ariyaratne. For Ōkōchi, Buddhism is not simply a religion for transforming oneself, but a religion for transforming society. In the same essay noted above he writes, "the 'awakening' sought by the Buddha was an awakening to the entire universe. The Buddha is someone who lives responsibly based on this self-awareness of the universe, that is, as a 'citizen' of the world." Ōkōchi combines this emphasis on a "return to the

original teachings of the Buddha” with Pure Land Buddhist rhetoric about making *this* world the Pure Land. Many in the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin traditions interpret Amida’s Pure Land to be a heavenly land where believers transfer after death. In contrast, Ōkōchi believes that heavens and hells are manifest in this world, and that it is the locus for the development of the Pure Land. This notion is, of course, not original, but it is nevertheless a minority tradition within the Pure Land denominations.

Another well-known advocate of this Pure Land approach is Aoki Keisuke, Jōdo Shin priest and abbot of a temple in Himeji. Aoki, was one of the first Buddhist priests to get involved in environmental issues after the war.<sup>11</sup> He has long advocated a Pure Land Buddhist theology in which hell (*jigoku* 地獄) can be found in the human mind and in a society based on competition and oppression, while the Pure Land (*jōdo* 浄土) can be found where the interconnectedness of life is celebrated and filled with infinite light (*muryō kōmyō do* 無量光明土). In his 1997 book, *Edo to kokoro: Kankyō hakai kara jōdo e* 穢土と心—環境破壊から浄土へ (The Impure Land and One’s Mind: From Environmental Destruction to the Creation of a Pure Land), he emphasizes human responsibility in “the destruction of the earth, which is the creation of hell.”<sup>12</sup> Well-known locally for protecting the sea from overdevelopment, he has energetically campaigned for many years against oil refineries and other industrial production that caused the ‘red-lake phenomenon’ in Harima Bay, ruining the local fishing industry. According to his theology, this hell, which he describes more globally as a “shadow of a society centered on money,” can be replaced by an “ecology of the Pure Land” where the Buddha, enlightenment, infinite light, and compassion permeate this world (Aoki 1997: 146, 229).

In his environmental work, Ōkōchi linked this concept of building a Pure Land on earth, with his critique of structural inequalities. As an increasing number of Japanese became aware of global warming issues through the 1997 Kyoto conference (officially, the Third Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change or COP3), Ōkōchi was mobilizing citizens in his locality in Tokyo. He helped establish the Edogawa Citizens Network for Thinking about Global Warming (an offshoot of an earlier organization, Group KIKI, which was dedicated to alternatives to nuclear power, garbage recycling, and

<sup>11</sup> On Aoki’s work protecting the Harima Bay, see Aoki 1997: 59, 73.

<sup>12</sup> This can be found as a subsection of Chapter 2 of his book.

other energy and waste issues). After a study tour to Sarawak, Malaysia to document the destruction of the rainforest by Japanese multinationals, the group successfully pressured the local council to not use wood from tropical rain forests. In addition to small projects such as collecting aluminum cans, the Citizens Network raised funds for CFC-recovery equipment to donate to car demolition businesses in their local Edogawa Ward, a district responsible for 60% of CFC emissions in the 23 wards of Tokyo.

By far their most ambitious project was to establish an alternative energy power plant in the Ward to end their neighborhood's dependence on Japanese fossil-fuel and nuclear energy. In 1999, the Edogawa People's Power Plant No. 1 was constructed as a citizen's effort to withdraw from the energy companies and the financial institutions that funded them (and engaged in further environmentally destructive investments). The power plant was located on the roof of Jukōin Temple.

The temple name, consisting of the Chinese characters Ju 寿 (life) and Kō 光 (light), reflected the Jōdo tradition's teachings that existence is unlimited life and light of the Buddha. In his rationale for the power plant project, Ōkōchi proclaimed:

Human life as well as all life existing in nature is mutually interlinked and dependent on each other. This Buddhist concept aims at creating a global society of coexistence and co-prosperity. Jukō-in, in solidarity not only with Buddhists but also with other citizens, NGOs and various other groups, is dedicated to ecological development and human rights issues. (Ōkōchi n.d.: 1)

This dedication meant that the 400-year old temple faced a radical rebuilding in terms of temple architecture. After obtaining the understanding of his parishioners, the temple was completely modernized using eco-friendly concrete and wood building materials. The traditional roof tiles were replaced with two sets of fifteen large solar panels that would generate 6,000 kWh. This was enough to received official recognition from the local government as the first of several planned People's Power Plants in Edogawa Ward.

The funding for this project—6 million Yen—came from local environmental groups, individual donors, and loans from an independent bank that the group established—the Mirai Bank or the 'Bank of the Future'. Ōkōchi adapted a temple fund-raising strategy from the premodern period when donors bought roof tiles for a new temple's construction over and above the actual cost. He asked locals to buy solar panels as a gift to the temple power plant. The *taiyō kawara* 太陽 (sun tiles) were sold at Yen 5,000 per panel and the funds deposited in the new bank.

With the goal of supporting environmental sustainability, the model for the Mirai Bank was based on medieval and early modern Buddhist mutual aid societies (*kō*). Instead of giving their hard-earned money to the big national banks, which often use people's savings to fund environmentally-destructive construction projects, the Edogawa citizens chose to invest in building and protecting the future (*mirai* 未来). Inspired by micro credit banking in Third World countries, Mirai Bank not only criticized the existing capitalist system, but offered an alternative economic model for a new kind of sustainable society in Japan. In addition to funding the power plant, the bank embarked on a consumer campaign to encourage the purchase of eco-products. Because 60% energy in Japanese households is consumed via refrigerators, air conditioners, and lights, the bank decided to focus on environmentally-friendly refrigerators. Understanding that average families rarely take up new alternatives if they need to sacrifice comfort or pay exorbitant fees, the bank provided interest-free loans to buy environmentally-friendly refrigerators. These refrigerators could reduce energy consumption by 400 kWh per year (equivalent to Yen 9,000), thus a bank loan of Yen 50,000 could be paid off in 5 years.<sup>13</sup>

The solar power plant not only generated alternative energy, but it also generated new, small-scale economics. Excess energy beyond the temple's energy needs was sold to Tokyo Electric Power Co. at Yen 22/kWh with the income plowed back into paying off the initial investment. The Edogawa Citizens Network for Thinking about Global Warming decided to encourage local citizens to 'buy' this excess energy at a premium (using the green energy standard in Germany of Yen 55/kWh) with Green Power Certificates. By selling 200 certificates for Yen 1,000/30kWh, the power plant could return its initial investment in just nine years. To emphasize the involvement of the local community and to build a more mutually dependent society, each Green Power investor also receives Edogawatt bills, a local currency the size of a calling card that can be used to pay for babysitting, translation, and other services "deepening interpersonal relationships and trust" (Ōkōchi n.d.: 3). Since solar energy has the lowest maintenance costs associated with energy production (almost zero), the idea is that each People's Power Plant can be profitable within a decade, generating clean, zero-emissions energy, and building a more intimate society at a time when modern Japanese society has grown increasingly impersonal. As the power plant enters the consciousness of the local

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<sup>13</sup> Many of the details on the solar panel power plant project can be found in Ōkōchi 1999.

community and attracts media attention, the temple has continued efforts to link grassroots activism with community development. On the third year anniversary of the plant in October, 2002, the temple organized a community-wide workshop on how to implement a low-energy, low consumption life-style.

Ōkōchi's approach has been very practical and reflects his Jōdo denomination background in his belief that ordinary Japanese citizens can participate in this type of 'engaged Buddhism' without engaging in asceticism or sacrificing comfort. His ideal of 'engaged citizenship' or the spirit of volunteerism in society is active social reform:

A volunteer, according to Jukō-in thinking, is not a person who provides his/her cheap labor to fill in cracks left by the administration, or a person looking for his/her own satisfaction. Volunteers look for the true nature of the problems and promote movements oriented towards social reforms. . . . They should take the side of the weaker (the people) and not the strong side of the system. They begin by experiencing problems of suffering. Then, they move to reflect on the structures and the mechanisms concerning those issues. . . . those volunteers rich in work experiences with NGOs show us the face of the Buddha and famous Buddhist saints. (Ōkōchi n.d.: 2)

Thus, Ōkōchi aligns himself with ordinary citizens, disdaining what some might considered elitist asceticism. His approach differs from the Sōtō Zen establishment Buddhism because it is based in a critique of the current socio-political and capitalist system. With much of mainstream Buddhism aligned politically with the right-wing political conservatives and big business, Ōkōchi's leftist rhetoric of siding with the poor and oppressed offers an important, but marginal voice, in the contemporary Japanese Buddhist landscape.

*Conservative Japanese Buddhist Environmentalism in  
Local and Global Contexts*

In contrast to the type of progressive politics of Ōkōchi, mainstream Japanese Buddhist environmentalism is by and large conservative. While it is undoubtedly true that socially engaged Buddhism is generally characterized by forms of progressive politics, many Japanese Buddhists involved with environmental issues come out of a strain of conservatism that celebrates local tradition and involves Japanese nationalism on the international stage.

A good example of an environmentalism based on the rhetoric of 'conservation' is that of Shinchō Tanaka, the Shingon sect abbot of Shimyōin

志明院 Temple in Kyoto. Born in 1940, Tanaka became the abbot of the ancient Shimyōin Temple in 1967 after training at headquarter temple of Koyasan. Located in the Kumogahata district of Kyoto at the very source of the Kamo River which runs through the old capital, the temple has served as the protector of this important watershed since the medieval period. Taking pride in the temple's role of the centuries, the temple abbot has viewed it as a calling to help maintain the cleanliness of the water source and protect a site which in times past was considered a sacred zone in which only the initiated and purified mountain ascetics could enter. Indeed, over the years, Tanaka himself notes that many Kyotoites would say that "the abbot of Shimyōin is picky" because of his strict rules about banning visitors from eating and drinking or bringing in bags of any kind into the temple area. He says he did this to correct the bad manners of visitors and tourists, whose numbers probably went down because of the rules, to keep the watershed pure and free of trash as "the river is born from the mountain" (Tanaka 1992: 21–22).

The environmental activism of this priest began in the spring of 1988 when a proposal was made to build a major dam on the Kamo River between Kamigamo (the Lower Kamo) Shrine and Shimyōin Temple. Knowing that both the river that defined the character of Kyoto and the mountain on which his temple stood would be destroyed, he became determined to fight the dam project. It was a noble thought, but in the postwar history of dam building in Japan, once a decision to build a dam was made, even with protests and petitions, not a single project had been halted previously (see *ibid.*: 38). In this seemingly impossible task, Tanaka put his faith in the protective deity of Shimyōin Temple, Fudō Myōō 不動明王 (the Immovable One), a deity in the esoteric Buddhist pantheon. Drawing on the esoteric Buddhist tradition's emphasis on the nonduality of body and mind, form and formlessness, Tanaka (1992: 152) claims that "unlike other sects which focus on the other world, esoteric Buddhism focuses on this world" which is composed of the six elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, and mind) that manifests the enduring truth of Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 (the cosmic Buddha). With esoteric Buddhism as his philosophical ground and Fudō Myōō as his protective deity, Tanaka decided that "the anti-dam movement would start from our mountain temple" (*ibid.*: 38).

In his 1992 book, *Damu to oshō: Tekkaisareta Kamogawa damu ダムと和尚—撤回された加茂川ダム* (The Dam and the Buddhist Priest: The Abandonment of the Project to Construct the Kamo River Dam), Tanaka chronicles the meetings and development of the anti-dam movement

which began as a small group in January 1989 holding its first meeting at the temple. The group, with Tanaka as its spokesperson, began attracting supporters among civic groups, artists, and scholars, raising enough money to hire a consultant company to assess environmental damage. Raising its profile through such events as sponsoring anti-dam classical music concerts in the mountain temple or large demonstrations in Kyoto City, the movement drew the attention of local, national (including the NHK), and even international media (an August 16, 1989, article on the movement appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*). By June 1989, the movement had joined forces with 10 other groups concerned with protecting Kyoto's water and greenery and began to exert political pressure on the governor and assembly. With opposition to the dam across the political spectrum, the campaign to 'conserve' traditional Kyoto (its temples, the Kamo River, and greenery) managed to stop the project and become the first of several major campaigns to block the damming of Japanese rivers.

The appeal to tradition and conserving the old ways proved effective for this local campaign that needed the support of conservative politicians. Conservatism of another strain marks the Buddhist environmentalism of Seiei Tohyama. Born in 1906 into a Jōdo Shinshū temple, Daishōji 大正寺 (Fuji Yoshida City, Yamanashi Prefecture), Tohyama and his son, Masao, are well-known around the world among environmentalists working on desertification.

The Tohyamas trained as agriculturalists focusing on recovering desert regions for productive agriculture. Seiei began his work in Japan with the Tottori Sakyū 鳥取砂丘 Project, experimenting with various trees and plants to make desert conditions blossom. With nearly 60,000 square kilometers worldwide lost to desert expansion every year, the Tohyamas believe that there is an "important link between greening of the world's deserts and world peace" given the increasing number of global conflicts over water (Tohyama and Tohyama 1995: 14). Going global with their techniques, Tohyama looked at the massive desertification in China and decided to focus his efforts there. In 1979, he joined the Western China Scientific Inquiry Tour for an inspection of Chinese deserts. Describing why he focused his attention not on Japan, but on China, he states:

Sino-Japanese relations are said to go back two thousand years. In ages past the Japanese were avid students of Chinese culture. The Chinese priest Jianzhen (688–763, 'Ganjin' in Japanese) took a set of Buddhist precepts to Japan, living out the rest of his days in Nara. Even during the centuries of Japan's self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world, its government made special efforts to acquire classical Chinese texts. Then there were the



tragic years of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–45. China received nothing in reparation for Japan's invasion. As a Japanese and a devout Buddhist (born and raised in a Pure Land sect temple), I feel deeply aware of Japan's debts to China. My efforts to contribute to the development of China's deserts is just a small gesture of gratitude, one person's endeavor to make amends. (Tohyama and Tohyama 1995: 121)

Here, we can see Buddhist motivations to Tohyama's work. Several years later, with the support from China-Japan Friendship Association, the Academy of Sciences of China, and Chinese government, Tohyama began his project of greening the world's deserts at the Shapotou 沙坡頭區 Experimental Station in the Tengger Desert using kudzu (the fastest growing vine in Asia) to hold the ground together.<sup>14</sup> Not knowing if the techniques he developed in Japan would work in China, he began the

project with a simple purification rite, scattering grains of rice that had been part of an offering to the image of Jianzhen at Yakushi-ji 薬師寺 Temple in Nara, Japan. We prayed that the spirit of Jianzhen, the virtuous eight-century Chinese high priest, would bless the model vineyard at Shapotou. (Tohyama and Tohyama 1995: 144)

The Shapotou project was a great success and by 1986, he was invited to begin the Lanzhou Desert Research Facility. This project required massive numbers of kudzu seeds which only matured in the fall when a flat pod would contain two or three seeds. Thus, he approached Nikkyō Niwano, the founder of the lay Buddhist organization Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, who remembered nostalgically his mother weaving kudzu cloth and helped to fund Tohyama's project (Tohyama and Tohyama 1995: 121). Mobilizing the Risshō Kōseikai Young People's Groups in autumn 1986, by February 1987, 200,000 Risshō Kōseikai members collected 550 kilograms of kudzu seeds for the project. This project to green the desert along the Yellow River was a major success and attracted great media attention. Tohyama (ibid.: 145) reflects, "my kudzu idea and our meeting [with Niwano] might have been part of the Buddha's plan."

These beginnings led to Tohyama's volunteers planting of over 1 million poplars (to promote a local Chinese species) and willows in Mu Us Desert in Inner Mongolia and over 2.4 million poplars in the Kubuqi Desert (also in Inner Mongolia) during the 1990s. The hard work of volunteers and a 10 million Yen donation from Risshō Kōseikai Fund for Peace helped to actualize these projects. Success brought with it increased media

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<sup>14</sup> Kudzu root is a tuber (1 meter long, 20 centimeters thick) used for viticulture.

attention and Tohyama began to talk of these greening projects in terms of the slogan, “*Sekai no sabaku ni Amida no mori o tsukurō* 世界の砂漠に阿弥陀の森を作ろう” (Let’s Create Forests of Amida Buddha in the World’s Deserts). As a Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist, he believed that these forests could serve as manifestations of Amida Buddha’s vow to save sentient beings in all ten directions (*jippō shujō* 十方衆生). Inspired by a Jōdo Shinshū temple, Kyōsenji (Hiroshima Prefecture), which had come up with the term ‘*Amida no mori* 阿弥陀の森’ (Forests of Amida Buddha), Tohyama drew on the tradition discussed above of Pure Land Buddhists attempting to ‘building the Pure Land’ on earth (see Tohyama n.d.). The initial staff of seven volunteers developed into a large movement which raised over 52 million Yen during a fund-raising campaign between September 1997 and May 2000 (used to buy 440,000 poplars trees). The effort, began in China as an attempt to repay China for transmitting Buddhism to Japan as well as for Japan’s aggression during World War II, has gone global with Tohyama’s group involved in ‘greening the desert’ projects in Iran, Mexico, and Egypt.

Although the Tohyama project is couched in terms of creating ‘world peace’ through these environmental efforts, we should also note that he is an ardent nationalist who joined the Japanese military in 1928, believing in the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (which he has said he still believes in because Ōtani Kōzui, the leader of the Jōdo Shinshū Honganji tradition, promoted it during the war). He continues to support this notion in terms of the twenty-first century as an ‘Asian century’ led by Japan, and upsetting some observers with his denial of the Nanking massacre and his advocacy of the Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社 (which enshrined the spirits of the Japanese war dead, included a number of war criminals) (see Tohyama n.d.).

Without delving into the details of the politics of the Tohyama case, what is of interest here is the preponderance of politically conservative Buddhist environmentalists. While engaged Buddhism, particularly in the West, tends to draw from the progressive end of the political spectrum (as with convert Buddhists in general), Japanese engaged Buddhism is far more complex. The leading Buddhist economist in the postwar period, Shinichi Inoue, is another case in point.<sup>15</sup> Although his work on developing “a Buddhist economics to save the earth”—the title of one of his books—can be understood as part of a Schumachian tradition of a ‘small is beautiful’ economics and a critique of American economics, Inoue was

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<sup>15</sup> For Inoue’s work in English, see Inoue 1997 and 1999.

a well-known nationalist and former member of the *kamikaze* 神風 corps during world war two. As a leading banker (Bank of Japan and Miyazaki Bank) and board member of several major lay Buddhist organizations, he had deep connections to powerful members of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (he was a cousin of former Prime Minister and Finance Minister Miyazawa Kiichi). His model for a uniquely Japanese form of capitalism—to be a counterbalance to what he thought was an immoral American model (he had respect for the German model and Tony Blair’s British model)—was an attempt to recast capitalism in a kinder, gentler Japanese mode based on the morality of Buddhism. Rather than developing a new theory of economics, Inoue was a firm believer in capitalism and a critic of leftist movements like labor unions. Inoue and Tohyama both have had extensive influence in the Japanese political world either through the media or personal connections. They represent an important strand of Buddhist conservatism that is truly conservative.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, let me bring up the case of Rinnōji 輪王寺 Temple (a Sōtō Zen temple in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture), whose abbot has been active in volunteer efforts such as a Thai AIDS hospice and earthquake relief for victims in Turkey and Taiwan, setting an example with its recycling and environmental education programs.<sup>16</sup> Using the idea that the Buddhist spirit of attention to small things and ‘not wasting’ starts at home, the temple looked to its own practices leading to waste and over-use of natural resources.

As a typical, though large, parish temple, the primary activity of the temple was not Zen meditation but the performance of funerary and memorial services for its parishioners. These services take place at death and in subsequent intervals over a period of thirty-three years. In addition, parishioners would visit the temple, with flowers and other offerings for the deceased, during the annual summer ancestral festival of *obon* お盆. At this season, the spirits of the deceased are thought to return to the temple graveyard or to the memorial tablet (*ihai* 位牌) normally kept in the family altar (*butsudan* 仏壇). The abbot noticed that an enormous number of flowers were being donated at the temple graveyard—

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<sup>16</sup> On the Rinnōji case, see Rinnōji 2003, and their website <http://www.rinno-ji.or.jp>.

nearly 5,000 flower bundles during the *obon* season alone—and then were simply discarded into the landfill. The temple conceived of a plan to take these flowers and develop a high quality composting system, the fertilizer from which would be donated to local farmers. By 2000, the temple had expanded this recycling project to include the composting of leftover temple food. They also recycled into charcoal the bamboo offering stands used at gravesites. Once every two months and more frequently during the *obon* season, the monks of the temple undertake the process of making organic fertilizer for the farmers.

Environmental education has also become a big part of the temple's activities since 2001. Each year the priests offer a presentation on recycling to the local middle school students using the temple recycling system as a model. In 2003, the temple produced a home video for its parishioners entitled *Kankyō no tame ni* 環境のために (For the Sake of the Environment) that gave instructions on home composting and how to 'not waste' water used to clean rice. The video targets housewives, who are most responsible for cooking rice and monitoring recycling at home. By working with housewives and young teens the temple reinforced the message that environmental education must begin early and at home.

The Rinnōji example illustrates anti-waste activism that functions within the traditional boundaries of what some have termed "funerary Buddhism based on the parish system."<sup>17</sup> This system, which characterizes mainstream Buddhism in contemporary Japan, tends to emphasize the continuity of tradition and customary/formalistic relationships between parishioners. The fees paid for funerary and memorial services constitute the vast majority of a temple's income. For the most part, any Buddhist consumer or environmental activities in Japan have had to operate within this system which has been the mainstay of Japanese Buddhism since the beginning of the Tokugawa period (1600–1868). Thus, rather than an environmentalism that would be a radical departure from social and political norms, the Buddhist institution in Japan represents a conservative bastion from which it is not easy to move forward on environmental issues.

For example, several years ago, the Japanese Sōtō Zen environmental division produced a CD of songs encouraging denominational members to avoid disposable chopsticks. The message was to carry around 'my *ohashi* お箸' (chopsticks) as a way to save forests. Upset by this anti-consumerist

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<sup>17</sup> See Tamamuro Taijō's classic work on *sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教 or 'funerary Buddhism' (Tamamuro 1963).

message, the national chopstick manufacturer's association pressured Sōtō Zen headquarters to block the CD release and the project came to a halt. In Japan, when competing interests of labor/industry and environment come to a head, Buddhist organizations almost always side with industry. Institutional Buddhism in Japan not only tends to support the establishment, but it is perhaps the most conservative pillar in contemporary Japanese society. The result has been that despite the exception of the Sōtō Zen Green Plan, most Buddhist environmentalism in Japan has had to remain small-scale, localized, conservative, and organized primarily on the initiative of an individual or at times at the level of an organization like the Buddhist women's association.

At the same time, whether it be empowering consumers through temple education (Rinnōji), creating energy off the grid through solar roof panels (Jukōin), or making use of sect-wide organizations to promote 'green Buddhism' (the Sōtō Zen Green Plan), Japanese Buddhists are beginning to make structural changes that directly impact the environment. Precisely because establishment Buddhism is a pillar of mainstream Japanese society, even small changes at the over 76,000 temples have the potential to make dramatic changes not only at local temples, but in the environmental patterns of the millions of lay Buddhist members of those temples. In this way, a 'conservative conservationism' seems to be one model for a hyper-capitalist Japan and generally conservative Buddhist establishment.

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'FINE WORDS INDEED':  
YASUKUNI AND THE NARRATIVE FETISHISM OF WAR\*

JOHN BREEN

Surviving comrades of the fallen in the Pacific war, and bereaved family members, head to Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社 to mourn and commemorate at its great spring and autumn festivals; they may also visit on days of special importance to their regiments. The bereaved often tell how, at Yasukuni, their loved ones appear clearly before them, and give them much comfort (Breen 2004: 88–90). Yasukuni serves in this way as a prompt to very personal memories. However, like all memorial sites Yasukuni engages actively in the construction of a more public memory that often conflicts with, and always seeks to accommodate, the personal and private. The mnemonic function of the shrine, that is to say the strategies with which it reconstructs the past so as to accord it significance for the present, is vital and obvious, but it merits more attention than it has so far been accorded.<sup>1</sup> This chapter sets out to identify and explore the several strategies Yasukuni Shrine deploys to this end; it is also concerned to ask why Yasukuni does what it does mnemonically. Note that while Yasukuni commemorates the war dead from all imperial Japan's conflicts, the focus in this essay falls uniquely on Yasukuni's construction of Pacific war memory.

Yasukuni Shrine appeals to three mnemonic strategies. The first is 'textual': shrine priests and shrine apologists publish pamphlets, posters, books and a multiplicity of web pages to articulate their understanding of the Pacific war. A second strategy is that of display: the shrine compound accommodates the Yūshūkan 遊就館, 'Japan's first and oldest war museum' whose exhibits, in their selection and arrangement, construct a powerful and persuasive historical narrative of war. Finally, there is the ritual strategy. Yasukuni is before all else a ritual site; ritual performance

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\* This is an updated and revised version of an essay that earlier appeared under the title "Yasukuni and the loss of historical memory," in *Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past*, ed. John Breen, 2008.

<sup>1</sup> For a pioneering study of Yasukuni as a site of memory, see Nelson 2003. Since the publication of the original version of this essay, Mark Selden (2008) has published a fine article on Yasukuni and memory.

is the shrine's, and the priests', *raison d'être*. As Connerton (1989: 3–4) insists, a fundamental operation of ritual is the conveying and sustaining of 'recollected knowledge', that is, of images of the past. Any exploration of the shrine as a mnemonic site might usefully, therefore, begin with its ritual operations.

This chapter does not, in brief, seek to engage directly with the two arenas that have dominated what is known as the 'Yasukuni problem'. The first of the two concerns the constitutionality of prime ministerial visits to the shrine, while the second concerns the presence of Class A war criminals in the Yasukuni pantheon. These individuals include people like Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki who lead Japan to war, and Generals Matsui and Mutō, who commanded the Imperial army in Nanking and the Philippines respectively. While acknowledging these thorny and persistent issues in passing, **this chapter sets out to identify the shrine's mnemonic operations as a third problem in its own right.**<sup>2</sup> Yasukuni is legally recognized as a 'religious juridical person' (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人), and **is entirely free to construct whatever memory and tell whatever historical tales it wishes.** This goes without saying; but its operations become problematic when the state, in the form of the Prime Minister or, indeed, any of his ministers, patronizes the shrine, thus according it the guise of a 'national' site and the shrine's memory that of 'official', public memory.

### *Ritual Propitiation as Mnemonic Strategy*

Yasukuni priests perform rites every morning and evening of every day of the year; their ritual purpose is to propitiate and honor the war dead. These rites are known as *ireisai* 慰霊祭 where *irei* means 'propitiate' or 'comfort' and *sai* means 'rite'. There is a second category of rite, rarely performed today, namely *reiji hōansai* 霊璽奉安祭 which are dynamic rites of apotheosis that transform the war dead into sacred beings (Breen 2004: 80–81). At Yasukuni, these sacred beings or *kami* 神 are typically referred to as *eirei* 英霊 (glorious spirits). Of the many rites Yasukuni priests perform throughout the year, the most important and the most solemn by far are the two seasonal rites, the Great Rites of Spring and Autumn (*shunki reitaisai* 春期例大祭 and *shūki reitaisai* 秋期例大祭). Their distinguishing feature is the dominating presence of the *chokushi* 勅使

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<sup>2</sup> For an attempt to understand the problem of Yasukuni from a multiplicity perspectives, see Breen 2011.



or imperial emissary who, dispatched directly from the imperial palace in Tokyo, serves as the emperor’s proxy. In what follows, I set out first to explain the ritual dynamic that obtains between priests, the *kami* and the emissary in these Great Rites of Spring and Autumn, and then I ask what this has to do with questions of memory and historical narrative.<sup>3</sup>

The Great Autumn rite comprises three different ritual sequences. In the first, priests make offerings to the *kami* residing in the innermost recesses of the main sanctuary (*honden* 本殿). These offerings include beer and the ‘Peace’ brand of cigarettes—closest in flavor, it is said, to those of wartime in Japan—as well as the more conventional offerings of rice, rice wine and water. The chief priest then intones prayers and places his own offerings of the evergreen *sakaki* 榊 branch before the *kami*. In the second sequence, the imperial emissary enters the main sanctuary. From the centre of the main sanctuary, he makes his offerings of colored silk and intones his prayers, and finally offers his own sprig of the evergreen *sakaki*. In the final sequence, representatives of the Defense Ministry (Bōeishō 防衛省), the Japan Society for the War Bereaved (Nihon Izokukai 日本遺族会), the National Association for Shrines (NAS; Jinja Honchō 神社本庁), the Glorious War Dead Society (Eirei ni Kotaeru Kai 英霊に答える会) and other organizations make their way along the corridor from the worship hall (*haiden* 拝殿) to the main sanctuary and present their offerings and pray.

The ritual dynamic operating here in this Great Autumn Rite is of great vintage, and appears to draw on the cults of *goryō* 御霊 which are traceable back to the Heian period (late 8th–12th centuries) and possibly earlier. *Goryō* cults involve the belief that the spirits (*goryō*) of (usually) noble men and women who died inauspicious deaths are angry and resentful on account of their lives being cut prematurely short and, in their anger and resentment, return to wreak havoc upon the living. If, however, the living propitiate the angry spirits with the right offerings, then those spirits may be persuaded to desist from destruction and, indeed, to deploy their numinous powers to protect and bring solace to the living. The Great Autumn Rite at Yasukuni is a modern ‘take’ on this ancient tradition, which lies close to the heart of Japanese religious culture. The dynamic here is exactly the same: in return for endless propitiation by the living (priests and emperor foremost amongst them), the dead will be restful

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<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I draw on the *Shūki reitaisai shiki shidai* 秋期例大祭式次第, the ritual programme for the Great Autumn Rite which I attended in 2001.

and offer no threat to the living; they will, indeed, guarantee them peace and prosperity.<sup>4</sup>

When, however, we refocus our attention on the imperial emissary and his ritual role, a complicating dynamic surfaces. The first thing to notice is the ritual tension obtaining between the propitiating emperor (here, his emissary) and the propitiated war dead. The emissary's actions are clear enough: he makes offerings, he intones a prayer and offers *sakaki*, all by way of comforting and venerating the war dead. But there is an inescapable reflexivity here, so that the ritual focus shifts subtly between the venerated war dead and the venerating emperor. After all, the emperor propitiates and venerates the war dead for no other reason than that they embodied loyalty towards him, patriotism for the empire and self-sacrifice in the service of both. It is never clear whether it is the war dead as *kami* that are celebrated in these rites, or the emperor and the imperial values which these men embodied. One Yasukuni priest told this author he felt uncomfortable when people speak of "the emperor venerating the war dead [in these rites]." What he feared was the inversion of the cosmic order: the war dead are supposed to be worshipping the emperor; not the other way around. Indeed, the *norito* 祝詞 prayer which the priest intones in the first sequence confirms the ambiguity of the ritual dynamic. It begins by asserting that "the offerings of this day are enabled by the limitless generosity of the emperor's heart." It then asks the dead that, in return for those offerings in the form of abundant fruits of the earth and the sea, they protect the imperial nation and ensure the imperial institution flourishes in splendor for evermore. In other words, the rite entrusts to the dead precisely that function which they fulfilled as soldiers and sailors when living: service to emperor and imperial Japan.

This emperor-centered reading of the Great autumn rite seems to find support in the shrine's total symbolism. The main sanctuary and the worship hall are bedecked with drapes bearing the 16-petal imperial chrysanthemum, as are the lanterns that light up night time ritual performances. The massive wooden gate (*shinmon* 神門) is embossed with a striking golden chrysanthemum, too, which designates the shrine precinct as imperial space. Moreover, the Yasukuni ritual cycle tracks that

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<sup>4</sup> Priests of the shrine interviewed by this author are uncomfortable with the association of the war dead with angry spirits; they prefer to think of them as 'ancestors' and the rites of propitiation as ancestral rites. On the angry spirit cult in historical context, see McMullin 1988.

of the imperial court so the shrine performs what are known as *tōjitsu sai* 当日祭 or ‘contemporaneous rites’ to mark the September *kanname* 神嘗 rite, the November *niiname* 新嘗 rite and the February *toshigo* 祈年 rite. These rites involve the emperor venerating Amaterasu 天照皇大神, the Sun goddess, and offering thanksgiving for her gift of rice to Japan.<sup>5</sup> Again, on the anniversaries of emperors Kōmei (r. 1847–66), Meiji (r. 1867–1912), Taishō (r. 1912–26) and Shōwa (r. 1926–89), Yasukuni priests face the mausolea of these modern monarchs, and venerate them from afar. There is a human dimension to the shrine’s imperial linkage, too. The Shōwa emperor last visited Yasukuni in 1975 and never returned, and the present emperor has not visited since his enthronement in 1989, but every year, the Spring and Autumn festivals are attended by one of the Mikasa Princes.<sup>6</sup>

My understanding of this Great Autumn Rite is that it is on one level at least a celebration of the emperor by the living and the dead gathered in Yasukuni Shrine. The rite serves to generate, and forever re-generate, a sense of awe before the emperor, his institution and those essentially imperial values the war dead are said to have embodied in his name. The question, then, is **what history is remembered and what forgotten here?**

The rites embed within them a simplistic narrative, which runs like this. Millions of Japanese went to war in the 1930s and 40s on behalf of emperor and imperial Japan; 2,300,000 of them, after valiant struggle, sacrificed their lives in the imperial cause. To a man, they died embodying those hallowed imperial virtues of loyalty, patriotism and self-sacrifice. Their deaths were thus noble and honorable before they were ever tragic. The war, which created so many heroes, is by definition a heroic and noble undertaking. This uncomplicated ritual narrative is, of course, myth and not history, and it comprises all those elements of myth identified by Connerton (1989: 43): struggle, death in war, and redemption through death. What is banished from the memory in this mythical narrative is the pitiful nature of many war deaths, as well as the sacrifices of the

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<sup>5</sup> It should be pointed out that Yasukuni is not unique in replicating the cycle of imperial rites. All the shrines under the umbrella of the National Association of Shrines are required to do so as well.

<sup>6</sup> The reasons why the emperor never returned to Yasukuni were, till recently, shrouded in mystery. It is now clear from a memorandum written by the emperor’s chief steward and from entries in his chamberlain’s diary that the emperor personally objected to the shrine’s apotheosis of the Class A war criminals (Breen 2008: 2–5).

common man and woman. The shrine venerates as ‘glorious spirits’ only the military.<sup>7</sup> So, for example, the 100,000 citizens of Tokyo who lost their lives in the American firebombing of March 1945, those who died in the defense of Okinawa in April of the same year, the non-combatants who died in the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August are all denied a place in Yasukuni’s pantheon. **To the extent that Yasukuni is a military shrine the omission of civilians is understandable, but the omission undermines the shrine’s claim to be a *national* site of mourning. The Autumn and Spring Rites take as their premise, after all, the historically false proposition that the Pacific War was a war that engaged combatants alone.**

The rites of propitiation fail to accommodate within their narrative these complicating facts of undeniable historicity:

- 1) That even though there were many, many Japanese soldiers and sailors who exhibited extraordinary bravery, the great majority died squalid deaths of starvation and disease;<sup>8</sup>
- 2) that even those who embodied the vaunted imperial virtues of loyalty, patriotism and self-sacrifice, were victims of the militarism that bound Japan in the 1930s and 40s;
- 3) that the war which took so many lives was, like all wars, brutal and cruel.

The shrine rites’ simplistic recall of the Pacific War brings to mind the case of Iida Susumu. Iida, a civilian attached to an imperial navy unit, was featured in an NHK retrospective on Yasukuni in the summer of 2006. The program, called *Yasukuni o kangaeru: Sengo rokujūnen 靖国を考える* : 戦後六十年 (Reflecting on Yasukuni 60 years after war’s end), began inauspiciously with an overlong, uncritical interview with the then Chief Priest, Yuzawa Tadashi. It turned out, however, to be a deeply moving broadcast, not least because of the appearance of men like Iida, whose voices have been smothered in the polemic that has defined Yasukuni studies to date. Iida Susumu was arraigned at the Tokyo war crimes’ tribunal as a Class B war criminal for beheading two prisoners of war in New Guinea. He was found guilty and sentenced to twenty years hard labor.

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<sup>7</sup> For the multiple military categories of *gun* 軍, *gunzoku* 軍属 and *jungunzoku* 准軍属 (military, quasi-military and quasi-quasi military), see the table *Senbotsu sha no gōshi* 戦没者の合祀 in Yasukuni Jinja 2000: 186.

<sup>8</sup> This statistical point is stressed in Iida 2008: 5.

Iida spent his time in Sugamo prison reflecting on his actions, and those of the Japanese military in that South Pacific campaign. On camera he spoke of Yasukuni and its ‘pacifying’ and ‘honoring’ of the ‘glorious spirits’ of war dead:

These are fine words indeed. They strike a chord with the bereaved, with comrades and, indeed, with a lot of the Japanese people. But from the perspective of one who fought in the war, I have to ask, ‘Do these men merit honor as the nation’s glorious war dead?’ I beg to differ.

Referring to the fact that no less than 100,000 Japanese officers and men died of starvation in New Guinea, Iida continued:

Who did we soldiers despise? It was the military commanders who planned that New Guinea campaign. To reflect on this is to conclude that words like the ‘glorious spirits of the war dead’ are designed simply to avoid the issue of responsibility. This [refusal to accept responsibility] is insufferable.<sup>9</sup>

Yasukuni’s rites of apotheosis and propitiation are indiscriminate; and in their failure to discriminate, they deny the value of the individual war experiences of countless men like Iida Susumu.

To the south of the main sanctuary where Iida’s commanders and comrades are venerated as *kami*, stands another site, the Chinreisha 鎮靈社, literally ‘the Spirit pacifying shrine’. Built in 1965, the Chinreisha comprises two *za* 座, or sites in which two different categories of *kami* reside. The first *za* is dedicated to those who fought and fell in battles with the imperial army during the revolutionary decades of the 1860s and 70s. So, venerated here are many nameless samurai who died in the Boshin 戊辰 civil war, alongside others of renown like Etō Shinpei and Saigō Takamori, men who worked in the imperial government, left their posts, rebelled using martial force, and finally took their own lives when their cause proved unwinnable. The second *za* is still more interesting, since it is dedicated to the dead of Japan’s erstwhile enemies. Here are venerated as *kami* British, Americans, South East Asians, Koreans and Chinese. The Chinreisha is very much peripheral to the main sanctuary, it is true, and it is not marked by a *torii* 鳥居 gate. Nonetheless, priests make offerings there every morning and every evening, and the shrine has its own feast day on July 13. What is important about the Chinreisha is that it has the capacity to recall and narrate a past more complex than that of the rites

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<sup>9</sup> Iida Susumu develops these views with great force in two important books on the New Guinea campaign: Iida 2008 and 2009.

in the main sanctuary: a violent past that had its perpetrators as well as its victims; its winners and losers; its horrors as well as its heroism. So much a matter of controversy was this Chinreisha amongst the priesthood and shrine activists that, within a decade of its construction, it was banished from sight. The shrine encircled it with a high steel fence, secluding it from all but the shrine priests who served it.<sup>10</sup> On November 23, 2006, the *Mainichi* newspaper 毎日新聞 carried a front page article announcing that Yasukuni Chief Priest, Nanbu Toshiaki (d. 2009) had ordered the steel fence stripped away. The Chinreisha is now exposed once more to the gaze of visitors. It is unfortunately unclear what Nanbu's motives were, and what opposition he had to overcome.

*Strategies of Display: The Yūshūkan War Museum*

On the opposite side of the main sanctuary to the Chinreisha is the Yūshūkan war museum. Refurbished, expanded and reopened in 2003, the Yūshūkan serves as a sort of illustrated commentary on the shrine's rites of propitiation. Participants in the great Yasukuni rites are given free tickets to the museum and actively encouraged to visit. Museum exhibits impart physicality to some of the most extraordinary of the military men and women apotheosized and venerated in the main sanctuary. To take but one example among thousands: there is Lieutenant Nishi, who won an equestrian gold medal in the 1918 Olympics. Nishi refused to surrender to the American forces in Iōjima, and died in what was effectively a suicidal tank attack against overwhelming odds. The museum displays Nishi's photograph, his Olympic gold medal and certificate; it records his regiment and his rank, and the date and place of his death. The exhibit addresses Nishi as *mikoto* 命, where *mikoto* is an honorific form of address for the *kami* he has now become.

There is, of course, nothing unique about the Yūshūkan as a war museum honoring the war dead; this is precisely what war museums exist to do. Nor is there anything distinctive in the Yūshūkan's use of technology to divert the gaze of the visitor away from war's horrors, sanitizing them. So, for example, the visitor encounters first of all a fine example of the C56 steam engine, which travelled the Burma railway. There is a plaque explaining the C56 was built in 1936, and was the first steam engine ever

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<sup>10</sup> On the origins of the Chinreisha, see Breen 2008: 9–10.

to ply the Burma railway. It was, indeed, such a fine example of engineering that it continued to be used after the war as well. But there is no mention here that 90,000 men, prisoners of war and local laborers, were sacrificed in the building of the railway along which the C56 plied its way. The entrance hall grabs the gaze of the visitor with life size models of the Ōka 桜花 and the Kaiten 回轉, both used in special attack or suicide missions. The aircraft known as Ōka or Cherry Blossom had no engine of its own, and to get airborne it was reliant on a mother plane, to whose underbelly it was clamped. When an enemy war ship came into sight, the Ōka pilot climbed down through the hatch in the mother plane’s fuselage, and took his seat in the explosive-packed Ōka, and released himself with the pull of a lever. Aided by only the most primitive steering device, he would seek to direct the craft towards its target. The explosives packed into its nose would detonate on impact, and rip holes in the best armored of warships. The Kaiten was an underwater version of the Ōka; it rose from the depths to shunt its explosive-packed body into the hulls of warships. The plaques reveal much about the technology of these extraordinary weapons of war.

There is, however, one feature of the Yūshūkan museum which is distinctive and, perhaps, unique. That is the conspicuous absence of the enemy. The visitor to the museum walks the history of the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, the so-called Manchurian Incident, the China War and the Pacific War, and there is no enemy in sight. There are no representations of American or British soldiers, and no uniforms, no weapons, no flags or other trophies of war are anywhere to be seen. This offers a striking contrast to the Imperial War Museum in London, say, where life-size dolls of German and Japanese soldiers are on display; Tiger tanks squat beneath German Messerschmitts suspended from the ceiling. I asked a shrine priest about this absence of the enemy, and he explained that the Yūshūkan is not, in fact, a war museum at all; it is a *hōmotsuden* 宝物殿 or ‘repository’ of the relics of the war dead; its sole purpose is to honor the memory of Japanese war dead. This is to some extent persuasive for the museum certainly is such a repository, but the fact is that it claims to be much more. In all of its literature, the Yūshūkan defines itself as Japan’s oldest and most esteemed war museum; its remit being “to clarify the truth about Japan’s modern history” (Yuzawa 2000: 2; Kobori 2009). The absence of the enemy makes this a daunting challenge.

What the absence achieves splendidly is an amnesia of perpetration, defeat, and, above all, the horror of war. The museum’s treatment of the battle for Okinawa might serve as an example. On display in the Okinawan

panel are the banners used to dispatch the *tokkōtai* 特攻隊 or suicide pilots, as they took off on their doomed missions. There is the jacket worn by General Ushijima Mitsuru, commander of the thirty-second army, who took his own life on June 23 convinced the battle was lost. There is a photo, too, of a commemoration stone set up to mark the extraordinary courage of the nurses of the Himeyuri unit, who tended to the Japanese wounded as the battle for Okinawa raged about them; it stands by the cave in which they took refuge. There is also this account of the battle for Okinawa:

The entire population of Okinawa were one as they fought on for months. No wonder the cost was so high. Lieutenant Colonel Ōta Minoru dispatched a final tearful telegram reporting the activities [of his unit]. In the field of battle, suicide attacks were deployed in the air, at sea and on land. The battleship Yamato played its part, as did aircraft, and the infantry units, too, who took on the American tanks. All of these were suicide attacks.

The museum's memory is impaired.<sup>11</sup> No battle was more ferocious than that fought over Okinawa, but there is the contesting memory of many Okinawans who testified that the imperial army used the civilian population as shields, sometimes murdered them, and even drove them to acts of group suicide. There are many records of individual Okinawans who witnessed friends and family cut down by Japanese soldiers. The Yūshūkan does not, and of course cannot, engage with these complicating memories.<sup>12</sup>

When the visitor reaches the panel that treats the end of the Pacific War, it becomes clear that, while the Imperial Japanese Army's enemies are absent, there is, after all, a striking foreign presence. The panel is dominated by a large portrait photograph of Justice Radhabinod Pal, the one Asian judge at the war crimes tribunal in Tokyo, and the one judge, too, who was a genuine authority in international law. It was Justice Pal's considered view that the Japanese were innocent of all war crimes. The real aggressors, he insisted, were not the Japanese at all, but the Americans and British; *they* should be standing trial. Justice Pal's views are set out in large print alongside his photograph:

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<sup>11</sup> For an impassioned critique of this author's understanding of the war museum and its treatment of the Pacific War, see Nitta 2008: 140–41. For a still different take, see Doak 2008: 62–64.

<sup>12</sup> Tanaka Nobumasa writes of Okinawan perspectives on the campaign (see Tanaka 2004: 109–11). See also Mark Selden's reflections on Okinawa and war memory (2008).



If you read my history, you will know that the Americans and British are the loathsome instigators of aggression against Asia. However, many Japanese intellectuals do not read what I have to say. This is why they tell their students that Japan was guilty of war crimes and that Japan launched a war of aggression against Asia.

The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal remains highly controversial; non-Japanese as well as Japanese scholars of different persuasions have argued its shortcomings for over fifty years.<sup>13</sup> Historians now talk of the imperialist identity of combatants on both sides; of an imperialist war fought by imperialist powers competing for land and people that did not rightfully belong to either side. It is difficult to see that the undeniable truth of Pal's insistence on American and British aggression against Asia renders any more persuasive the Yūshūkan's reading of the Pacific War.<sup>14</sup> The gallery of the Pacific war concludes with a panel on national liberation movements 1945–1960, which imparts further meaning to the Pal-sanctioned memory of the war: "The flames stirred under Japanese occupation were not doused even after Japan's defeat, and new nations states emerged in rapid succession following wars of independence."

The wars waged by the Japanese army were, then, noble undertakings, not least because they liberated Asia from loathsome Americans and British imperialists. The Japanese military were, to a man, heroes, paragons of loyalty to emperor and imperial Japan; and not a life was lost in vain because Japan contributed to liberation even if it suffered defeat in the process. Neatly excised from the historical memory of the Yūshūkan are the historical facts of Japanese war crimes, of Japanese aggression and, indeed, of Japanese defeat.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The pioneering example is Minear 1972.

<sup>14</sup> The identity between Yasukuni, the Yūshūkan and Pal's understanding of the Pacific War was reinforced in 2005 when Chief Priest, Nanbu Toshiaki, unveiled a stone monument and plaque dedicated to Pal outside the museum entrance. The legend says: "We hereby honor the courage and passion of Dr. Pal who remained true to legal justice and historical truth. In order to record his words as a precious lesson to the Japanese people, we have erected this monument, and hope to pass on to future generations [Dr. Pal's] great legacy."

<sup>15</sup> For a recent and enlightening discussion of disputes over war memory as they affect all nations, see Macmillan 2009: 113–38.

*Textual Strategies of War Memory*

History as narrated by the Great Rites of Spring and Autumn, and reproduced in the exhibits on display in the Yūshūkan, is intended to impart meaning to the horror and the waste of war. This same narrative is reproduced over and again in the many publications of the shrine, of the museum and of its apologists. Representative are books like *Yasukuni no inori* 靖国の祈り and the pamphlets, posters and web pages authored by organizations like the aforementioned Glorious War Dead Society and the Japan Society for the War Bereaved, as well as the Shintō Association of Political Leadership (Shintō Seiji Renmei 神道政治連盟).<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, the recall of these publications makes a perfect fit with the narratives of shrine ritual and the Yūshūkan display. Here I focus uniquely on a couple of recurring but distinctive textual themes. The first is ‘cornerstone’ theory, a term which I use to refer to arguments that the sacrifices of the war dead constitute the ‘cornerstone’ of post war Japan’s brilliant success. The introduction by Ōhara Yasuo (2003) to *Yasukuni Jinja: Yūshūkan no sekai* 靖国神社遊就館の世界 offers one example:

The lives we lead today are built upon the cornerstone [*ishizue* 礎] of our forefathers. . . . A year has now elapsed since the new, refurbished Yūshūkan opened to the public. What visitor can fail to be moved by the glorious spirits who constitute the cornerstone of modern Japan, by their relics, their love of country and parents, and by the love for them of the bereaved.

The Glorious War Dead Society was for a while distributing complimentary packets of first aid plasters at the shrine, which carried this legend: “Are you not forgetting? It is upon the noble cornerstone [*ishizue*] laid by the 2,500,000 glorious spirits that the Japan of today stands, that you stand, and that your family stands.”<sup>17</sup> The Shintō Association of Political Leadership distributes a pamphlet asserting the centrality of Yasukuni as the nation’s site of mourning. The pamphlet, styled *Kudan no sakura wa naite iru* 九段の桜は泣いている (The Cherry Blossoms on the Kudan Hill are Weeping) includes the following:

Thus it is that Yasukuni shrine has been treasured by the people of Japan for so long: Yasukuni, which venerates those who became the cornerstone

<sup>16</sup> On the aims and activities of the Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership, see Breen 2010.

<sup>17</sup> See also the “Greeting” by Chūjō Takanori, president of the Glorious War Dead Society (see Chūjō).

[*ishizue*] of the modern Japanese state, the cornerstone [*ishizue*] of the peace and prosperity that Japan enjoys today.

It is important to understand that this equation of the sacrifice of the war dead with post war prosperity is not the monopoly of shrine apologists. Just before he went to Saipan in May 2006, Emperor Akihito voiced the same sentiments: "We must move forward, always bearing in mind that Japan today is built upon the foundations [laid by] all these many people" (Kunaichō). There has been no greater advocate of 'cornerstone theory' than Koizumi Jun'ichirō. In 2006, the last year of his premiership, he defied taboo and visited Yasukuni on August 15. When asked subsequently about his feelings on this day, he replied:

I say this every time, but Japan must reflect on past wars, and never wage war again. The peace and prosperity of today's Japan has not been achieved simply with those alive today. Rather, today's Japan exists today [sic] because of those people whose precious lives were sacrificed in the last war (Koizumi).

Koizumi at the same time reiterated his determination to "take on board historical facts with humility and to keep reflection and sincere apology always embedded in my heart."<sup>18</sup> So what then are the historical facts? For Koizumi, the kamikaze 神風 pilots were especially important; so much so that, in moments of crisis, he would imagine what the pilots would have done in similar critical situations. But what historical evidence is there, after all, that the kamikaze pilots so admired by Koizumi did, indeed, contribute to the foundation of post war peace and prosperity? No doubt all died desirous of defending the Japan that they loved, but this was not the Japan of the post war. It was the Japan of the Meiji constitution, over which the emperor, descended from the Amaterasu, the Sun goddess, ruled as 'sacred and inviolable'; the Japan in which the Imperial army enjoyed extraordinary constitutional privileges; the Japan in which the Imperial rescript on education (*kyoiku chokugo* 教育勅語) and its ethical imperatives were accorded sacred status. This was not the democratic Japan of individual freedoms and rights. Of course, there were pilots like Lieutenant Furukawa Masataka who wrote, as he waited to take off on his last mission, of his unsurpassed love of peace; and of his dreams of a world in which all people worked together and

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<sup>18</sup> Koizumi articulates his position on Yasukuni with clarity at the website *Shushō kantei hōmupēji* (Koizumi).

loved one another. There must have been many like him.<sup>19</sup> To suggest, however, that they died for democracy is a nonsense.

The premise of cornerstone theory is emotional not rational. However bravely and selflessly these men and women sacrificed their lives, it was Japan's defeat by the Allies, the post war dismantling of Japanese militarism, the implementation of democratic reforms and the restructuring of government under the Occupation—not to mention the extraordinary of ordinary Japanese—that guaranteed post war prosperity. The consummation of these several processes was none other than the imposition by the Occupation of the post war Constitution, with its provisions for popular sovereignty and pacifism. Neither the publications of apologists nor, indeed, the *Yūshūkan* displays is able to accommodate this narrative of war's end.

There is a second recurring theme in the textual memory manufactured by Yasukuni, and that is the linkage forged between the shrine and the regeneration of post war Japanese ethics. The most eloquent proponent of this repositioning of the shrine in post war society, and perhaps the most prolific of Yasukuni's many apologists, is emeritus professor of Tokyo University, Kobori Keichirō. Kobori sets out his basic position in a publication co-authored with Ōhara Yasuo (Kobori and Ōhara 1999): "If only [he began] the Prime minister and the emperor would make their way boldly to Yasukuni, this would surely have an extremely positive effect on the morals of the nation at large." He develops his theme:

In the Japan of today the young people especially have no sense of gratitude that they have been born into this nation of Japan. If only the Yasukuni problem can be solved [so that the PM and emperor both venerate there] the attitude of the young toward Japan will be quite transformed. I believe they would then come round to the belief that Japan is a nation to be proud of, that we Japanese have something of which we can truly be proud. To this extent [he concluded] the solution of the Yasukuni problem will have a profoundly beneficial effect on national ethics. (1999: 16–17)

The first thing to note about this striking statement is that it has its origins in the Liberal Democratic Party. The very first item of the Outline of a Proposal for Legislation on Yasukuni (*Yasukuni hōan yōkō* 靖国法案要綱), the product of an attempt by the LDP back in 1956 to reform the legal status of the shrine, makes precisely the same point. Its reads: "The shrine

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<sup>19</sup> Two books that serve admirably to humanize the kamikaze pilots are Naitō 1989 and Ohnuki-Tierney 2006.

exists to venerate the dead, to honor their posthumous virtue and thus to bring about a revival in the ethics of contemporary Japan." The conjunction 'and thus' is of particular interest. It hints that the shrine, in its post war manifestation, exists first and foremost to regenerate the moral order of Japanese society; that honoring the war dead is subordinate.

This same moral position is to be found in the writings of postwar chief priests, and in the publications of satellite groups like the Japan Society for the War Bereaved and the Glorious War Dead Society.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the reason why the shrine today insists on the ritual participation of the Prime Minister and the emperor seems to lie here: for how might the shrine constitute the moral beacon for all of postwar Japanese society without their physical presence? Kobori does not make explicit what he means by 'morals', but they are, of course, those which the fallen were all said to embody: loyalty towards the emperor, love of imperial Japan and self-sacrifice. If, as Kobori proposes, the Prime Minister as representative of government and people, and the emperor as symbol of Japan go boldly to Yasukuni, then these moral values will establish themselves across Japan. This 'Kobori conviction' is fundamental to an understanding of the meaning that the shrine accords to itself and its practices in the post war. The problem with it is that it appropriates the war dead for political purposes and subverts the shrine as a site of propitiation and mourning. For in Kobori's schema propitiation and mourning are secondary; they are reduced to serving the greater good of ethical dissemination. This strategy is problematic in the mnemonic realm too. After all, how can the shrine recall anything other than a past of imperial loyalty, of love of imperial nation and self-sacrifice if it is charged with disseminating these values throughout post war Japanese society?

### *Epilogue*

The question remains, then, of how to understand the shrine's mnemonic strategies of ritual, display and text: why does Yasukuni do what it does in the realm of memory? The reflections on historical memory by the American critic Eric Santner are suggestive here. Santner, who has studied public rituals, narratives and other modes of cultural production in post

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<sup>20</sup> For a representative selection, see the statements by chief priests Matsudaira Nagayoshi and Yuzawa Tadashi in Matsudaira, "*Yasukuni hōshi* 靖国奉仕" (Yuzawa 2000) and the website of the Japan Society for the War Bereaved (Nihon Izokukai).

war Germany, points out that these endeavours have served not to aid but to obstruct the process of mourning. Mourning demands an “elaborating and integrating of the reality of loss and traumatic shock, by remembering and repeating in mediated doses.” Germany has failed, as Santner puts it, to “take the poison that cures.” Cultural production in post war Germany suppressed the trauma of war, of defeat and of occupation. To the massive trauma, painful beyond endurance, Germany countered with various mnemonic strategies in order to ensure its suppression. Santner refers to these strategies as ‘narrative fetishism’. He writes:

By ‘narrative fetishism’ I mean the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place. Narrative fetishism is a strategy of undoing in fantasy the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere. (1992: 144)

Narrative fetishism—for which read ‘myth production’—releases one from the burden of having to reconstitute one’s self-identity under post-traumatic conditions; in narrative fetishism, to use Santner’s coinage, the “post is indefinitely postponed.”

If Santner’s observations do, indeed, apply to post war cultural production in Germany, it is likely that they have value for understanding other nations similarly visited by massive trauma.<sup>21</sup> The ritual dynamic in Yasukuni’s rites of pacification, the display of artifacts in the Yūshūkan museum and the principles sustaining cornerstone theory as history may perhaps be understood as constituting between them a sort of narrative fetishism. Yūshūkan in the twenty-first century suppresses the defeat, the loss of two million and more lives, the humiliation of occupation, and the imposition of the Constitution, which together are the very source of massive trauma. The shrine obliterates from its memory of war all traces of trauma. In their place it unfolds a fetishized narrative that recalls all Japanese soldiers as heroes, paragons of loyalty and patriotism, who sacrificed their lives selflessly for the emperor; it recalls the war as a noble undertaking, fought with heroism to free Asia from American and European imperialist powers; and it recalls the suicide pilots, especially, as the cornerstone of post war Japan in its peace and its prosperity. If one were to seek a single answer for why Yasukuni does what it does in the realm of memory, it may well lie here. Yasukuni fetishizes the narrative of war, and it does so in order to expunge the traces of trauma. Santner’s

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<sup>21</sup> For an application of Santner’s ideas to post war France, see Brower 1999.

theory might lead us to assume that in its expunging of trauma, and its failure to integrate and elaborate the trauma, Yasukuni disqualifies itself as a place of mourning.

Yasukuni’s shortcomings in this regard render particularly significant proposals for the creation of a new, non-religious site dedicated to the war dead. The idea was first raised by PM Nakasone in the 1980s and it surfaced briefly again in 2005 when PM Koizumi set up a cross-party group to consider the idea. More recently, Hatoyama Yukio, the leader of the Democratic Party that was swept to power in September 2009, made clear his intention to act. His party’s proposal is to develop Chidorigafuchi 千鳥が淵, the Tokyo site of the unknown soldier. Before the election, in July 2009, the party published “Index 2009,” a policy document which refers to Yasukuni on its very first page:

It is problematic for the prime minister and his cabinet to visit Yasukuni shrine in an official capacity, given its enshrinement of Class A war criminals. We shall work towards the construction of a new national site of mourning with no specific religious character, in order that anybody and everybody can, without ill-feelings, honour the war dead and swear their commitment to non-war and peace. (DPJ: 1)<sup>22</sup>

The discussion thus far has identified several advantages to the idea of a state-sponsored, non-Shintō, non-religious site to the memory of the war dead, notwithstanding opposition both from pro- and anti-Yasukuni polemicists.<sup>23</sup> The advantages of a new site may be summarized as follows:

- 1) such a site could be freed, above all, from the ‘narrative fetishism’ of the sort that Yasukuni exhibits in its desperation to bury the massive trauma of war;
- 2) to the extent that the new site would be liberated from such a narrative, it would facilitate for the first time the process of unencumbered mourning—mourning minus the politics and the ethics of Yasukuni—and thus help to bring closure to the war;

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<sup>22</sup> The Shintō establishment and Yasukuni’s many backers are, at the time of writing, already stirring in response. *Jinja Shinpō* 神社新報, the organ of the Shintō establishment, greeted Hatoyama’s approach with the lament that “Japan remains in a state of surrender to interference by China and Korea in its internal affairs.” The newspaper has also reported on the creation of a new college for the study of Yasukuni, called the *Yasukuni kassei juku* やすくに活性塾, which was launched in spring 2010. For details of the school, its curriculum and its lecturers, see the website *Yasukuni Jinja*.

<sup>23</sup> The idea in its earlier manifestations was criticised by both pro- and anti-Yasukuni polemicists. See, for example, Ōhara 2009 and Takahashi 2005: 214.

- 3) finally, such an unencumbered site of mourning would enable the Japanese premier, indeed the Japanese emperor, to stand alongside the heads of state of Japan's former enemies—something that can, and should, never happen at Yasukuni—and reflect on the horrors of war.

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FROM THE 'TRADITION' TO A CHOICE:  
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MORTUARY PRACTICES\*<sup>1</sup>

SATSUKI KAWANO

In Japan, the transformation of the dead into ancestors involves years of ritual investment by the deceased's kin, with the help of Buddhist priests and community members. However, urbanization, the service-oriented economy, smaller families, and diverse life courses in postindustrial Japan have contributed to the transformation of mortuary practices. First, urbanization and mobility have weakened people's reciprocal ties with Buddhist institutions and neighbors in their communities, which used to ensure the performance of community rites. Second, the for-profit death industry came to prosper by providing commercial mortuary services that compensated for the weakened reciprocal ties. Third, postindustrial demographic trends leading to smaller families and diverse life courses, such as the declining birthrate, postponed marriages, and the rising number of single people, have reduced the pool of culturally preferred ceremonial caregivers (a married son and his spouse) who are obliged to tend a family grave and perform memorial rites for the family dead. Weaker ties with a temple and a community, combined with the limited availability of culturally preferred descendants to care for the dead, have given rise to a number of new developments.

In this chapter, I will first describe the mortuary practices customary in early postwar Japan and then examine the development of commercial mortuary practices and the trend of standardization. I will go on to analyze new mortuary ideologies and practices developed during and

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<sup>1</sup> I have used quotation marks around the term 'tradition' to indicate that I refer to what people today may define as the traditional mortuary ideology or practice. Therefore, rather than a timeless prototype, a 'tradition' is defined in certain historical, political, and social contexts.

after the 1990s. Postindustrial Japan has seen an alternative to the survivor-centered framework of death assumed in early postwar Japan, in which survivors are proponents of normative mortuary practices to ritually care for the deceased. Since the 1990s, the new ideologies of choice and an emphasis on the preferences and personal characteristics of the deceased—a condition I will refer to as ‘deceased-centeredness’—have redefined the nature and meanings of mortuary practices. In this new framework of death, rather than leaving matters of death rites to survivors, people increasingly plan the details of their own funerals and establish their own graves to their liking. A mortuary practice is considered an expression of the deceased’s individuality (Kawano 2010; also see Suzuki 1998; Tsuji 2006). Furthermore, instead of simply following mortuary conventions, survivors may also showcase the deceased’s life by emphasizing his or her personal accomplishments and characteristics through a mortuary practice. Among the new mortuary practices that spread during and after the 1990s, a special attention will be given to the practice of ash scattering promoted by a particular citizens’ group, the Grave-Free Promotion Society (Sosō no Jiyū o Susumeru Kai 葬送の自由をすすめる会; GFPS).

### *Conventional Mortuary Practices in Early Postwar Japan*

In postwar Japan, death rites were typically Buddhist, which, however, does not mean that they involved nothing other than Buddhist elements. On the contrary, what was (and still is) typically considered a Buddhist funeral is the “product of historical negotiation among multiple cultural components” (Walter 2008: 275) involving the idea of the spirit or soul, ritual pollution and purification, and Confucian ideas and rites. Despite the fact that Buddhist sects maintain procedural, sequential, and terminological differences, funeral rites prescribed in official sectarian texts share a remarkably similar structure, consisting of posthumous ordination and the guiding of the ordained to a superior realm or an enlightened state (ibid.: 269). Buddhist memorial rites typically follow the initial funeral rite, most commonly for the purpose of transferring merits to the deceased (ibid.: 269, 277). For the bereaved, through the performance of many post-death ancestral rites, the newly dead were gradually transformed into benevolent ancestors.

The transformation of the dead depended upon reciprocal relations among the deceased’s family, Buddhist temple, and community, all of which were expected to remain enduring institutions (Kawano 2010). A

stem family often maintained a stable, long-term ritual tie with a Buddhist temple whose head priest venerated the generations of the family's ancestors. Unlike a nuclear family, which dissolves when children marry and leave their original family to establish their own, a stem family ensures its continuance by requiring one child to remain in the original family and absorbing an in-marrying spouse. Like a family, a Buddhist temple remained as a long-lasting institution, though individual head priests came and went. The parishioner-temple tie, therefore, was maintained by a social contract between two institutions, rather than one existing between an individual and an institution. A temple provided a range of ritual performances and sometimes cemetery spaces to its parishioners' families, while the families supported the temple financially.

Although Buddhist priests were in charge of religious rites for the deceased, in early postwar Japan, the deceased's community members handled the practical details of death rites and sent "the deceased's spirit to the other world and protect[ed] the living against the danger of a spirit and the impurity of a corpse" (Suzuki 2000: 40). The community members' tasks included washing and dressing the corpse, placing it in a coffin, making ceremonial decorations, setting up a funeral altar, and preparing offerings. Women cooked special foods for the bereaved and visitors. Participants in a funeral typically contributed incense gifts (food was common in the early postwar period, though money was adopted later) to share the cost of funerals. The confined body was either cremated or carried in a procession to the graveyard for burial. Cremating the coffin or digging a hole for burial may also have been the job of community members. The receivers of incense gifts were obliged to reciprocate the gifts when a death occurred in another family in their community. Stem families in a community, therefore, were expected to maintain long-term reciprocal obligations to share labor and material resources, and collectively sent the dead of their community away.

The funeral was only the first step toward assisting the dead to achieve stable ancestorhood. It was common for the bereaved to hold the seventh-day rite to venerate the deceased. In some communities, gravesite rites were held on every seventh day thereafter until the 49th-day ritual. The deceased's fate was determined on the 49th day after death (whether or not to achieve buddhahood) (Smith 1974: 92; also see Walter 2008: 268), and on that day the period of mourning ended (yet there were variations according to the Buddhist denomination). The 49th-day rite was often followed by the 1st-, 3rd-, 7th-, 13th-, 17th-, 23rd-, 27th-, and 33rd-year rites, which involved the chanting of sutras by a Buddhist priest and the burning of incense.

In addition to the above post-death rites, the deceased were venerated daily and seasonally. A family typically maintained a domestic altar, where a tablet bearing the deceased's posthumous name (often Buddhist) was placed. The deceased received offerings and prayers at the altar. The dead received ritual attention both at home and at their grave on the equinoxes and the Festival of the Dead. Families attended religious rites performed at their Buddhist temples and visited their ancestral graves to make offerings. An ancestral grave was for "contact between the living and their ancestors, a receptacle for the spirits of the ancestors, a site for ritual offerings to the dead and a symbol of family continuity and belonging" (Reader 1991: 96). Communities may have also maintained territorially organized religious federations (*kō* 講) to venerate the community dead. The members of the federations regularly chanted sutras together.

#### *Urbanization and the Commercialization of Funerals and Cemeteries*

We have already seen how the development of Japan into a highly industrialized, urbanized society undermined the stability of the long-term, enduring reciprocal ties among a family, a Buddhist temple, and a community (Kawano 2010). In particular, people's mobile lifestyles made it difficult for them to maintain long-term ties with the family's Buddhist temple, the reciprocal network of neighbors, and an ancestral grave. This trend fostered the prosperity of the for-profit death industry, which came to provide commercial services to meet the needs of urbanites unable to maintain mutual ties with Buddhist temples or neighbors in their community of residence.

The postwar migration during the 1950s and 60s from rural to urban areas also had a major impact upon the expansion of the for-profit death industry. In the booming postwar economy, new jobs created in urban areas attracted many rural youth. As an eldest son was expected to remain in the original family, marry, and care for his aging parents, often younger sons and daughters migrated to urban areas and established nuclear family households. A family's ceremonial assets, such as a domestic altar and an ancestral grave, were passed on to only one married child, typically the eldest son. Thus new urban migrants often inherited no ceremonial assets. Moreover, a new urban migrant did not always establish ritual ties with a local Buddhist temple until a death occurred in his or her immediate family and the need to perform a death rite arose. As a newcomer, he or she may not have been assimilated into the community's

long-standing reciprocal network, if any, which allows its members to give and receive labor and material resources to perform funerals for the community dead.

The funeral industry, which had already been present in certain urban areas before the Second World War, had begun to spread more widely by the late 1950s (Suzuki 2000: 53). By the 1990s, it became increasingly common in many parts of Japan for the funeral industry to provide people with commercial funeral services and the attendant specialized knowledge of death, which had formerly been possessed by the community. This development promoted an increasing dependence of the bereaved on funeral professionals (Suzuki 2000).

Today, funeral professionals typically handle the corpse, set up the altar and decorations, notify various parties, and handle bureaucratic paperwork. The bereaved are guided through the process of arranging and conducting the funeral ceremony, cremation, and the seventh-day rite (*ibid.*). A Tokyo municipal survey reveals that some 92 percent of the respondents used the services of a funeral company, and some 72 percent held a funeral at a facility of a public, private, or religious institution (Tokyo Municipal Government 2002). A funeral is no longer performed at the deceased's home by community members. Funeral professionals organize an abridged ceremony according to "the secular funeral-dealer style, with Buddhist coloring," typically giving a priest "thirty-five or forty-five minutes" for sutra chanting (Walter 2008: 276). Furthermore, to fit people's busy lifestyles, the mortuary process has been compressed by performing the seventh-day ritual immediately after cremation (Suzuki 2000: 118). Mass-produced, commercial death rites are widely available, and the bereaved increasingly see priests as service providers and define themselves as consumers who pay for ritual services (see Covell 2008: 314–16).

Urbanization not only transformed funerals but also led to the development of large-scale, for-profit cemeteries. Although the shortage of cemeteries was already a social issue before the Second World War (see Bernstein 2006), the postwar migration during the 1950s and 60s placed further strain upon the limited cemetery spaces in urban areas. By the 1970s, urban areas suffered from a shortage of cemeteries, which prompted the development of large public and for-profit cemeteries established by Buddhist institutions and companies (Makimura 1996: 133, 136–37). By the 1980s, many large cemeteries were established in the Tokyo metropolitan area (Nudeshima 1991: 48–49). Unlike a temple or a community cemetery, these large cemeteries tended to accommodate the graves of families who were unrelated to each other by their residence, religion,

or kinship. Makimura (1996) points out that this development resonated with the spread of urban high-rises housing new migrants in expanding urban areas.

These large-scale cemeteries may offer services suited to the kinds of families who establish their family graves there. For example, a major private cemetery established outside the Tokyo metropolitan area some forty years ago offers a memorial ceremony (Buddhist, Shintō, or Christian) for clients who maintain no institutional affiliation with a religious organization. About a decade ago, the cemetery began to make available a veneration package for those who cannot visit their family grave easily—for example, due to senility, illness, or job transfer. On behalf of the deceased's kin, a Buddhist priest will visit the family's grave and venerate the deceased there.

In short, one can no longer assume enduring ties among family, temple, and community in the system of venerating the dead. Commercial funeral services and for-profit cemeteries are common in many parts of Japan. This development of mortuary practices in postwar Japan can be summarized by the term 'standardization', which also characterizes the spread of family graves in postwar Japan.

### *The Spread of Family Graves*

The most common form of grave in postwar Japan is a family grave (so-called *iebaka* 家墓), which consists of the gravestone bearing a family's name with an underground interment space to accommodate its members' cremated remains. The interment structure may be called *karōto* カロート, in which multiple urns containing cremated remains are placed. The family grave may easily be seen as a 'traditional' space where generations of ancestors rest together in peace. However, although a cemetery may contain some older gravestones bearing a stem family's name dating back to the Meiji period, the establishment of a family grave became the norm during the Shōwa period (Fujii 1993: 18; Makimura 1996: 112). In many parts of Japan, older gravestones bearing individual or couples' posthumous names were replaced by family graves over time (Kawano 2010). Even today, a family grave is the most common type of grave being established.

Despite the fact that people who had moved to urban areas in their youth during the postwar migration period tended to establish nuclear-family households away from their extended kin and thus had no remains



of ancestors to inter, these postwar migrants often established family graves. The graves were adopted to enable married urbanites to be buried with their spouse and child in the future rather than to house generations of ancestral remains. This future-oriented notion of the family facilitated the spread of family graves in urban areas dominated by newly established nuclear-family households in postwar Japan (Makimura 1996: 42–44; Mori 1993: 226–27).

The spread of family graves was not limited to urban areas, however. Scholars have noted that a shortage of cemetery space and the spread of cremation are associated with the establishment of family graves (Fujii 1993: 17; Iwata 2006: 121–22; Kōmoto 2001: 61–62; Mori 1993: 113). However, the main reasons and the timing for adopting a modern family grave varied in each community. Even in the same region where cremation was introduced, people in some communities began establishing family graves but not those in others (see Kōmoto 2001: 61–62).

As a grave developed into a place for family members to rest together, family crests (*kamon* 家紋) on gravestones replaced religious iconographies (e.g., stone images of Buddhas attached to gravestones and the inscription of Buddhist mantras on gravestones; see Fujii 1993: 18). No longer a clearly marked religious space that demonstrated the builder's wish for the dead to be reborn into a Buddhist paradise, a family grave developed into the 'house' of the dead, where the deceased could 'sleep' in peace. As a result, a modern cemetery today accommodates forests of mass-produced gravestones bearing family names, perhaps made of stones imported from China, marking the locations of posthumous residences.

### *New Mortuary Ideologies and Practices*

Although it is not an entirely new practice for the deceased-to-be to instruct his or her spouse or descendants to conduct their mortuary rite in certain ways, in contemporary Japan a mortuary practice may be chosen by the living to express his or her individual preferences/values. The phrase, 'dying in one's own way' (*sono hito rashii saigo* そのひとらしい最期) crystallizes this mortuary ideology that focuses upon the choice made by the deceased-to-be according to his or her personal preferences and characteristics. To those who adopt the new ideologies, therefore, the choice of a funeral, a grave, or a memorial rite, has become a living person's 'lifestyle' or, more accurately, 'death-style' option. For example, a divorced woman who has lived her life on her own may choose to have

her ashes scattered as a sign of her independence from her natal family, instead of asking her married brother to have her remains interred in his family grave as an 'add-on'.

The ideals of choice and deceased-centeredness have also reshaped the relations between the bereaved and the providers of ceremonial services and assets. Death practices are no longer confined to the 'tradition' that survivors are expected to enact, but are consciously fashioned to suit the deceased's tastes. This new complex of mortuary practices highlighting deceased-centeredness, however, has not eliminated the older survivor-centered framework, in which survivors are the enactors of mortuary customs and the deceased are the recipients of conventional ritual care. The rise of deceased-centeredness has produced diverse opinions and debates regarding the nature and the purpose of mortuary practices in contemporary Japan.

One might expect that the development of this new mortuary framework would challenge conventional mortuary practices. The increased importance placed upon deceased-centeredness, however, has not straightforwardly opposed Buddhist mortuary conventions or the commercialization of death. It is certainly worth noting the development of 'nonreligious' (*mushūkyō* 無宗教) funerals and parting ceremonies held in a hotel's banquet room, which do not involve sutra chanting or incense burning. However, the Buddhist funeral still remains the normative, most common type. Similarly, as alternatives to Buddhist post-death memorial rites, nonreligious 'gatherings to think of the deceased' (*shinobukai* 偲ぶ会) may take place on the anniversaries of death. Furthermore, by considering today's consumers' preferences and their home décor, modern, stylish domestic altars lacking Buddhist symbols are now available (Nelson 2008). Nonetheless, supporters of new death ideologies do not always choose nonreligious alternatives. More than 90 percent of funerals and memorial rites are estimated to be Buddhist ones (Tanabe 2008: 325).

Interestingly, both the supporters and the opponents of Buddhist mortuary conventions and commercialized mortuary practices may deploy the idea of deceased-centeredness in justifying the type of mortuary practice chosen for the deceased or the deceased-to-be. For example, a person may choose a nonreligious funeral because he or she is not religious. Yet a Buddhist funeral may also be modified by incorporating deceased-centeredness but may still remain Buddhist. There is a growing trend toward funerals celebrating the deceased's lives (Suzuki 1998). A fresh-flower altar is increasingly common today, which is used to display the deceased's this-worldly accomplishments (Yamada 2007). The fresh-flower altar

contrasts with a conventional wooden funeral altar, covered with religious iconographies associated with a Buddhist paradise. Yet, these funerals highlighting the deceased's accomplishments are still likely to involve Buddhist specialists and ritual acts. Similarly, the idea of deceased-centeredness may also be used to critique the commercialization of death, leading to the complete rejection of commercial services or to the choice of a 'no-frills' funeral. A person may even choose to have no funeral, or a 'cremation without funeral'. At the same time, the for-profit death industry deploys the idea of deceased-centeredness to market their services and encourage clients to customize highly standardized mortuary practices to suit their taste.

The new ideal of deceased-centeredness had similar effects on the practices of disposal. By the late Shōwa period (1926–1989), it was common for the deceased-to-be to pre-purchase his or her own grave before death. This trend is even more common today. By adopting the ideas of choice and deceased-centeredness, one may design a gravestone symbolizing the deceased's individualities—for example, by attaching a stone-made golf ball to the gravestone for a golf lover, or having the gravestone curved into the shape of a musical instrument for a musician.

People may choose new alternatives to family graves, which have become recognized options since the 1990s, by considering their own and their descendants' lifestyles. *Eitai kuyōbo* 永代供養墓 (graves with 'permanent' ritual care), which have been translated as "eternal memorial graves" (Rowe 2003: 110), or "eternally worshipped graves" (Tsuji 2002: 188) by Japan scholars, for example, began to appear during the 1980s and spread to many parts of Japan by the twenty-first century (see Kawano 2003). *Eitai kuyōbo* provide inexpensive alternatives to conventional Buddhist family graves (typically US\$1,000 and over).

Inoue Haruyo (2003: 224) defines so-called *eitai kuyōbo* as a type of graves presupposing no succession (cf. Mori 2000: 132). When a family buys the right to use a grave plot in a temple compound and establishes a family grave, for example, as long as the family line continues those buried in the grave will receive ritual care from the temple and the generations of successors in the family keep the right to use the plot. The plot will be 'returned' to the temple when there is no successor in the family to inherit the right to use the grave. The remains collected from a demolished grave are moved to a collective grave for homeless spirits. Becoming homeless souls, or second-class citizens in the world of the dead, is undesirable. However, *eitai kuyōbo* do not require their users to have successors when they buy a grave, though some of these grave systems give their users an

option of succession. The providers of *eitai kuyōbo* are supposed to venerate the dead in perpetuity. *Eitai kuyōbo* thus shift the responsibility of ‘venerating the dead in perpetuity’ from the family to the grave provider, in particular, the Buddhist temple (Inoue 2003: 226; Mori 2000: 134). To be buried in *eitai kuyōbo*, unlike a family grave, one may obtain an individual membership by paying a one-time fee. Post-death memorial rites (often Buddhist) may be included in the package; the Buddhist temple maintaining the *eitai kuyōbo* ensures the performance of memorial rites for a certain period of time (e.g., thirty-three years after death).<sup>2</sup> Many *eitai kuyōbo* maintain a shared interment space where unrelated persons’ ashes are interred, though some may provide individual interment spaces initially for a fixed number of years before individual ashes are moved to the collective interment space.<sup>3</sup>

Providers of *eitai kuyōbo* use the concept of *eitai kuyō* 永代供養 in a new context. *Eitai kuyō* in the conventional family grave system implies that the buried dead will receive memorial care from a temple priest as long as the deceased’s stem family line continues, assuming that the family regularly makes appropriate donations to the temple priest. Colloquially the term *eitai kuyō* invokes the image of the deceased eternally resting in peace. This image is justifiable when people in a given community maintain the strong ideology that all stem families, once established, should be perpetuated. However, in postindustrial Japan, many families lack successors but do not necessarily adopt them to continue their family lines. *Eitai kuyōbo* speak to this reality, as they are predominantly graves for individuals with no successors. This deployment of *eitai kuyō* in a new grave system allows grave providers to market images of postmortem well-being and peaceful rest in postindustrial Japan where the perpetuation of family lines is no longer taken for granted. Furthermore, unlike the homeless souls’ grave that houses the nameless dead, a number of *eitai kuyōbo* allow the deceased’s names (pre-mortem or posthumous) to be displayed so that the deceased’s individual identities would be preserved. Therefore, *eitai kuyōbo* may shift the discussion of posthumous existence away from

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<sup>2</sup> There are *eitai kuyōbo* established by Shintō institutions, though they are not as common as those maintained by Buddhist ones (Rowe 2006: 67–69).

<sup>3</sup> Before the arrival of *eitai kuyōbo*, cemetery providers often avoided selling a grave plot to childless couples, permanently single people, and divorced childless women. When a buyer is childless or permanently single without a grave successor and a grave is abandoned without succession, it is expensive and time-consuming for a cemetery provider to remove the remains, demolish the stone structure, and resell the plot.

the undesirable fate of becoming homeless souls when those without successors consider their postmortem fate (cf. Mori 2000: 132).

The scattering of ashes is another new mortuary strategy, and may be chosen for a variety of reasons. The deceased-to-be may choose it because he or she enjoys hiking or surfing. He or she may select scattering because of aesthetics; the sea or a mountain, as opposed to a 'small, dark' grave (*semakute kurai* 狭くて暗い), is often described as a beautiful, spacious posthumous destination. The deceased-to-be may also choose ash scattering because he or she is critical of profit-oriented Buddhist priests and funeral companies; the choice of ash scattering avoids making them richer. Like *eitai kuyōbo*, ash scattering may also be selected because it is inexpensive (starting around US\$1,000) or because the deceased-to-be has no grave successor.

Furthermore, rather than following the normative rules designating burial partners in a family, some people choose their own burial partners and exclude others who are normally entitled to be buried together. In a family grave, generations of married couples are expected to rest together, but some people may choose to be buried separately from their spouse or in-laws. In particular, a wife in an unhappy marriage may refuse to be buried in the husband's family grave with her spouse and in-laws and opt to have her remains interred in *eitai kuyōbo*. Inoue called this phenomenon a 'posthumous divorce' (see Inoue 2003: 119–201, 221). In this context, a grave is considered a posthumous residence and the deceased-to-be chooses her coresidents. Although it is not a common case, during my fieldwork I met an older male informant who chose scattering because he did not want to have his remains interred with his wife's.

In sum, the ideals of choice and deceased-centeredness shed light upon recent developments in mortuary practices. Mortuary practices are no longer the 'tradition' more or less automatically enacted by survivors. The deceased-to-be is increasingly involved in the decision-making processes that determine mortuary rites and a posthumous residence. By making his or her choice, the deceased-to-be becomes a planner and consumer of his or her own (imagined) ending, which may come into conflict with those who firmly believe in the older, survivor-centered framework of death.

#### *Ash Scattering and the Grave-Free Promotion Society*

A citizens' group, the Grave-Free Promotion Society, conducted its first ash scattering ceremony in 1991. At least until the beginning of the twenty-first

century the group was the main player performing ash scattering ceremonies in Japan. Though a number of funeral companies have adopted scattering ceremonies developed by the GFPS and commercialized ash scattering, the GFPS still remains dominant today, having conducted 1,406 ceremonies for 2,446 deceased persons (as of March 12, 2009).

The GFPS was founded by a former *Asahi Shinbun* journalist, Yasuda Mutsuhiko, to promote the 'freedom to choose a mortuary practice' (*sosō no jiyū* 葬送の自由) and, in particular, a 'natural' mortuary practice (*shizensō* 自然葬). Ash scattering is considered one example of a natural mortuary practice that is environmentally friendlier than interment in a family grave, as President Yasuda finds large-scale for-profit cemeteries destructive to the natural environment. For instance, room for such a cemetery is often made on a hillside in the outskirts of an urban area by cutting down trees. President Yasuda used to work as a freelance journalist specializing in water conservation issues, and he proposed ash scattering as a way of avoiding what he considers to be environmentally destructive cemeteries.

While many members of the GFPS see the society's environmental focus as significant, they tend not to be enthusiastic environmentalists. The majority of people who have chosen ash scattering so far are aging urbanites born during the demographic transition period (1925–1950) when Japan was in transition from a high-birthrate and high-mortality society to a low-birthrate and low-mortality one (Kawano 2010). This means that these urbanites have many adult siblings, as a given society's birthrate typically decreases in the demographic transition that follows a decline in mortality rates. Historically speaking, those born during the demographic transition period experienced massive postwar migration of rural youth to urban areas during the 1950s and 60s in Japan's postwar recovery. While the eldest sons were typically expected to stay with their aging parents in their rural hometowns, many younger sons and daughters migrated to the booming urban centers and established nuclear-family households. The eldest son often inherited the family grave in his rural hometown. As only one child is allowed to inherit a family grave, many urban migrants are in the position to establish a grave for themselves. Yet, they do not necessarily have a culturally preferred grave successor. Most postwar migrants are not childless; the norm was to get married in their twenties and have an average of two children. However, their children may postpone marriage or remain permanently unmarried, reducing their parents' chance of having a grandchild. Children may also lead busy, mobile lives, thereby making it even more uncertain that a family grave, whether inherited or

newly established, will be properly cared for. Lacking a successor, a family grave will be 'returned' to the grave provider; the family's financial investment in a new family grave (it may easily cost US\$20,000 or more in the Tokyo area) may be lost in a generation or two. As ash scattering involves no acquisition or maintenance of a permanent memorial site, it provides a memorial option to aging urbanites without a culturally preferred successor, a family grave to inherit, or both (Kawano 2010). Conversely, it is less common for people with both a successor and a family grave to turn to the practice of ash scattering.

Ash scattering provides the deceased-to-be with a way of lightening survivors' ritual obligation by reducing the scale of their financial (e.g., maintenance fees) and caregiving duties (e.g., grave visits, cleaning). An older couple with married-out daughters but no sons, for example, may find ash scattering practical. Once married out, a daughter adopts her husband's family name and is expected to tend his family's grave. Her married brother, if any, is expected to inherit her natal family's grave. Yet, as families are smaller today, not all married-out daughters have a male sibling. In this context, by choosing ash scattering, senior persons can take charge of their own mortuary strategy through responsible, thoughtful planning and avoid overburdening their married-out daughters, who are not culturally obliged to memorialize the deceased-to-be. The new ideals of choice and deceased-centeredness transform the deceased-to-be from passive care recipients into managers of their posthumous existence.

### *Ash Scattering and Mortuary Conventions*

The GFPS is a nonprofit organization run by volunteers, including the president and ceremonial directors who help the bereaved conduct their scattering ceremonies. Unlike a funeral company, the GFPS performs ceremonies only for its members. Because the society is a citizens' movement, its official ideology does not involve the discussions of veneration of the deceased (*kuyō* 供養), the pacification of spirits (*chinkon* 鎮魂), retribution (*tatari* 祟り), the otherworld (*anoyo* あの世), or a Buddhist paradise (*gokuraku* 極楽). Through ash scattering, the deceased 'return to nature' (*shizen ni kaeru* 自然に還る) and rest peacefully at sea or on a mountainside. While the GFPS is ideologically and legally defined as a nonreligious movement, its members do maintain various levels of religious commitment. Some are followers of Christianity or New Religions, such as Sōka Gakkai, while others retain family-based institutionalized

affiliations (Buddhist or Shintō) with varying degrees of individual commitment and levels of participation in institutionalized religious practices. Others remain completely unattached to religious institutions.

By examining the GFPS ideologies found in its publications, non-GFPS members often assume that ash scatterers reject normative mortuary practices. However, a closer look at the society's day-to-day routines and individual members' accounts of memorial activities for the deceased kin reveal a more complex story. Many GFPS members blend ash scattering and conventional mortuary practices in a variety of ways, while it is true that some try to stay away from them.

When asked, a GFPS volunteer will often explain ash scattering as an alternative to interment, thereby partly reconciling scattering and the conventional mortuary process (Kawano 2010). Therefore, whether or not to conduct a funeral and parting ceremony is up to the deceased-to-be or the bereaved. Furthermore, whether or not to conduct post-death memorial rites is yet another issue. GFPS members maintain diverse patterns of memorial cycles, some conducting a full-scale Buddhist funeral and memorial rites, others skipping certain rites or replacing Buddhist rites with nonreligious ones (Kawano 2004). Most commonly the bereaved memorialize the deceased whose ashes were scattered by maintaining either a formal domestic altar (most often Buddhist, but sometimes Shintō) or an informal shelf, with or without Buddhist religious iconographies and practices to venerate the dead (*ibid.*). The bereaved may or may not have ancestral tablets made for the deceased whose ashes were scattered. Some have individual tablets made for the deceased and regularly burn incense and make offerings at their domestic altars. The bereaved who do not maintain formal altars tend to display the photographs of the deceased and may still make offerings, such as water, coffee, or flowers. A female informant in her sixties maintains a small, apartment-size altar, which accommodates a single tablet representing all the ancestors of her husband's stem family. She said she did not have a separate tablet made for her husband because her husband is part of the generations of ancestors represented by the tablet. When her son said he would have no place to venerate his deceased father once his ashes were scattered, the informant told him that his father would 'come over' if called upon at the Buddhist altar. They had a family gathering in front of the altar during the Festival of the Dead. Meanwhile, a female informant in her eighties maintains an informal shelf where her deceased husband's photograph is displayed, along with his parents' photographs. She burns



incense there. The deceased wished to receive no posthumous name and to have no ancestral tablet made, and the bereaved honored these wishes of the deceased. Therefore, the choice of ash scattering is a measure of neither nonreligious nor non-Buddhist orientations of the deceased or the bereaved.

Ash scattering has received mixed reactions from Buddhist priests; some are supportive of the practice while others are not (Rowe 2003). The most common criticism of it I heard from pro-Buddhists (including laypersons and Buddhist priests) was that the practice violates the respect for one's ancestors. A fifty-three-year-old Shingon priest, for example, stated, "Just throwing the ashes like unwanted objects is disrespectful" (Sato 2004). Here the GFPS practice of reverently returning the deceased to nature is understood as an act of carelessly discarding the remains. Furthermore, ash scattering is sometimes misunderstood as a practice that seeks to replace funerals or memorial rites, which, however, is not accurate. It is not unusual for the opponents of ash scattering to contend that the practice is fundamentally incompatible with Buddhism. A member of the GFPS who is also a Buddhist priest, however, stated that ash scattering is consistent with 'authentic' or 'original' Buddhism (as opposed to funeral Buddhism, which is sometimes considered to be a degenerated version of Buddhism; see Tanabe 2008). According to this priest, the religious goal set by the historical Buddha did not involve the performance of funerals for followers. Moreover, having the remains scattered is more consistent with the Buddhist ideal of nonattachment.

A notable Buddhist response to the GFPS movement is *jumokusō* 樹木葬, or burial in the woods, initiated by the priest Chisaka Genpō of Shōunji Temple 祥雲寺 in Iwate prefecture (see Rowe 2003, 2006). Like the GFPS, this burial practice highlights its nature-centered approach by aiming to conserve the hills and mountains in the area where the burial site is located. No stone monuments or underground interment structures are constructed where the deceased's remains are buried. Instead of erecting a gravestone, a native tree is planted. Unlike ash scattering, *jumokusō*, however, is limited to a legally designated cemetery, and the grave plot may or may not be inherited by a descendant (Chisaka 2003: 166). Those who purchase the right to use the *jumokusō* cemetery plot may be asked (but not required) to contribute labor to maintain the forest where the cemetery is located (ibid.: 165).

Buddhist priests' reactions to scattering vary, and so do the effects of scattering on GFPS members' institutional affiliation with a Buddhist temple.

Some GFPS members decided to sever their ties with their family's Buddhist temple because its head priest was opposed to ash scattering. One member said that his religious identity as a Buddhist has not been affected by his loss of parishioner status at his former family temple. He believes that being a Buddhist has nothing to do with his institutional affiliation. In some cases, GFPS members experienced conflicts with Buddhist priests when trying to move their ancestral remains from their grave located in their family temple's cemetery. If people intend to have their kin's remains reburied in a new grave, the official permission to do so (*kaisō kyokasho* 改葬許可書) must be issued by the cemetery provider. Although ash scattering is legally distinct from reburial and thus does not require the permission, some Buddhist priests tell GFPS members that they will not issue the permission for reburial in order to allow ash scattering. When a GFPS member attempts to retrieve and scatter the ashes of ancestors' remains interred in a family grave, though this is not the typical type of ash scattering, he or she may also sever the tie with the family's Buddhist temple on the grounds that no more ritual services from the temple are needed. Therefore, for a Buddhist priest, ash scattering may lead to the loss of a parishioner, which negatively affects his financial stability and mortuary authority.

### *Conclusion*

New mortuary ideologies and choices meet the needs of people who are searching for individuality and are pursuing diverse life courses in postindustrial Japan. However, these new developments do not straightforwardly indicate a complete departure from Buddhist or commercial mortuary practices. People who choose a new practice may or may not reject Buddhist practices, and a new practice such as ash scattering may be reconciled with conventional mortuary processes. Nonetheless, to some extent, the development of new mortuary practices has led to public questioning of the taken-for-granted mortuary authority of Buddhist priests and the monopoly of death-related knowledge by the for-profit death industry. In particular, ash scattering as developed by the GFPS provides a notable case of this public challenge to mortuary authorities. The development of new mortuary ideals and practices since the 1990s, however, has not eliminated the older, survivor-oriented framework of death or ended Buddhist dominance over matters of death. Rather, the result has been a shift toward a pluralization of mortuary authorities

and the sparkling of lively debates concerning the nature and purpose of mortuary practices.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This contention, however, does not imply that diversity has never characterized the state of Japanese mortuary practices in the past (see Kawano 2010). Furthermore, mortuary practices became a matter of public debate in the past; for example, consider the government's ban on cremation and the development of Shintō funerals during the Meiji Period (see Bernstein 2006).

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PART IV

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION FOR A NEW AGE



## THEOSOPHY AND RELATED MOVEMENTS IN JAPAN

KENTA KASAI

### *Context of Theosophies*

In the history of esoteric and occult thought, there are two movements which are called 'Theosophy'. The first one, Christian Theosophy, was defined by Antoine Faivre as the various manifestations of Western esoteric thought from the end of fifteenth century onward. This thought is characterized by (1) a sense of a God-Man-Nature correspondence; (2) a mythic interpretation of Judeo-Christian Revelation in the Bible; (3) and the attempt to cultivate direct access to "superior worlds" (Faivre 2006: 259). The second one is the Theosophical Society, an esoteric movement established at the end of nineteenth century (Santucci 2006: 1114). This chapter focuses on the latter, the Theosophical Society, and on the history of its related movements in Japan. Influenced by earlier Western esoteric thought, it offered detailed and subtle ideas on the structure of the human mind and body, the mechanism of reincarnation, the geography of this world and the other world, and on the creation of the world and the historical development of humanity. It also developed a system of spiritual training and consciousness transformation based on these theories. Though the Theosophical Society itself experienced schisms and did not have a large membership, their ideas, theories, and techniques were incorporated by various other religious groups, so it has had a wide range of influence in the history of modern religions. The Theosophical Society mediated and actualized both Western and Eastern thought, as well as ancient and modern philosophies and metaphysical ideas in connection with social reformation.

The following discussion describes the Theosophical Society's influence in Japan, where the number of its members and the range of its activities has been rather limited. In what follows, I will look at two aspects of Theosophy—the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner and the activity of once 'the world teacher', Krishnamurti and his followers in Japan. In addition, it is important not only to refer to the activities of the Theosophical Society after 1945, but to examine how Theosophy was accepted when it first came to Japan. That is, in Japan, Theosophy was first taken to be a

group espousing a form of Western Buddhism. Later, certain intellectuals introduced it as a system of gnosis, or mystical knowledge for spiritual development. I will also offer a brief glimpse of its application to the arts and education. Theosophy developed most of the ideas of spirit, mind, body and the other worlds which were also shared by so called 'New Age' religions and New Religious Movements in Japan, including Agonshū 阿含宗 and Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教.

### *Establishment of the Theosophical Society*

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) has had far flung influence on esoteric and occult religions even to the twenty-first century. She was born in 1831 in Ekaterinoslav, Russia, and, after having travelled around the world, eventually emigrated to the United States in 1873, where she became a popular psychic. In New York, she met lawyers Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and William Quan Judge (1851–1896) who shared the same interest in spiritualism and together they established the Theosophical Society in 1875. The initial stage of the doctrine of Theosophy can be found in her two volume work *Isis Unveiled*, which was published in 1877, and which is based on a mix of Indian and Tibetan mysticism and elements of the philosophy and practice of the spiritualism movement prevalent at that time.

Blavatsky and Olcott moved to India in 1879, then to Sri Lanka in 1880, where they continued to learn about Buddhism (Ishii 2003: 44–48). By 1882 the Theosophical Society was becoming an international organization and she moved its headquarters to Adyar, (now Chennai), India. While there she developed the idea of the *mahatmas*, or 'great masters', who, they were believed, beneficially lead all humanity to goodness beyond any discrimination due to race or class (Santucci 2006: 1116–17).

As a result, a member of the Theosophical Society could be of any faith but was expected to support the following three cosmopolitan objectives:

- 1) To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, or caste.
- 2) To promote the study of the sacred writings of Asia, namely, Hindu, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian; to study the relationship between science and religion, and to promote understanding towards a single world religion.
- 3) To investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible, and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in man especially. (Blavatsky 1987: 39)



In line with the first objective, Theosophists participated in a variety of social reform activities in connection with the popular nationalist movement in India that arose to contest British rule. In regard to the second and third objectives, Blavatsky and Olcott combined both occultist theories and various spiritualist practices in order to try to communicate with past 'Masters'. Occultism and aspects of Eastern esotericism provided ideas about the structure of human bodies, spirits, and about the mechanism of reincarnation. Their successors subsequently expanded on those ideas to develop a cosmopolitan ideology, and an inter-religious theory that included what they considered to be the 'technology' to facilitate human potential. The Theosophists promoted a number of unique ideas such as souls as subtle bodies; reincarnation, and karma; mystical training (a kind which is unique to Theosophists); a hierarchy of Masters and initiation to the higher stages of spiritual development; the evolution of the world, humanity, and of individuals; and 'Akashic' records of the ancient world (Bailey 1922: 40). These ideas in turn have been used and quoted by a many people and groups in various ways.

In addition to the above mentioned cosmopolitan motto and mystical practices, Theosophists, at least at an early stage in their development, also identified themselves with Buddhism. They established a Theosophical Buddhist Association in Sri Lanka and supported Buddhist children's education there beginning in 1880 (Prothero 1996: 123–27). Olcott even wrote *The Buddhist Catechism*, an introductory book on Buddhism (Olcott 1903). Certain groups of Japanese Buddhists heard about them and took them at first to be 'Western Buddhist'. The overwhelming encounter of Japan with the civilizations and religions of the West, including a new version of Christianity, caused them to promote some 'Eastern' traditions such as Buddhism as both a cultural bridge and a way to resist the tidal wave of Western social and cultural influences. Therefore they first welcomed the Theosophist Olcott as a representative of 'the Western Buddhism'.

#### *Vicissitudes of the Theosophical Society*

It might be convenient to divide the history of the Theosophical Society into a few periods in reference to our interest on Japanese religions, because it is a complex worldwide movement and it has experienced schisms that have splintered the movement into multiple groups. The first founders' period is also the period when Theosophy was claiming an affinity with Buddhism. The second is successors' period when the Theosophical Society's interest moved to the areas of both social justice

and human reformation. Various Japanese intellectuals came to learn of those two aspects of Theosophy, each according to his or her personal interests. But, it was only after World War II that most Theosophical literature became available in Japanese and accessible to a general readership. This is the third period. Here I will provide a chronology of the Theosophy movement in reference to its relationship with Japanese society.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. Chronology of Theosophy, its Related Movement, and Japanese Society

Year	Japanese Era		Event
1868	Keiō	4	With <i>shinbutsu bunri rei</i> 神仏分離令 (Separation of Buddhism and Shintō) the state abolishes its patronage of Buddhism. It results in the <i>haibutsu kishaku</i> 廃仏毀釈 (Movement to abolish Buddhism).
1875	Meiji	8	Establishment of the Theosophical Society in New York.
1877	Meiji	10	Blavatsky's <i>Isis Unveiled</i> is published.
1880	Meiji	13	Olcott and Blavatsky are ordained as 'Buddhists' in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist Theosophical Society is established to support Buddhist children's education in Sri Lanka.
1882	Meiji	15	Japanese monk Mizutani Jinkai corresponds with Olcott.
1886	Meiji	19	Translation of Olcott's <i>The Buddhist Catechism</i> (仏教問答). Inoue's <i>Bukkyō Kinjin</i> 仏教金針 (Golden Rules of Buddhism) is published and encourages a renewal movement in Japanese Buddhism.
1887	Meiji	20	Matsumoto Matsutarō corresponds with Judge. The Hanseikai 反省会 (The Association for Reflection) is organized for temperance and develops an international network of 'Western Buddhists' including Theosophists.
1888	Meiji	21	<i>Hanseikai Zasshi</i> 反省会雑誌 (Journal for Hanseikai) and <i>Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō</i> 海外仏教事情 (International Trends on Buddhism) include numerous articles on Theosophy (1888–1891).
1889	Meiji	22	Olcott visits Japan and stays for 4 months presenting 76 lectures and attending various ceremonies and banquets. Many Theosophist publications are translated into Japanese.

<sup>1</sup> Toshio Akai's website, "Shinchigaku Kanren Nenpyō 神智学関連年表" (Akai 2004) served as a helpful reference to organize this chronology. See also the chronology of Theosophist's activities in Asia from a Japanese Buddhist viewpoint in Satō 2008: 584–95.

Table 1. (*cont.*)

Year	Japanese Era		Event
1891	Meiji	24	Though Olcott revisits Japan, Japanese Buddhists are no longer enthusiastic about his ideas.
1893	Meiji	26	With Shaku Sōen, Toki Horyū, Noguchi Fukudō, Hirai Kinza attends the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Meeting with various religionist intellectuals including Theosophists, Hirai nurtures his idea of synthetic religion.
1895	Meiji	28	The Theosophical Society splits into the American Section (Point Loma group) and the Indo-Europe Section (Adyar group). Katherine Tingley, leader of the American Section of the Theosophical Society, visits Japan.
1898	Meiji	31	Tingley establishes the Universal Brotherhood and the Theosophical Society in Point Loma, California.
1902	Meiji	35	Rudolf Steiner joins the Theosophical Society.
1909	Meiji	42	C.W. Leadbeater 'discovers' Jiddu Krishnamurti proclaiming him as the 'Vehicle' for the World Teacher. Japanese Businessmen led by Shibusawa Eiichi travel across the United States and visit Point Loma where they are impressed by the moral education of children of the Raja Yoga Academy.
1910	Meiji	43	Nakajima Rikizō, professor of Ethics of the University of Tokyo, visits Point Loma.
1912	Meiji	45	The Order of the Star in the East is established under the leadership of Krishnamurti. Rudolf Steiner leaves the Theosophical Society.
1913	Taisho	2	Kumamoto Aritaka summarizes Steiner's thought on education in the intellectual journal <i>Teiyū</i> 丁酉. This is the first introduction of Steiner's thought to Japan.
1920	Taisho	9	Suzuki Daisetz Teitarō and Beatrice Lane Suzuki join the Tokyo International Lodge of the Theosophical Society.
1925	Taisho	14	Kumamoto Aritaka writes a series of essays on Steiner's thought in the <i>Kōyasan Jihō</i> 高野山時報 (Bulletin of Mt. Kōya as the Head of Shingon Buddhist Sects), a publication geared principally to Buddhist priests. He presents Steiner's ideas as a profound expression of Western meditation thought and human potential cultivation.

Table 1. (*cont.*)

Year	Japanese Era		Event
1928	Showa	3	Formation of the Mahāyāna Lodge in Kyoto. The Suzukis move from Tokyo to Kyoto as D.T. assumes a position at Ōtani University.
1929	Showa	4	Krishnamurti dissolves the Order of the Star in the East.
1945	Showa	20	End of the Second World War.
1953	Showa	28	Miura Sekizō establishes Ryūōkai 竜王会 (Dragon-King association) for the dissemination of Theosophy and Raja Yoga.
1975	Showa	50	Koyasu Michiko's <i>Myunchen no Shogakusei</i> ミュンヘンの小学生 (A Primary School Kid in Munich) is published as a popular initiation of Waldorf (Steiner's) education.
1985	Showa	60	Nihon Jinchigaku Kyōkai 日本人智学協会 (Japanese Association of Anthroposophy) is established by Takahashi Iwao without authorization of the General Anthroposophy Society, Dornach, Switzerland.
1987	Showa	62	Tokyo Steiner School was established as the first institution for Waldorf education in Japan and Asia.
2000	Heisei	12	Anthroposophical Society of Japan was established by Agematsu Yūji under the licence of General Anthroposophical Society, Dornach, Switzerland.

In the first period, Theosophists practiced a kind of spiritualism led by Blavatsky, and the teaching was developed around the 'Masters' message. Followers in this first stage came mostly from spiritualist movements. Because Olcott and Blavatsky were opposed to organized churches, their teaching tended to be critical of Christianity. After they relocated their headquarters to Adyar, India, their thought transformed rapidly to incorporate aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism, so Japanese Buddhists mistook it to be a Western expression of Buddhism. Initially too, Theosophists considered Buddhism as the most ancient religion in the East and as the origin of esotericism.

After the death of Blavatsky in 1891, numerous movements were inspired by the Theosophical Society. This stage of Theosophy is also characterized by the effort to devise methods of developing human potential. Blavatsky and Olcott were succeeded by a second generation of leaders who were also considered to be psychics and who began to develop a theoretical base for

the Theosophical mystical disciplines and exercises. Some also held to an idea of a Maitreya (future world leader and savior) figure or 'vehicle of the World Teacher' and they tried to reorganize the Theosophical Society as a messianic movement. This soon gave way to a period characterized by efforts directed toward social reformation and social activism. Theosophy offered general ideas and individual members became active in various social reform movements in areas such as education and women's liberation. They also advocated vegetarianism, and were active in the temperance movement in India. A leading figure in the Theosophical Society at that time, Alice A. Bailey (1880–1949), was instrumental not only in organizing Theosophical theories, but also developed a forward-looking view on education that appealed both to the intellect and the spirit. It was published as *Education in the New Age* (1954) which provided the nucleus for the many of the ideas that were incorporated in the charter statement by the UN sponsored organization, UNESCO (Iwama 2005: 35–42).

Theosophy also continued to present a critique of Christianity, particularly in regard to the exercise of authority in the established Churches, which among other aspects, publicly acknowledged and supported the social and spiritual authority and leadership of men over women. Female leadership is not rare in the history of the Theosophical Society, though this is generally not the case in Japan, with the exceptions of Beatrice Lane Suzuki (enthusiastic practitioner of Theosophy and later became wife of D.T. Suzuki), and Tanaka Emiko, the second generation leader of Theosophy in Japan.

#### *Key Figures for Theosophy and its Subsequent Development in Japan*

The Theosophists who were most influential in Japan apart from Olcott were Annie Besant (1847–1933), the second president of the Society; Charles W. Leadbeater (1847–1934), one of the leading theorists of the society; and Jiddu Krishnamurti (1896–1986), who was originally considered as a 'vehicle' for the World Teacher. When Besant began to present the child Krishnamurti as a reincarnation of Christ (a claim Krishnamurti himself later renounced), she was strongly criticized by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), and this led to Steiner's disassociating himself from Besant and Leadbeater. Though Steiner took the leadership of the German Section of the Theosophical Society, he soon declared complete independence from it, and turned himself to the establishment of the General Anthroposophy Society.

Besant was a social activist and was reputed for a time to have psychic ability. She helped to broaden the scope of the interests of the Theosophical Society beyond that of the spiritualistic focus of Blavatsky. As an activist she supported self rule for both Ireland and India, and she eventually became the Chairperson of the Indian National Congress and campaigned for independence of India from England. It is insightful to note that Maria Montessori (1870–1952), the founder of Montessori education, regarded as an alternative education system popular in Japan, was also a friend of Besant's and lived at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar during World War II with her son Mario, from 1939 to 1946 (Iwama 2005: 53–56).

In 1909 C.W. Leadbeater found the 14 year old boy Krishnamurti on the beach attached to the property of the Theosophical Society in Adyar. Leadbeater, who was considered to be clairvoyant, thought the boy could be the 'vehicle of the World Teacher' and the reincarnation of Christ or Maitreya. Besant and Leadbeater put him through a rigorous course of training and education hoping to help him to progress spiritually and formed the Order of the Star in the East around him. Krishnamurti's first book, *At the Feet of the Master*, was translated into several languages, including Japanese. However, in 1929, he declared the dissolution of the Order, and renounced the notion that he was the 'World Teacher' as had been depicted by the Theosophical Society, and subsequently devoted his life to speaking and writing as an independent spiritual thinker.

Rudolf Steiner was an Austrian social thinker, philosopher and esotericist, who attempted to find an epistemological synthesis between science and religion by the proper recognition of the structure of spirit, mind, body and the world. The basis of this epistemology was derived in large part from his research on the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, publishing two works on the subject: *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception* (1886) and *Goethe's Conception of the World* (1897). After publishing 'Goethe's Secret Revelation' suggesting an esoteric reading for *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*, he was invited to the German Section of the Theosophical Society to speak on Nietzsche. This series of lectures resulted in his being elected as the head of the section. However, his strong objection to Leadbeater and Besant's pronouncements about Krishnamurti led to a split in 1912 or 1913. Steiner and the majority of the members of the German section of the Society had formed a new group, the Anthroposophical Society (Santucci 2006: 1121).

*Theosophy's Pre-War Encounter with Japanese Buddhists and Intellectuals*

The first encounter of Japanese intellectuals with the Theosophical Society was based on the assumption that it was a form of 'Western Buddhism'. With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Japanese government sought to achieve a strict differentiation between Shintō and Buddhism, while throwing its weight behind the former. Japanese Buddhists experienced a difficult time as a result of the subsequent *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 movement to abolish Buddhism. Though it did not last long, Buddhists experienced various hardships such as the confiscation of temple property and possessions (bells, Buddha images, etc.), the transformation of temples into Shintō shrines, the enforcement of exclaustation of monks and at times requiring them to become Shintō priests. Also, perceived superstitions embedded in Buddhist folklore and Buddhist religious culture and rituals were considered to be obstacles to national progress and development. Along with pressure from within, Buddhists were confronted with a new form of competition due to a surge of Christian missionaries entering Japan during this period. So, Buddhists in Japan felt they needed allies in the West, especially those who were using or discovering Buddhism to be a 'modern' corrective to Christianity. Concerned youth among those Buddhists looked for a way to travel and study abroad. Theosophists who embraced Buddhist, Indian, and other Eastern philosophies were seen at first as Buddhists, and as allies who shared the same Buddhist wisdom.

Therefore, the Theosophist network was warmly welcomed by Japanese Buddhists until greater familiarity with it caused it to be deemed simply as an eclectic form of Western spiritualism with a preference for 'Eastern thought'. Initially there was correspondence between the Japanese priest Mizutani Jinkai and Olcott in 1882. Then Imadate Tosui (1855–1931) translated Olcott's *The Buddhist Catechism* (Madras, 1881) into Japanese in 1886 as *Bukkyō Mondō* 仏教問答<sup>2</sup> under the arrangement of Akamatsu Renjō, one of the Steering Committee members of Nishi Honganji 西本願寺, Headquarters temple of Jōdo Shinshū Honganji School 浄土真宗本願寺派 (True Pure Land Buddhism). In 1887, the Hanseikai 反省会 (The Association for Reflection) was organized as an association promoting temperance

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<sup>2</sup> Yoshinaga (2004) has a "List of Articles on Theosophy in Meiji 20s." Also see Akai 2007: 55–79. Articles on Theosophy in the *Jōdo Kyōhō* (Jōdoshū periodical) and reactions of Japanese Buddhists to Olcott's visit to Japan are also enumerated and described in Ishii 2003: 43–54.

arising out of the Jōdo Shinshū Honganji School with its own journal, *Hanseikai Zasshi* 反省会雑誌 (Journal for the Hanseikai, now published as *Chūo Kōron* 中央公論). It also developed an international network of 'White Buddhists', including Theosophists. One of its members, Matsumoto Matsutarō, corresponded with William Judge and identified him as a Buddhist. One famous Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist priest, Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911), considered Theosophy to be a form of Southeast Asian Buddhism. At that time there was frequent correspondence between Theosophists and Japanese Buddhist monks, so that a series of articles on Theosophy was included in Jōdo Shinshū's *Hanseikai Zasshi* and *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* 海外仏教事情 (Current Western Buddhism) in the 1920s.

Among others, Hirai Kinza (1859–1916), a philosopher and English teacher, and a monk Noguchi Fukudō (Zenshirō) (1864–?) played a crucial role in inviting Olcott to Japan in 1889. Olcott, enthusiastic to promote his 'revitalization of Buddhism', visited Japan and stayed four months presenting 76 lectures and attending a variety of ceremonies and banquets. His lectures on Buddhism were also translated into Japanese. He brought an official Buddhist flag with five colours to Japan and encouraged young Japanese Buddhists to organize a Young Men's Buddhist Association. However, in 1891, when Olcott revisited Japan, Japanese Buddhists were no longer sympathizing with his ideas because they had come to feel that what he espoused was Theosophy rather than Buddhism (despite his public conversion to Buddhism in Ceylon) (Satō 2008: 231–48).

Hirai was one of the speakers at The World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He presented an eloquent lecture titled "Synthetic Religion," his version of a perennial philosophy which espoused a belief that every religion shares a common element. It displays a clear correspondence to Theosophy. Later Hirai became a Unitarian and organized the Sanmajikai 三摩地会 (The Samadhi Association) for psychic meditation training.<sup>3</sup>

### *Theosophy as a Source of Moral Religion*

In the 1900s, though Theosophy was no longer taken as a form of Buddhism, it inspired various intellectuals. Especially among ex-Christian intellectuals, the ideas in Theosophy were examined to promote pluralistic

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<sup>3</sup> There has not been much research done on Hirai in the religio-historical context of Japan. On his life and work, see Yoshinaga 2007a.



moral disciplines and were incorporated together with Christian ideas. These thinkers were in search of a universal religion. Their focus was on facilitating moral education rather than on developing human potential, and so they found the Point Loma (California) Theosophists in the United States more favourable than Olcott's Adyar group.<sup>4</sup> Hirai Kinza and Viscount Shibusawa Eiichi (1840–1931) established the Kiitsu Kyōkai 帰一協会 (Association Concordia), a circle of intellectuals which included Naruse Jinzō (1858–1919, founder of Japan Women's University), Anesaki Masaharu (1873–1949, the first Religious Studies professor of the University of Tokyo), Inoue Enryō (1858–1919, founder of Tōyō University), and Nakajima Rikizō (1858–1918, Ethics professor of the University of Tokyo). They aimed at developing a new idealistic religion bringing together what they considered to be the best aspects of various religions (Anesaki 1951: 164). Anesaki also organized Teiyu Rinrikai 丁酉倫理会 (Teiyu Association of Ethics) in 1900 with the purpose of re-constructing religious ethics to relieve the chaos caused by the disharmony that arose as a result of the clash between Japanese customs derived from the ideals of feudal society (including unquestioning obedience to the authority), and Western thought which stressed the balance of rights and duties. Anesaki desired to find new principles for action which could be internalized by modern Japanese citizens beyond simple patriotism or obedience to a national authority (ibid.: 95).

Naruse and Nakajima visited Point Loma, California, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in America. Nakajima was impressed by their ability to nurture well-disciplined and intelligent children, and in 1913 he lectured on Theosophy at a gathering of the Kiitsu Kyōkai. He described how the academy helped students to cultivate a harmony of body, mind and spirit. He also noted the effort to establish a sense of respect between teacher and student and likened this to *bushidō* 武士道 or Japanese chivalry. Later, in his lecture for college students in 1916, Naruse presented the idea of the correspondence between the entity of the Spiritual Universe and the human spirit mediated by etheric Astral Light, using the 'aura concept' of Leadbeater (Setsu 1928: 332).

An interesting example of the encounter of Japanese business leaders with Theosophy can be found in Viscount Shibusawa and his trip with fifty Commercial Commissioners of Japan (representatives of Japanese

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<sup>4</sup> See Yoshinaga's three papers (2001, 2002, 2007b) on the religio-historical context of Theosophy and Japanese intellectuals concern in Meiji-Taisho era.

businessmen) to the United States in 1909. At that time, he visited the Point Loma community and the Raja Yoga Academy in San Diego, California. Shibusawa, ‘the Father of Japanese Capitalism’, and the founder of the First National Bank of Japan and the Tokyo Stock Exchange, was also an ardent social reformer who established the Japan Red Cross. He encouraged Japanese businessmen to develop their potential during this trip through encounters with concerned people in the United States (see Shibusawa Memorial Museum). Iwaya Sueo (Sazanami), one of the representatives who participated in this trip, gave his impression of the Point Loma visit with brief verbal sketches. In this short quotation, one can see that the Japanese businessmen were very surprised to encounter such well-disciplined children at the institute.

At the cape, set on a high hill with a splendid view, there is a round house with a vegetable garden. This is the Raja-Yoga Institute and the headquarters of the Theosophy association recently introduced around the world. . . . Men and women formed a small orchestra and played *Kimigayo* [Japanese National Anthem], . . . A boy gave a welcoming address in Japanese. . . . [Later] lovely girls from 3 or 4 to 7 or 8 years of age demonstrated their lessons, dances and games in turn! At the end, Ms. Tingley, the President of Institute gave an eloquent address to welcome us. . . . It is a distinguished Institute. Everything we see and hear is extraordinarily impressive. (Iwaya 1910: 221–23)<sup>5</sup>

The Theosophical Society of Point Loma also has had other connections with Japan. Edward Stanley Stevenson (1871–?), one of the members of the Point Loma Theosophical community, had once worked for the Japanese Naval Academy (Yokosuka Kikan Gakkō) in Yokosuka, Japan, as an English teacher. Among his colleagues was Asano Wasaburō (1874–1937), one of the influential spiritualist intellectuals in Japan, who afterwards resigned from his job and joined the new religious movement Ōmoto 大本. After Ōmoto was persecuted by the government, for among other things, the millennialism of the leader, Asano organized the Tokyo Shinrei Kagaku Kyōkai 東京心霊科学協会 (Tokyo Association for Psychic Science) which was very influential. Also, it was Stevenson who co-translated Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy* into Japanese with Utaka Hyōsaku (cf. Stevenson and Hyōsaku 1910).

Suzuki Daisetz Teitarō (1870–1966), the famous Zen Buddhist Scholar, with his wife Beatrice Lane Suzuki (1877–1939), was also involved in the history of the Theosophical Society in Japan after his experience as the

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<sup>5</sup> Regarding the community of Point Loma, also see Greenwalt 1955.

translator of the works of Swedenborg. In 1920, when Suzuki lived in Tokyo, he attended the meetings of the Theosophical Society Japan Lodge. He even hosted them in his home sometimes. Among the attendees were, Captain Kon Buhei (father of Kon Tōkō, a Naokishō award novelist), Jugaku Bunshō (1900–1992, scholar of English Literature and influential in the folk craft movement), Kōda Rohan (1867–1947, novelist and Taoist), and Utsuki Nishū (Jōdō Shinshū Monk). In 1928, when Suzuki moved to Kyoto to teach at Ōtani University, he became responsible for the management of the Mahāyāna Lodge, in Kyoto (see Algeo 2007).<sup>6</sup> This was just before the dissolution of the Order of the Star in the East by Krishnamurti in 1929.

*Publications on Krishnamurti, Theosophy and Anthroposophy*

Krishnamurti, once held to be the ‘vehicle’ of the World Teacher ‘discovered’ by Besant and Leadbeater, never visited Japan. Later in life, and shortly before his death, he did stop in Narita (Tokyo) airport, but just to connect flights (Ōno 1997; Takahashi 1992: 247). Some Japanese intellectuals were very much interested in his teachings and travelled to various sites around the world in order to attend his lectures. They also gathered together, creating study circles that focused on his teachings, and translated his books and speeches into Japanese. He symbolized for them an independent soul searching for freedom in religious and social thought over and against authoritarianism, much like the fourteenth century wandering Zen priest Ikkyū Sōjun or Haiku poet Matsuo Bashō in the seventeenth century.

Kon Tōkō (1898–1977), a Tendai priest and Naokishō Award winning popular novelist, assisted his father Captain Kon Buhei in publishing a translation of Krishnamurti’s first book *At the Feet of the Master* (1911) as *Arakan dō* (1925). Captain Kon was the member of the Theosophical Society and also one of the first members of The Order of the Star in the East. He coined the term *shinchigaku* 神智学 (knowledge of deity or god), currently used as the definitive translation for Theosophy, rather than *reichigaku* 霊智学 (knowledge of spirit, a term coined by Hirai Kinza). By using this term, he intended to differentiate Theosophy from spiritualism with which the former is often confused (Kon T. 1940: 332). The younger Kon also translated Leadbeater’s *Man Visible and Invisible* as *Shinpi teki*

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<sup>6</sup> On Daisetz’s general impression on Theosophy, see Suzuki 1999.

*ningen zō* (1940). In his introduction, novelist Kon summarized the objective of the book as to demonstrate a method for achieving a state that is without desire, which is considered to be a common theme among major religions such as Buddhism. Also, Kon Hidemi, younger brother of novelist Kon Tōkō, composed a symphonic poem originally written by Krishnamurti as “A Mountain Pass” and staged it in Tokyo around 1926 (Kon H. 1980).

Mary Lutyens’s biography of Krishnamurti, *The Years of Awakening; The Years of Fulfilment*, was translated and published in two volumes (1975, 1979) by new age publisher Merukumāru. It initiated renewed interest in Krishnamurti in Japan. The Krishnamurti Center has also issued periodicals with translations of his lectures such as *Krishnamurti no kotoba* (Words of Krishnamurti; see cover at figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

Some Japanese scholars of Indian philosophy have also studied the thought of Krishnamurti. Tamaki Kōshirō, a scholar on Buddhism and a practitioner of meditation, has done research into the life and thought of Krishnamurti and examined his central religious experience called ‘the process’ in the context of family tragedy and his confrontation with death (1987). Much of Krishnamurti’s writings and lectures are translated into Japanese and some are available in paperback.<sup>8</sup>

The development of Theosophy after World War II became clearer especially since the 1970s along with the dissemination of Japanese Seishin Sekai (New Age) Movement. Its prominent developments can be seen in its publications and activities.

Miura Sekizō (1883–1960) established a Theosophical group called the Ryūōkai 竜王会 in 1953. The Ryuō Bunko Library, the publishing division of the association has been active in publishing translations of the works of Blavatsky, Leadbeater, and Krishnamurti since the publication of its first journal, *Shijō ga no hikari* 至上我の光 (The Light of Supreme Atman; see cover in figure 2, 1954–) and subsequently has compiled them into collections of Theosophy translations.<sup>9</sup> The Ryūōkai association under the leadership with Tanaka Emiko, daughter of Miura, was authorized as the Theosophy Japan Lodge by the Headquarter of the

<sup>7</sup> *Kurishnamurti no kotoba* is a periodical of Krishnamurti Center, Tokyo.

<sup>8</sup> Ono includes a list of the activities of the local study centers in Japan and Japanese translations of Krishnamurti.

<sup>9</sup> Miura Sekizō also a cultivating teacher who had translated J.J. Rousseau’s *Emile*, and inspired the Education Renewal Movement in Taisho Era Japan (1912–1926) with his elder brother Miura Shūgo (see Miura 1913).

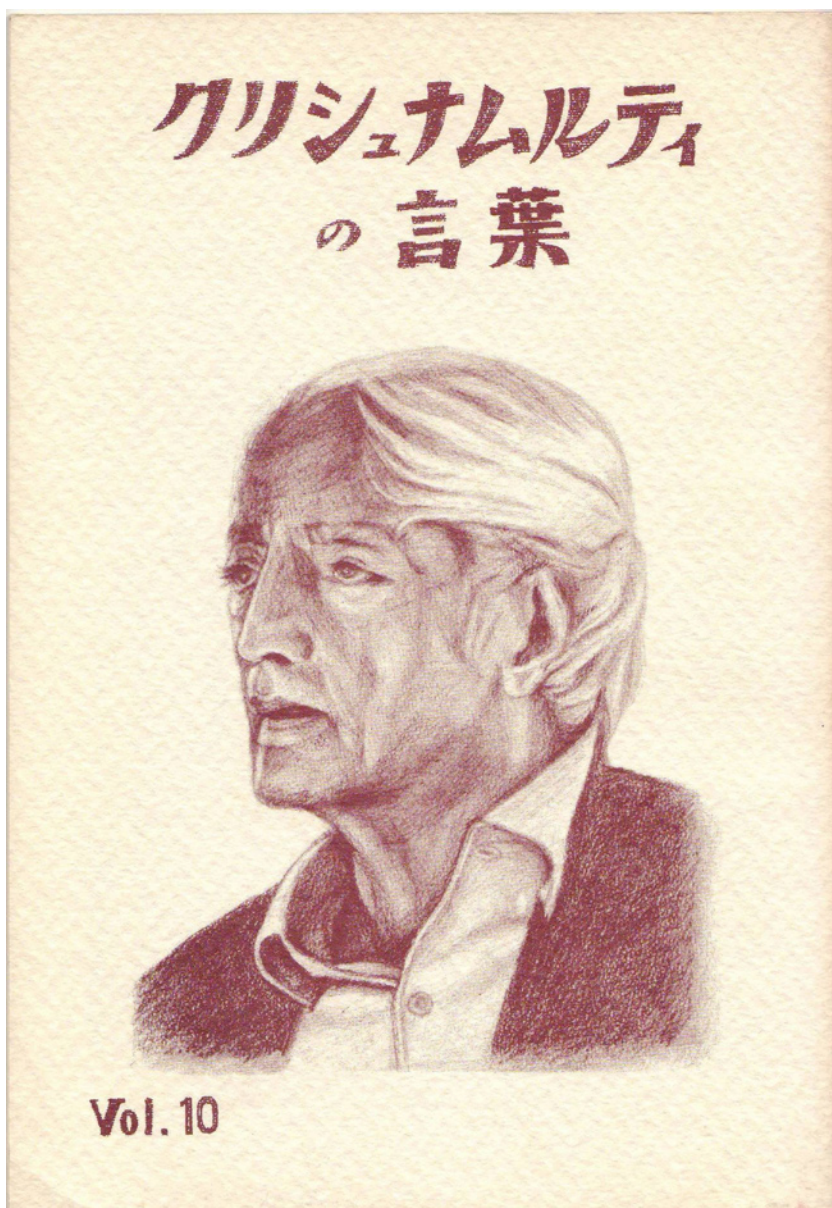


Figure 1. Cover of *Krishnamurti no kotoba* クリシュナムルティの言葉 (Words of Krishnamurti), vol. 10 (Tokyo: Krishnamurti Center, 1989)

Theosophical Society in Adyar, India. However, the Japan Lodge became independent from Ryūōkai association in 2003.

Publications of important Theosophists such as Arthur E. Powell (1882–1969) and Alice Bailey (1880–1949) have been issued by other publishers as well, including Tama Shuppan たま出版, or Shuppan Shinsha 出帆新社. Magazines oriented to esoteric subjects, like *tama* たま or *mū* ムー, featured articles and series on Theosophy. Because Theosophy offers a worldview which asserts the interconnection between humanity, Creation and the structure of the universe, and the importance of practicing of esoteric exercises, people who have an interest in uncovering human potential have tried to practice Theosophical exercises individually or in groups. Kosmos Library also offers books by or on Krishnamurti and Theosophy.

The Anthroposophy movement has been the most popular and successful of the Theosophy related movement in Japan since 1970s. The thought of Steiner was first introduced to the Japanese by a prominent mathematician and popular astrologist, Kumamoto Aritaka (1860–1943). He authored a series of introductions to Steiner's thought in an intellectual journal *Teiyu* 丁酉 around 1910 and *Kōyasan Jihō* 高野山時報 bulletin, a Shingon Buddhist periodical in the 1920s.<sup>10</sup> His summary of Steiner's ideas for children's education, "on the Application of the Visionary Psychology for religious, moralistic, emotional Concern" in *Teiyu* journal in December 1912 is the beginning of his enthusiastic elucidation of Steiner's thought (Kasai 2000: 151). However, there was no person to succeed him. After the Second World War, Steiner's thought was almost completely consigned to oblivion.

The first re-introduction of Steiner's thought was through the activities of Takahashi Iwao (1928–), a scholar of German Literature. Though he basically studied German Romanticism, at the end of his residence in Munich, he learned about Steiner. After his return to Japan he taught aesthetics at Keio University. In 1970s, he resigned his professor's post and opened his house as a meeting place for people interested in studying Steiner's works, and began translating them. He also worked for the Asahi Culture Center as a lecturer on Steiner's thought and has been a leader of a study group there for a few decades. Now Takahashi's translations, which cover many of Steiner's major works on esotericism and spiritual

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, he translated one of Steiner's lectures, in Kumamoto 1925: 3–7. In the introduction of this translation, Kumamoto indicates that Steiner's esoteric philosophy has much in common with Esoteric Buddhism such as the Shingon School. His contributions are also found in no. 363, 366–69, and 384.



Figure 2. Cover of *Shijō ga no hikari* 至上我の光 (The Light of Supreme Atman), no. 377 (Tokyo: Ryūokai, 1985)

training, are available in paperback. Nishikawa Ryūhan (1953–), a Shingon Buddhist priest in Takahashi's circle, is also active in the translation of Steiner's works.<sup>11</sup>

Takahashi's interest in aesthetics inspired the interest of art students in Anthroposophy. Among various artists who kept a strong connection with him is Kasai Akira (1943–), a dancer who performs the world famous avant-garde *Ankoku Butō* 暗黒舞踏 (Dark Dance), originated by Hijikata Tatsumi (1928–1986). Kasai learned not only from Steiner but also from the mystic George Gurdjieff (1877–1949), incorporating Eurhythmy, anthroposophical dance art, and other ways of expression related to anthroposophy, at his studio *Tenshikan* 天使館 (House of Angels). Architectural historian Agematsu Yūji (1942–) also once worked in collaboration with Takahashi. Agematsu described in detail the ideas behind the architectural designs of Steiner in his book *Sekaikan toshite no kenchiku* 世界観としての建築 (Architecture as Worldview) published in 1974. He maintains that architecture is also an epistemological activity that strives to connect the human mind to the universal mind. He is also known as an architect for his design work such as *Zenkoji Gaien* (Zenkoji temple outer garden), and the Nagano Winter Olympic Central Square. His wife Agematsu Etsuko is the first Eurythmist in Japan.

Takahashi established the *Nihon Jinchigaku Kyōkai* 日本人智学協会 (Japanese Association of Anthroposophy) in 1985 without official approval by the Association of General Anthroposophy at Goetheanum, in Dornach, Switzerland, the headquarters of the Anthroposophy movement. Goetheanum did not endorse him as the representative of Anthroposophy in Japan on the grounds of Jinchigaku Kyōkai president Takahashi's opposition to the Agematsu group (Nishikawa 2009: 187–89). *Jinchigaku Kyōkai* is still very active in offering lectures on anthroposophy, given primarily by Takahashi, in teaching the stages of Eurythmy (done by Kasai), in publishing periodicals such as *Jinchigaku* 人智学 (Anthroposophy) or *Subaru* 昴 (the Pleiades), and in organizing study groups, seminars and reading circles focusing on Steiner's books.

Agematsu left Takahashi's group and established the Anthroposophical Society of Japan in 2000. This is the authorized Association or the Japan branch of Goetheanum in Dornach. The Society also offers lectures,

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<sup>11</sup> Nishikawa Ryūhan (2009: 183–90) includes latest chronology on the network of practitioners, thinkers, and followers of Steiner.



reading circles, Eurythmy presentations and lessons and publishes a periodical *Steiner Today*. In 2006, however, it also experienced a split into two groups, the Non-Profit Organization Anthroposophical Society of Japan and the Rebuilt Anthroposophical Society of Japan (Nishikawa 2009: 189).

Waldorf Education, popularly called *Shutainā kyōiku* シュタイナー教育 (Steiner education), is another important aspect of Anthroposophy in Japan. Though there are some courses and seminars based on the Waldorf model, with the exception of two of the Waldorf schools, they are not sanctioned by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The others are 'free schools' run by private non-profit corporations. The popularity of Waldorf Education does not mean that the esoteric worldviews of Anthroposophy are accepted by the Japanese who attend them. People are interested in Waldorf education as an alternative to Japanese traditional education which overemphasizes intellectual training.

An epoch-making book in support of Waldorf education is Koyasu Michiko's book *Myunchen no shōgakusei* ミュンヘンの小学生 (A Primary School in Munich, Koyasu 1975). As of 2009, it has been reprinted 43 times. It is the journal of a scholar of German literature relating her daughter's experiences at the Munich Waldorf School. She describes the idea of *Formen* and *Eurythmy*, combining physical practice and an experience as an integral aspect of 'intellectual' learning, by relating the experiences of her daughter as she learns the alphabet through drawing and language skills through singing and dancing. For instance, her daughter learned the letter K as a *König* (*King* in German) by drawing a colorful anthropomorphic character invoking a King image (*Formen*). She learned oral language skills through Eurythmy, jumping and singing "Ich spitze, Ich spitze, Ich spitze" (I'm sharpen, I'm sharpen, I'm sharpen) while stretching her body straight from her finger to her toe (Koyasu 1975: 39–41). It was effective helping Japanese readers to gain a positive impression of Steiner and it avoided explanations of practices which are based on his esoteric worldview, even though this worldview provides the crucial context for *Formen* and *Eurythmy*.

Kasai Yoshiharu (1946–2009), was a New Left movement leader, who became disillusioned with the movement, and started a second-hand bookshop for spiritual books. He began studying Steiner with Takahashi, but he disagreed with Takahashi's aesthetic understanding and sympathy for Japanese Shintoism, so he formed another group for Steiner study, establishing the Jinchigaku Shuppansha 人智学出版社 (Anthroposophy

Publishing). This group enthusiastically issued six volumes *Steiner zenshū* (Steiner Collections) and periodicals such as *Gendai shinpigaku* 現代神秘学 (Modern Mysticism Study), *Jinchigaku kenkyū* 人智学研究 (Anthroposophical Study), *Rudolf Steiner kenkyū* ルドルフ・シュタイナー研究 (Rudolf Steiner Study) as a result of reading Steiner books. Kasai also published translations of many of Steiner's works and lectures, along with many studies of Steiner. Among others, Nitta Yoshiyuki (1933–), a scholar of German Literature and Professor at the University of Tokyo, has provided translations and introductions of Steiner's texts for Kasai's project.

Kasai's group was also active in social movements based on the ideas of Threefold Social Order in Anthroposophy. He was inspired by the German Green Party and often visited Germany to communicate with Green Party anthroposophist members and activists. In 1993, Kasai organized the Tokyo Green Party and came forward as a candidate for the House of Councilors but was unsuccessful. Though he expressed his ideas in the journal *Dai san no michi* 第三の道 (The Third Way) in the 1980s, the group dissolved and the publishing company closed. Later he concentrated his efforts in trying to clarify the history of the acceptance of Anthroposophy in modern Japan. He tried to show the connections between Steiner and the life and thought of Kumamoto Aritaka, the person who initially introduced the thought of Steiner to Japan. Similarly he attempted to show the connection between Steiner's thought and that of two notable philosophers Nishida Kitarō and Watsuji Tetsurō (Kasai 2004: 106–15). He maintained that Nishida's famous *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (An Inquiry into the Good) is written as a result of the plagiarism of Steiner's ideas in his *Philosophy of Freedom*. His biography of Steiner will be published posthumously.

Often, people actively involved with Steiner's thought and its applications to education or the arts appear as if they have embraced a 'book religion' for upper middle class intellectuals. They tend to combine Steiner's thought with various other New Age philosophies to facilitate a narrative understanding of self, without practicing its more puzzling esoteric aspects. In essence Japanese people consider the Waldorf education not in terms of its esoteric thought in relation to Theosophy, but as an alternative form of Japanese education. For them, internet website communities on Steiner's thought offer a convenient arenas for discussion. It should be noted that Anthroposophy as a philosophy of alternative education is more prevalent in Japan than in any other country in the world outside of Germany.

*Theosophical Ideas about New Religious Movements and Channelers*

Kiryama Seiyū (1921–), founder of a Buddhist new religion Agonshū 阿含宗, echoes the theosophical ideas of the cultivation of human potential. Kiriyama explained the mechanism of actualizing one's desire in Shingon Esoteric Buddhism by using a biological model. According to him, one can acquire supernatural power by training the brain directly. In his *Mikkyō: Chōnōryoku no himitsu* (Kiryama 1972: 462), he quotes from Leadbeater's *Man: Visible and Invisible*.<sup>12</sup> For him, the Theosophical ideas of human evolution provide a clue to combine Buddhist esotericism with his hope to cultivate the 'perfect human'.<sup>13</sup>

Jumbles of theories and ideas about self, spirit, mind and body, derived from the ideas of Theosophy (and elsewhere), are not unusual in most cases of modern religious movements or among clairvoyants, mediums or channelers. In the group Spiritual Convention (abbreviated as Supikon すぴこん in Japanese), one can find a trade fair of charms, healing practices to regulate the flow of vital energy 'ki 気', and 'channelers' who speak 'on behalf of angels', or divination practices. They are very familiar with the concept of 'subtle bodies' to ground mind-body relationship required for 'healing'. As in Theosophy, those concepts are referred to as the 'ancient' and 'archaic' occult knowledge and not as 'modern' Theosophy. Therefore, they rarely acknowledge any relation to Theosophy or the Theosophical Society.

Benjamin Crème (1922–), as "one of the awakened people ready for the arrival of the World Teacher Maitreya," held public lectures every year and garnered some followers in Japan. Though conspicuous posters of his lecture in a huge auditorium with free admission draws public interest, he seems not to be identified as a Theosophist. His was an attempt to return to the ideas which Krishnamurti had renounced. Though he is said to have learned from the works of Blavatsky and Besant, he has never belonged to

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<sup>12</sup> Kiriyama Seiyū also refers to Miura's explanation of the physiology of Yoga to support his idea to maintain that man can acquire supernatural power. In the very beginning of this book he quoted the frontispieces of chakras or auras in Leadbeater's *Man: Visible and Invisible*.

<sup>13</sup> Some scholars point to the similarities between Kiriyama and Asahara Shōkō (1955–), founder of Aum Shinrikyō, who once belonged to Kannon Jikeikai 観音慈恵会, the religious group which later became Agonshū, and is said to have learned how to cultivate supernatural power from Kiriyama. Kiriyama criticizes Asahara in detail in his *Aum Shinrikyō to Agonshū* (1995: 14). But, in Aum they do refer to the conditions of subtle body, concepts we know that they incorporated from Theosophy. Whether they were learned from Kiriyama or from other sources is a matter of debate.

the Theosophical Society, and without any formal group or institution, he tends to create informal networks of teachers and learners.

Both teachers and the scholars working in the area of the Holistic Education are also interested in the Krishnamurti School in India and Waldorf education around the world. However, as we have seen in this chapter, the Theosophical society in Japan has not been very active. Nevertheless, Japanese scholars have recently begun to look at Theosophy and its influence in Japan. Yoshinaga Shin'ichi and his colleagues recently made available the Hirai Kinza Archive which has a huge collection of his works including those on Theosophy. He is also organizing the writings of Utsuki Nishū, a Jōdo Shinshū monk who had an extensive knowledge of East Asian and Southeast Asian Buddhism.

Just as Kawaguchi Ekai (1866–1944), who is said to have utilized a Theosophist network to travel to innermost Tibet (the first Japanese to do so) in 1901, there must have been numerous people who had access to Theosophy in some way without more detailed knowledge of its spiritualist ideas or practices. We have looked at only part of the influence of Theosophy on Japanese religions and that on Theosophy from Japanese religions. Before World War II, Theosophy was an 'international', 'inter-faith', 'pluralistic' movement when these terms were yet beyond grasp of most people either in the East or the West. It enabled Japanese Buddhists to encounter various international Buddhist communities beyond those in China or Korea. Hanseikai, the Buddhist association in Japan which was once enthusiastic about Theosophy, is socially active in the area of moral and social reforms, which includes the temperance movement. Theosophist's efforts have been directed to international or intra-national social issues such as education for the poor, anti-discrimination, and the elimination of poverty. It has sometimes borne fruit in the form of an International Organization for education and culture such as UNESCO after World War II. These days 'spiritual healers' contemplate the condition of one's subtle body without being conscious of origin of the concept, which is not 'ancient', 'archaic' wisdom but a modern one. Theosophy purported to act as a bridge across religious boundaries of ancient and modern, East and West, and Japanese religions have incorporated many aspects of its message.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I should note that most of the materials on Theosophy before the Second World War referred to in this chapter are dependent on Yoshinaga's exhaustive research. I would also like to thank Fukasawa Hidetaka for the suggestion in regard to my inquiry about postwar activism based on Steiner's thought.

It is not easy to calculate the impacts of Theosophy directly, since it is often restricted to the spheres of personal practice and preference. Its ‘messages from the Masters’ have been considered to be suspect and they have been subject to criticism from early on. Though drawn to certain areas of similar interest with Theosophy, Carl Gustav Jung felt that Theosophist’s lack of detailed scholarly knowledge especially in the area of symbols, alchemy, and psychology relegated Theosophy as a rather amateurish practice (Jung 1970: 863). Nevertheless, there is an experimental correspondence of interest between Theosophists and some Jungian psychologists. And, I will conclude this chapter by introducing two such Japanese scholars in Jungian psychology.

Dr. Yuasa Yasuo (1925–2005) has been influenced by *The Serpent Power*, a publication of Theosophical society (Avalon 1958: 326). Yuasa is a famous scholar of Eastern thought on body-mind interaction. He was also the first president of the Japanese Society for Mind-Body Science and his works on subtle life energy or *ki* have acquired a wide readership. In an indirect way, through his works, we can assume that some Theosophical ideas have become more widely disseminated in Japan.

The second is the Jungian psychologist Oimatsu Katsuhiko (1959–) who examined possible commonalities between the Jungian technique of active imagination and Blavatsky’s experience as a psychic. He first examined the practices and experiences of Blavatsky, and then compared these with Jung’s dissertation, a case study of a spirit medium, and his *Seven Sermons to the Dead*, 1916 (Oimatsu 2010). In addition Oimatsu recently translated Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* into Japanese (Blavatsky 2010).

These newer works indicate that among the circles of Jungian psychologists in Japan, there still exist interest in Theosophy, though their approaches might be critical. Other influences of Theosophy on various ‘spiritual’ practices in Japan are less readily apparent and have yet to be studied in a more systematic fashion.

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## THE RISE OF THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

SHIMAZONO SUSUMU AND TIM GRAF

### *Spirituality in Translation*

The word 'spirituality' and its Japanese counterpart *supirichuariti* スピリチュアリテイ have attracted attention since the second half of the 1990s. While already en vogue in the U.S., spirituality (or related terms) are nowadays widespread in Europe and other parts of the world. Japan's new 'spirituality' emerged as part of a shifting global phenomenon that is both a movement and a culture. This global phenomenon is pluralistic and has multiple sources specific to local religious and sociocultural conditions.

This chapter identifies the evolving characteristics of the 'new spirituality culture' (*shin reisei bunka* 新靈性文化) in Japan, a culture that is differentiated from traditional religion and traditional notions of 'spirituality' by its embrace of seemingly secular concerns like healthcare and healing, business ethics and self-help. This discussion will introduce seminal individuals from the 1970s and 80s who shifted the understanding of spirituality towards a definition that encompasses new understandings of consciousness and body and thus helped broaden the conception of spirituality that emerged in the 1990s. These profiles are followed by a discussion of the spread and application of spirituality through health care and the hospice movement.

For many people, the new spirituality movement and culture are different from religion (*shūkyō* 宗教), yet at the same time they seem to be related. Shifts in terminology concerning spirituality and related terms are indicative of this differentiation. In Japan after the war, for example, spirituality was usually translated as *reisei* 靈性. Words like those below provide an impression of what the field of spirituality encompasses in contemporary society:

soul (*tamashii* 魂); spirit; universal consciousness; consciousness-transformation; awakening of body and mind; awareness experience; higher self (*ōi naru jiko* 大いなる自己, *haiyā serufu* ハイヤーセルフ); over-soul (*ōvā sōru* オーヴァーソウル); animism; contact with spirits of nature; ancient Shintō

(*koshintō* 古神道); quigong; healing (*iyashi* 癒し); therapy (*serapī* セラピー); near-death-experiences; soul transmigration; deep ecology (*dīpu ekorojī* デープエコロジー); Gaia; the evolution of consciousness.

By the 1980s and 90s in Japan, all of the above subjects came to be associated with the term *seishin sekai* 精神世界 (the spiritual world). This term had entered public discourse around 1977 when many major bookstores began to equip their sections on religion with additional *seishin sekai*-corners (see Shimazono 1996, 2004, 2007). The meaning attributed to *seishin sekai* is vast and vague, but there are recurring themes such as an alteration of mind and spirit, a search for the self, self-realization, self-transcendence, and self-liberation. The 'spiritual world' is a place where various information, teachings, and practices coexist with a 'journey to the self' and personal spiritual growth on an individual, rather than group, basis.

Traditionally, these features have been treated as a matter of 'religion' (*shūkyō*) and 'self-cultivation' (*shūyō* 修養). However, these terms are increasingly considered as inappropriate for a description of contemporary social realities, since many people of all ages and levels of society show interest in *seishin sekai* or 'spirituality', but not in religion.

#### *From the 1960s to the 1990s*

Interest in the spiritual world was already high before the word *seishin sekai* came in use. The attraction rose with the wave of American and European 'counter culture' which had already reached Japan in the late 1960s. This culture was highly influenced by beliefs and practices of the 'new age' movement, later called *seishin sekai* in Japan. The Beatles, for example, brought a fascination for Indian meditation systems to Japan via Europe and the U.S.

The political climate of the American civil rights movement, the Vietnam War protests, and the revolution of May 1968 in Paris contributed to a growing desire for liberation of body and mind and for personal inner freedom. The younger generation turned rapidly towards the spiritual, motivated by their enthusiasm and rising expectations towards a political emancipation from society's oppressive structures. Experiments in the search for a path of inner freedom were seen all over the world.

In Japan, a series of incidents by violent revolutionary groups engraved deeply a sense of political demise in the minds of the younger generation.

The Yodogō Hijacking incident<sup>1</sup> of a Japan Airlines flight in 1970 was followed in the same year by the group lynching incident committed by the United Red Army (Rengō Sekigun 連合赤軍).<sup>2</sup> In 1972, the Asama-Sansō hostage-taking (*Asama Sansō jiken* 浅間山荘事件) occurred.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, in 1974, a number of large corporations were bombed by a revolutionary group.<sup>4</sup> These incidents showed that some militant groups and activists of the Japanese student movement were committed to bring about political change by violent means. They were also indicative of and related to larger trends in society, namely a growing unrest and discomfort with established structures and norms, especially those affecting the younger generation. As in the West, a search for orientation in society and alternative concepts of community were fueled by desires for self-determination and expressiveness, along with a growing interest in spirituality.

It was in 1972 when the Japanese translation of *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* by anthropologist Carlos Castaneda was published, where Castaneda elaborates a lifestyle that demands a critical reevaluation of individual socialization in the quest for spiritual awakening. In 1973, sociologist and intellectual on spirituality, Mita Munetsuke

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<sup>1</sup> The incident known as *yodogō haijakkū jiken* よど号ハイジャック事件 took place on March 31 of 1970, when a passenger aircraft operated by Japan Airlines (flight 351) was hijacked on its way from Tokyo to Fukuoka by nine activists of the Communists League—Red Army Faction (Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei Sekigunha 共産主義者同盟赤軍派). The members of this group planned to emigrate to North Korea. They took seven crew members and 122 passengers aboard the aircraft hostage. The hostages were released at airports in Fukuoka and Seoul before the hijackers headed to North Korea for asylum.

<sup>2</sup> This incident refers to the killing of 14 (almost half) of the United Red Army members by fellow United Red Army fellow activists. The United Red Army, whose members maintained military training camps in the Southern Japanese Alps, comprised of the Communist League—Red Army Faction and parts of the Japanese Communist Party. Five members managed to escape police arrest and barricaded themselves in a mountain lodge in what is known as the Asama-Sansō incident (see following note).

<sup>3</sup> On February 19 of 1972, five armed members of the United Red Army invaded a house at Mount Asama, Nagano prefecture, where they took a hostage and barricaded themselves. The hostage situation caused a police siege which lasted until February 28, when police forces stormed the building. Two policemen and one civilian were shot dead.

<sup>4</sup> Ekida Yukiko, Daidōji Masashi, Daidōji Ayako and other members of the East Asian Anti-Japan Armed Front (Higashi Ajia Hannichi Busō Sensen 東アジア反日武装戦線) planned and executed a series of bombings targeting various facilities of large-scale Japanese companies such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, among other companies regarded as supportive of Japan's war efforts in Asia by the East Asian Anti-Japan Armed Front. The nine bombings, many of which caused deaths and injuries, took place between August 1974 and May 1975. The bombing incident is known as *renzoku kigyō bakuha jiken* 連続企業爆破事件.

(under his pseudonym Maki Yūsuke),<sup>5</sup> announced the ‘commune of unison’ (*kōkyō suru komyūn* 交響するコミュニケーション) based on his theory about ‘living the desire of constant self-liberation’. He elaborated on this theory in a collection of essays entitled *Kiryū no naru oto: Kōkyō suru komyūn* 気流の鳴る音-交響するコミュニケーション (*The Sound of Flowing Airstreams: The Commune of Unison*, 1977). From the latter half of the 1970s to the first half of the 1980s, a great number of books by Maki Yūsuke, Fritjof Capra, Yuasa Yasuo and other authors were published with high expectations of *seishin sekai* ushering in a new sociocultural and political era.<sup>6</sup>

A substantial part of what is now called ‘spirituality’ corresponds with the idea of *seishin sekai* from the 1980s to the first half of the 1990s. The striking expansion of this ‘spiritual world’ started during the first half of the 1970s. Spiritual quests and inner liberation were explored before of course, since many concepts and practices of the ‘spiritual world’ derived from historically diverse religious traditions. However, it was only in the 1980s that those spiritual quests started to become a trend that spread rapidly, with a strong impact on the lives of a huge number of mostly younger people. The early phase of *seishin sekai* emerged as anti-establishment culture. This discourse was employed by parts of the progressive media. Flows of information circulated mainly inside small networks of people promoting an avant-garde attitude towards social norms. In the 1980s, however, this trend gradually turned mainstream with a strong influence on the content of leading journals, lectures

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<sup>5</sup> Mita Munesuke, born in 1937, is a professor emeritus of Tokyo University who furthermore published under the alias Maki Yūsuke. He gained a reputation as an intellectual influenced by Carlos Castaneda. His numerous publications relate to topics such as the social psychology of Modern Japan, as well as commune-related concepts, among other subjects.

<sup>6</sup> The following list shows several original titles of the ‘spiritual world’ in order of appearance: Ram Das and the Lama Foundation, *Be Here Now*, 1971; Andrew T. Weil, *The Natural Mind: A Revolutionary Approach to the Drug Problem*, 1972; Iwata Keiji, *Sōmoku chūgyō no jinruigaku: Animizumu no sekai* 草木虫魚の人類学-アニミズムの世界 (*An Anthropology of the Grass, the Trees, the Insects and the Fish: The World of Animism*, 1973); Theodore Roszak, *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness*, 1975; Yuasa Yasuo, *Shintai: Tōyōteki shintai ron no kokoromi* 身体-東洋的身体論の試み (*The Body: Attempting a Far Eastern Body-Theory*, 1977); Maki Yūsuke (Mita Munesuke), *Kiryū no naru oto* 気流の鳴る音 (*The Sound of Flowing Airstreams*, 1977); Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, 1977; Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time*, 1980; Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture*, 1982.

delivered from university podiums, as well as practices and policies related to health and welfare organizations.

Concepts inspired by *seishin sekai* and vocabulary related to spirituality were increasingly adopted by the practitioners of what has been called 'New Science' (*nyū saiensu* ニューサイエンス)<sup>7</sup> as well as programs for a growth of mind and soul, healing (*iyashi*) and terminal or palliative care. At the same time, an array of ideas and products related to *seishin sekai* also appeared in the areas of sports and business. Yoga, quigong, awareness seminars, and consciousness-alteration therapies marked pivotal points in the biographies of a growing number of people. Yoga in particular has flourished in fitness centers and university clubs, with a market for a wide selection of related products and accoutrements such as mats, cushions, clothing, and instructional magazines. Many of these ideas were furthermore promoted by new new religions (*shin shin shūkyō* 新新宗教) which developed from the 1970s (see Shimazono 1992, 2001; Prohl in this volume).<sup>8</sup>

In the 1990s, the image of anti-establishment culture or youth culture was long gone. Some of those aspects remained, but *seishin sekai* had mostly become mainstream. At the same time, its role as a source of cultural identity was expanding. Even established large-scale enterprises effectively incorporated *seishin sekai*-related ideas and practices. The activities of Funai Yukio that will be discussed momentarily are a good example of the merging of the worlds of business and spirituality. Funai's work belongs to the genre of self-improvement (*jiko keihatsu* 自己啓発) literature that merges questions of management with psychological and religious themes. Another hero of people from the corporate world is Fritjof Capra, well-known in the west for his books exploring the spiritual dimensions of sciences such as physics.

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<sup>7</sup> The Japanese term *nyū saiensu* (New Science) parallels the meaning of New Age Science. The emphasis of New Science is on the attempt to overcome scientific rationalism and materialism with interpretations of scientific data on the basis of New Age concepts and spiritual world views.

<sup>8</sup> New new religions like God Light Association ジー・エル・エー (GLA), Shinnyo-en 真如苑, World Mate ワールドメイト and Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 are distinct from new religions (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教), their modern predecessors, in that they began to develop at a time when the massive membership growth of new religions like Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, Tenrikyō 天理教, and Rissō Kōseikai 立正佼成会 slowed down. *Shin shin shūkyō* are generally considered less hierarchical in structure, less centered on group activities and more individualistic than *shin shūkyō*.

*Pioneers of a Rising Spirituality*

What I call 'spirituality' is the Japanese expression of a new global religious culture and identity-pattern that most of all concerns highly industrialized countries. The proponents involved in this spirituality, on the other hand, avoid calling it 'religion' (*shūkyō*). They assert this movement and culture is not about 'religion' but the 'spiritual world' (*seishin sekai*) or 'spirituality' (*supirichuariti, reisei*).

The culture and movement of this new spirituality accumulated a variety of phenomena during its establishment, and thereby expanded the scope of new age and *seishin sekai* which were considered until then little more than a temporary fashion. This distinction becomes evident in the use of the word 'spirituality' in Japan, but let me return to this point later when discussing developments that took place after the turn of the century.

In order to illustrate how the phenomenon that was later understood by the term *supirichuariti* gained shape, I will first introduce the work of some influential contemporaries in Japan from the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s. I do so with the intention of outlining the historical significance of meanings attributed to spirituality.

Four individuals whose work appeared from the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s embodied and produced an early form of what nowadays in Japan is called 'spirituality'. The authors, however, are not especially representative for the overall new spirituality culture in Japan. It is safe to say that the first two authors, Yamao Sansei and Funai Yukio, hold a certain position in the history of the Japanese culture of new spirituality, but categorizing and associating the latter two, Kashiwagi Tetsuo and Tanaka Mitsu as *seishin sekai* writers might cause surprises, since both of them moved outside the realm of the 'spiritual world'. Their individual and combined influence as pioneers of a new spirituality should become obvious as soon as we take a look at the spread of the word *supirichuariti* from the latter half of the 1990s.

The four individuals introduced below are all original thinkers. They paved the way for what became Japan's contemporary spirituality, showing in their work a new level of spirituality-centered culture. The conspicuous footprints they left in the religious and intellectual history of Japan should not go unnoticed, and their story deserves to be told regardless of the fact that they belong to the same generation.

*Yamao Sansei and the Spirituality of Connectedness*

Yamao Sansei, born in 1938, dropped out of the Faculty of Letters of Waseda University in the midst of the fights and demonstrations against the 1960 revision of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. He found employment at a factory, but left work and started the *Buzoku* 部族 (tribe) movement together with his fellows in 1967 in order to explore new styles of communal living and consciousness. The young members of the ‘tribe’ set up three communities (*kyōdōtai* 共同体) in apartments in Shinshū 信州, the Nansei islands 南西諸島, and Kokubunji 国分寺 in Tokyo. Their aim was to develop a virtuous and spiritually enriched everyday life. The “Buzoku manifesto” (*Buzoku sengen* 部族宣言) of December 1967 explains some of their perspectives:

If we try to adopt a far broader view, one could say a universal view, and reach out from the depth of our ego for the spark of wisdom—assuming the whole universe is the highest ego or self—then we see that our work in the outside world is a game we all perform with our whole existence, and society is the arena where this game takes place—it is a trick of god. We are part of a game; a game with us as the main characters. Each and every one of us, different logics and ethics aside, has deep inside the duty to achieve progress by moving forward and overcoming obstacles or difficulties. This is called deliverance [*gedatsu* 解脱] or self-awareness [*jikaku* 自覚] or realization [*jitsugen* 実現]. To put it differently: “This duty is accomplished by humans with a boundless self, or by reincarnation into another life. This is His—the highest self—god’s play.” (Yamao 1981: 126–27)

The rock music café they were running under the name ‘Horagai’ ほら貝 (conch shell trumpet often used by mountain ascetics) promoted the liberation of body and mind by dancing. During his year of pilgrimages in India and Nepal together with his family in 1973, Yamao had the chance to make himself familiar with the religious traditions and holy people of India, such as Ramakrishna.

In 1976, Yamao followed the growing trend of organic agricultural product cultivation and launched the Hobbit Village (Hobitto Mura ほびっと村)<sup>9</sup> in Nishiogikubo 西荻窪, Tokyo. This community became a renowned center of *seishin sekai* culture in the coming years. The group

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<sup>9</sup> Hobbit Village was named after the ‘hobbits’ from *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

distributed farm products, sold hand-crafted woodwork and accessories, maintained a coffee bar and eventually founded the Prasad プラサード bookstore as well as the Hobbit Village School. The following episode is part of a report by Yamao from 1977:

Apart from the Hobbit Village School we also offer a kids lecture for boys and girls once a month. Then there is a lecture on “planning your daily life.” Other than that we hold painting classes every Monday for the youngsters, entitled “Tarzan’s forest,” and Wednesdays is “nursing school for home birthing.” We also care for the physical body with our “Seitai massage seminar” and with “Tai chi.” Saturday’s class is on politics and economy. Our weekly curriculum seeks to educate from different angles by deepening our understanding of various subjects that range from close and familiar matters to world affairs. We even offer yoga and meditation seminars and a so-called “greengrocers school” where we discuss the negative effects of chemical fertilizer for the soil, or problems of consumerism, and new trends in agriculture. (1981: 301–2)

Yamao moved to Yakushima 屋久島, an island four hours by ferry south of Kyūshū in 1977, directly after the foundation of Hobbit Village. He planted his fields there, raised many children, and continued to send messages into the world as a poet and writer; messages that for him signified the dawn of a new era of spirituality.

Yamao’s later situation is well described in *Animizumu to iu kibō* アニミズムという希望 (*A Desire Called Animism*). One poem by Yamao published in that volume goes as follows:

With my hat of palm tree leaves as my umbrella, I continue climbing the mountain. If I made it this far, then the Jōmon Sugi cedars are close, yet the closer they get, the more distant they become. Those cedars must be over 7,200 years of age; they have been on earth since early Jōmon times. . . . There was no fear of nuclear weapons back then, nor was there misuse of atomic energy. The man-made institution called ‘state’ also did not exist. There was no reign of the demonic power of economy. The mountains were gods, the rivers were gods, the sea was god. The soil was god, the trees were gods, and the fire was god. God was life [*inochi* 命, *seimei* 生命], and life itself, this vibration, was god. (2000: 338–39)

For further explanation, the following is from a lecture given by Yamao about what he identifies as ‘the 16 truths’ guiding all existence:

I just read the poem of the moon today. The moon is part of these 16 truths. I furthermore read the poem of the soil. The world of soil is also one of the 16 truths. There is a poem of the sea and of the sun too. The truth is everywhere. That is what I wanted to share, personally, but since speaking of truth is so exaggerated, I changed it with the word ‘*kami*’ (spelled in



*katakana*-syllables rather than *kanji*)—one might call this truth ‘animism’.  
(2000: 294)

Yamao Sansei died in 2001, but he had written a last will that said

blessed be the Yakushi 薬師 Buddha of healing inside us. We have Article 9 of our Japanese constitution; let us implement it in all constitutions of all countries in the world. We renounced military force and war forever. Let this be the foundation for the lives of all people of all countries.<sup>10</sup>

These are the words of someone apparently very committed to a new spirituality culture of peace and environmental care. “The spirituality of connectedness,” my own designation for Yamao’s spirituality, intends to reflect these characteristics.

### *Funai Yukio and the Spirituality of Success*

Funai Yukio, born to a peasant family in Kawachi 河内 in 1933, graduated from the University of Kyōto in agricultural economics. He worked in the department of industrial psychology of a research facility affiliated with his employer, a safety association foundation, but left after several years in order to start a consulting company together with a friend.<sup>11</sup> Their main focus was on advertising sales.

After suffering the death of his father and his wife, Funai joined the leading Japanese management association of that time with a consulting business of his own. The success of this collaboration enabled him to eventually join the board of directors. Yet Funai was opposed to the association’s overall management principles. Thus in 1969, at age 36, he turned independent and founded the Funai Management Research Institute (Funai Keiei Kenkyūsho フナイ経営研究所).<sup>12</sup> Shortly thereafter he became a bestselling author. 350,000 copies of his book *Henshin shōhō* 変身商法 (*Transforming Business Methods*, 1972) were sold in one

<sup>10</sup> See the chapter by Urs Zachmann in this volume for more on Article 9 and the Japanese postwar constitution.

<sup>11</sup> This summary of Funai Yukio’s biography refers to the book *Ikikata wo hakken shirizu: Funai Yukio* 生き方発見シリーズ船井幸雄 (*Lifestyle Discovery Series: Funai Yukio*) published by Sunmark サンマーク出版 in 1998.

<sup>12</sup> The growing Funai Keiei Kenkyūsho was renamed into Japan Marketing Center (Nihon Māketingu Sentā 日本マーケティングセンター) the following year, then into Funai General Research Institute (Funai Sōgō Kenkyūsho).

year alone. Funai continued to publish one bestseller after another, and his business grew steadily.

It was around that time when Funai established a growing interest in spiritual matters. The turning point is said to have come in or around the year of 1975, under the influence of authors like Raymond Moody, Michael Sabom and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (see Funai 1990: 122–23).<sup>13</sup> In her volume *On Death and Dying*, Kübler-Ross describes what goes on the minds of dying people, while *Life after Life* by Moody and *Light and Death* by Sabom deal with near-death experiences. Funai was also influenced by authors who are anxious to ‘prove’ the existence of real extrasensory perception, life after death, and reincarnation in particular.

The first time Funai noted these subjects was in *The Idea of Wrapping Up* (*Tsutsumikomi no hassō* 包み込みの発想, 1979). The final chapter entitled “The great meaning of being born as a human” (*hito toshite umareta koto no ōki na igi* 人として生まれたことの大きな意義), and more specifically section three of this chapter labeled “This world is a place of studies and challenges” (*genze wa benkyō to shiren no ba* 現世は勉強と試練の場), sums it up as follows:

The animals on our planet evolved over time. It so happened that now humans are at the peak. The human brain shows patterns of animal life forms of preceding stages of evolution, meaning that evolution is a process. The effect called humanity, which characterizes us as humans, is created in the Frontal Association Area of the Cerebral Neocortex. Evolution as seen within the brain arguably proves that reincarnation exists, and that true life is eternal. It feels as if the creator of our splendidly arranged universe created everything under his direction with an objective in mind. If we combine these topics, then I think we will understand the reason why we were born in this world. . . . We as humans, without even waiting for ‘the law of karma’, better accept the teaching of various religions explaining that ‘this world is the cause and effect of the past and a place of studies and challenges’. Let us enhance our brains and physiognomy with all our might. (Funai 1979: 218–22)

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<sup>13</sup> Funai was primarily influenced by the following volumes: Raymond Moody, *Life After Life*; Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*; Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Own Families*; Gina Cerminara, *The World Within*; Michael Sabom, *Light and Death: One Doctor's Fascinating Account of Near-Death Experiences*; Joe Fisher and Joel Whitton, *Life Between Life: Scientific Explorations into the Void Separating One Incarnation from the Next*; Lyall Watson, *The Romeo Error: A Matter of Life and Death*; Erlendur Haraldsson, *Miracles Are My Visiting Cards: An Investigative Report on the Psychic Phenomena Associated with Sathya Sai Baba*; Baird Spalding, *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East*.

Funai read with enthusiasm books on New Science, transpersonal psychology, and other types of books that intend to ‘scientifically’ show the ‘invisible world’. He introduced these ideas and at the same time amalgamated them with his own theories, which contributed to his remarkable success as a writer.

In his volume *Reading Funai Yukio's Spiritual World in a Manga* (*Manga de yomu Funai Yukio no supirichuaru na sekai* マンガで読む船井幸雄のスピリチュアルな世界) published in 2005, Funai covers topics such as “The invisible world is close!”; “This world is a place of spiritual training” (*shugyō no ba* 修行の場); “The soul (*tamashii*) lives on after death”; “Luck and fortune will show up!”; “Power spots” (*iyashi rochi* イヤシロチ); “Do it yourself—methods for identifying authenticity”; “The world of cause and effect—how wishes come true”; or “Living with the logic of the universe—into a bright future with the ‘hundredth monkey effect.’”

*Iyashi rochi* means a place filled with special spiritual powers, while the ‘hundredth monkey effect’ represents a New Science theme about the consciousness alteration of apes. Some apes among the population of Kōjima Island 幸島 in Kyūshū developed the habit of washing their sweet potatoes before eating them. This washing behavior spread from individual apes to the group. This observation was frequently referred to by supporters of new age theories of ‘consciousness progression’, but Funai incorporated it into his own life methods and management philosophy. If individuals had good thoughts and their evolved consciousness spreads and exceeds a certain quota, then, according to Funai, the entire group would develop an elevated state of consciousness. He linked this concept to his management style and considered it part of his belief in an ‘evolution of consciousness’.

Coming into contact with others on the basis of a benevolent attitude was emphasized by Funai early on as a core principle of his management style. Since the latter half of the 1970s, however, his concept is linked to the belief in an ‘evolution of consciousness’. Funai mentions he was considered by many people to be ‘possessed’ (*kamigakatteiru* 神がかっている), ‘occult’ or ‘religious and unscientific’ since the end of the 1970s (Funai 1990: 83). According to Funai, this assessment is not appropriate, as becomes evident in his reference to Nakamura Tenpū (1876–1968), a pioneer of the yoga and healing movement. Funai depicts himself as the proponent of a spirituality that attaches importance to rationality. At the same time, he objects to the criticism that he merely takes up irrational religious beliefs in unreflective ways.

Nakamura Tenpū is quite often said to be eccentric or ‘possessed’ [*kami-gakatteiru*], but he was not that kind of person, and I am not possessed either. Yet, some say that I am. I think Tenpū-sensei and I are both rational people. He had a superior intuition, but he did not talk about it until he rationally comprehended this circumstance. We are not religious specialists. Moreover, I make my own decisions. I freely listen to the advice and opinions of others, but I don’t let others decide for me. I have nothing to do with fortune-telling and I am certainly not occult. (Funai 1990: 71)

Funai says, “a manager’s business is the business of decision-making.” The fate of the whole company depends on decisions by the manager that only he alone makes, in isolation, and that is no easy task. He therefore tends to seek the advice of “god (?)” (question mark by Funai). With this in mind, Funai became an “expert in god (?)” (ibid.: 138).

The website of the Funai General Research Institute (Funai Sōgō Kenkyūsho 船井総合研究所) listed a capital of 3.1 billion yen and 558 employees in December 2010, as well as four associated companies. Funai’s ideas spread with the publication of several books a year and numerous annual lectures and events with titles like “*Funai Open World*” (Funai ōpun wārudo フナイ・オープンワールド). He furthermore holds a strong position in the retail trade through his consulting network. His concepts and ideas reach people from a wide variety of social groups.

### *Kashiwagi Tetsuo and the Spirituality of Care*

Kashiwagi Tetsuo, born in 1939, became a psychiatrist after his graduation from Ōsaka University’s Faculty of Medicine. He studied in America between 1969 and 1972. Upon his return to Japan, he took a position at Yodogawa Christian Hospital (*Yodogawa kirisutokyo byōin* 淀川キリスト教病院) in Ōsaka.

Unexpectedly, Kashiwagi ventured into uncharted waters early in the summer of 1973. A surgeon in charge consulted him about the mental care for an in-patient who suffered from bowel cancer. The patient was in severe pain and had strong fears of dying. Moreover, he suffered from loneliness. Kashiwagi, who had developed an interest in psychotherapeutic care before, was eager to get involved:

I was overwhelmed by the abundance of problems this terminal cancer patient had to cope with. I thought to myself that one doctor alone is simply not capable of dealing with a patient so troubled. This experience triggered the formation of a team-oriented approach towards patients with terminal cancer; an approach that opened up a new field in the world of medicine and nursing. (1987: 210)

Kashiwagi and his fellows did not know about contemporary Western attempts in hospice care (palliative care) back then. In Japan, the first *Asahi Shinbun* 朝日新聞 article on hospice care appeared in 1977 (on July 13), followed by other articles covering hospice care in Europe and America. Kashiwagi, on the other hand, was already practicing his 'team approach' (*chîmu apurôchi* チームアプローチ) at Yodogawa Christian Hospital at that point. He writes:

We need the cooperation of nurses and doctors in order to fulfill the patients' mental needs [*seishinteki hitsuyô* 精神的必要]. As for the social needs, we need cooperation of social workers and for religious needs the cooperation of the hospital ministers. What I had in mind was the idea that the staff has to work together as a team in order to fulfill the needs of dying patients and their families. (1978: 5)

It is likely that Kashiwagi learned about the ideas of team treatment during his studies in American hospitals. The same goes for the idea of a hospital minister (chaplain) joining this team. Being a Christian psychiatrist, Kashiwagi adopted the Western concept of employing 'spiritual care' in hospices and other sites of medical treatment. Thus it is not surprising that he applied his concept to the care for the dying at Yodogawa Christian Hospital.

In 1977, the Japanese Association for Clinical Studies on Death and Dying (Nihon Shi no Rinshô Kenkyû Kai 日本死の臨床研究会) was founded, which only six years later saw nearly 500 health care specialists coming together on the occasion of the association's annual assembly in 1982 (Kashiwagi 1983: 20). Japan's first hospice was founded two years later at Yodogawa Christian Hospital. Kashiwagi returned to in-service training as an internist. As a pioneer in his field, he assumed a leading role in the definition of hospice care standards.

Kashiwagi presents four needs of dying patients in his book of 1978: 'Bodily needs' (*shintaiteki hitsuyô* 身体的必要), 'mental needs' (*seishinteki hitsuyô* 精神的必要), 'social needs' (*shakaiteki hitsuyô* 社会的必要), and 'religious needs' (*shûkyôteki hitsuyô* 宗教的必要). In a later book of 1983 entitled *Sei to shi wo sasaeru (Supporting Life and Death)*, in contrast, he addresses 'bodily, mental, social, and spiritual (*reiteki* 靈的) pains' in the following words:

The process of dying affects the whole person. This is not just about a body that stops to function. Mental problems [*seishinteki mondai* 精神的問題] like anxiety and fear also occur in the process, as well as social problems of parting from the family and, moreover, spiritual problems [*reitekina mondai* 靈的な問題] concerning death and the afterlife. All these factors cause

pain. The aim of terminal care is to relieve as much of this pain as possible. Terminal care intends to support the patients humanely and peacefully in fulfilling their lives. It is therefore essential to take a holistic perspective on the human being. (Kashiwagi 1983: 13)

Kashiwagi's use of the term *seishinteki* corresponds to 'mental' (*mentaru* メンタル), while *reiteki* means 'spiritual'. Kashiwagi's definition of 'spiritual' is rather narrow in this particular context, but he elaborates on his concept elsewhere in the same book: "Those who realize they are going to die become lonesome. Caught in their loneliness, patients look back on their lives and stare at their own existence with a clear vision. They become aware of the transience of life and struggle to somehow overcome the fear of death. A patient like this requires religious attention" (ibid.: 63). Later on the same page, Kashiwagi concludes: "It is a matter of belief if someone trusts in an afterlife or not. Those who can take the existence of a posthumous world into consideration are in a better position to face their last stage peacefully" (ibid.). Speaking of religion, it is considered that it was Christianity and a Christian notion of spirituality Kashiwagi had in mind.

However, Kashiwagi's 'care for the dying' was not exclusively directed to Christians. Being of Christian faith was certainly not Kashiwagi's only ideal. This is evident in his frequent use of the expression 'receptive skills' (*juyō nōryoku* 受容能力) to which he attributes a specific meaning. Kashiwagi explains that receptive skills are simply the ability to absorb bad news, regardless of the fact that they are already known. Or, to put it more precisely, one could define them as "the ability to consciously live in adverse yet inevitable circumstances, and to accept and handle these conditions within which one is embedded as a human being" (ibid.: 133).

Kashiwagi furthermore talks repeatedly about the meaning of topics such as 'learning from the patients'; 'not dying alone'; 'listening to what dying patients have on their minds'; and 'having conversations about death'. He does not make use of the word, but it would be safe to say those themes are inclusive of a 'spiritual' dimension.

Many patients with advanced cancer have a gut feeling at some point that their illness is incurable. This occurs even in cases where the patients were not told the name of their disease. Next, the patients experience three mental states [*seishin jōtai* 精神状態], namely anxiety, fear, and loneliness. What we can provide in response to these mental pains is not technology, but human engagement. It is not technology that alleviates the loneliness, but human relations. A lack of human relations brings sadness to those who face death in isolation. We must ensure patients are not dying alone and lonesome. (1983: 133–34)

What Kashiwagi explains here is the model of a new spirituality of life and death that is not limited to a particular religion. This aspect of not being bound to a particular religion became crucial to the foundation of the spirituality of life-and-death care that has spread rapidly in Japan since the 1980s.

*Tanaka Mitsu and the Spirituality of Self-Liberation*

Feminist activist Tanaka Mitsu was a committed spokesperson for the *ūman ribu* ウーマン・リブ (women's liberation) movement. She is also known for her dedication against any decline of the Vietnam War protest, and vigorously raised her voice against the collapse of the campus conflict that emerged around the year of 1970. Born to a family with roots in a downtown Tokyo fish restaurant in 1943, Tanaka's chances to pursue an academic career of her own were virtually void from the outset, but she loved to read. Her fascination for the political student movement of her time was strong. At the same time, however, she also questioned to what extent that movement responded to her own individual pain and struggle for liberation.

In exposing the experiences of oppression she had suffered, and by revealing the awareness of having been abused, Tanaka describes her inner conflict with a distinctive and dynamic voice. This conflict takes place between the hope of liberation she desires to gain by exposing her inner self, and her self-proclaimed tendency to indulge in ostrich-like behavior, or to remain in a sense of helplessness. This concept is expressed by Tanaka's characteristic use of the term *torimidashi* とり乱し (inner contradiction, disorder). She was 27 at that time, driven by a vivid attitude and the desire to live life free from self-delusion.

The possibilities of a woman to search and find herself in the sea (*umi* 海) [of life] differ from those of men. A woman conceives this source within, thus inside is the place for her to search for identity. Men may have society as their sea of life. For a woman eager to live a full life, however, it is her own body. Even if a woman attempts to find this sea in society, and to find herself in society, in the end she would merely reflect the shape of those who control it. Not that everyone everywhere has the choice to become a completely independent subject; the slow turns in the history of slavery and adulation have shown differently. If we search for the *umi* in society and try to sail there with 'masculinity' [*otokorashisa* 男らしさ] then the red setting sun would inevitably reflect the shadows of those in power. Conceiving the sea inside us has turned the historicity of adulation to flesh and blood of our bodies. In feeling the pain of this slavery, we

search for liberation. It is simply a search for an encounter [*deai* 出会い]. (Tanaka M. 2001[1972]: 132)

The meaning expressed in her texts in relation to the term *inochi* (life) is what I refer to as the ‘spirituality of liberation’. It was her desire for liberation from the continuous setbacks she experienced as a woman, and from an internalization of all negative effects caused by these blows. By using the term *deai* (encounter), Tanaka depicted an interpersonal exchange of *inochi* いのち (life):

The primal scream of the new born *ribu* (women’s liberation movement, i.e. ‘lib.’) longing for answers as to what it means to be a woman, questioning if we really are women, was simply the cry of women aware of their pain and misery as oppressed, ripped apart in a system where they cannot encounter anyone. It was the scream of women who became aware of a starting point of liberation, and aware of a new perspective on the foundation of their own subject formation. This is the struggle for human liberation—the cry of a woman who became aware of her ‘non-subjective’ self in a place where future-oriented subject-relations sprout free from constraints; the incapacity of creating substantial human relationships with anybody—it was simply the cry of slaves who became aware of their own pain; their pain of being eroded from within. (ibid.: 249)

Tanaka proclaimed that above all she had to search for her own liberation while exposing the experience of her sexual trauma. By doing so, she furthermore described her understanding of an encounter with life (*inochi no deai* いのちの出会い) in terms of ‘communication’ (*komyunikeishon* コミュニケーション).

Humans are born alone and they die alone. Only because you have a ‘full stomach’ does not mean that we as women have a full stomach also. You know only that you stilled your hunger. I on the other hand desire to be satisfied too. It is a part of human nature. A gentle tenderness is flowing at the bottom of this desire; the tenderness of my wish to share the sorrows of a life I can only live alone. Sexual communication is my physical expression of tenderness. (ibid.: 265)

Tanaka Mitsu spent four years in Mexico later on and returned to Japan as an unwed mother. She learned acupuncture and opened an acupuncture clinic named “Reraharuse レラハルセ” (deriving from the Spanish verb *relajarse*; to relax) in 1982 where she established a career as an acupuncturist. Her book of 1998 titled *Curing Methods to Slow Down and Relax!* (*Bō to shiyō yo yōjōhō* ぼーっとしようよ養生法) explains techniques for a prosperous life in reference to the Chinese cosmology of *qi* (*ki* 気).



It was an impasse caused by lost love and the care for her child at end of the 1980s that inspired Tanaka to immerse herself deeply into a spiritual practice as distinct as her voice as a writer. In doing so, she went beyond the theory and practice of qi. ‘Image training’ (*imetore* イメトレ, *imēji torēningu* イメージ・トレーニング) showed her a way out of the hardship of everyday life as a working acupuncturist and single mother who moreover suffered from chronic nephritis since her childhood.

The story of ‘poor me’ [*kawaisō na watashi* カワイソウな私] takes my excitement away and curtails my vitality. This story is mostly intertwined with blood bonds—my parents, siblings, relatives and other kin. Especially my parents! My parents... “I became like this ‘cause mother and father were like that...” it’s such a common story. I suggest ‘nature’s arm’ [*nēchazu āmu* ネイチャーズ・アーム] image training for folks like this. ‘Nature’s arm’ was also my first image training. We who were wounded in the world of humans will yet receive salvation in another world...

The dandelions as well as the baby kitten were born into this world because they were loved by the parents of heaven and earth. With us it is the same. There is another world. We noticed it but we ignored it. What might happen if we win this other world through an image? First, the flow of time will change. A deep breath while imagining [*imēji suru* イメージする] a madder red cloud is all it takes... to slow down time and to deepen our awareness of our body and surroundings.

I highly enjoy the feeling of just following the road once time slows down... In my simple delight about this instantaneous happiness, ‘I am almost a cat; just a small creature. My image training is a lesson to ‘now for 100 per cent’ become that small creature. (Tanaka M. 1996: 55–56)

The calligraphy on a painting by the artist Watanabe Shunmei hanging in Tanaka Mitsu’s “Reraharuse” acupuncture clinic reads “life blooming with bonds, life falling with bonds” (*go-en atte saku inochi, go-en atte chiru inochi* ご縁あって咲くいのち、ご縁あって散るいのち). “This is not about the bonds with me personally,” says Tanaka. “It is about the bonds with the ‘higher power’ [*ōi naru chikara* 大いなる力] which brought us into this world.”

There is not much of a rift between Tanaka’s 1970s idea of *inochi* and her use of the same concept in the 1990s. A focal change is evident, however, when comparing her early emphasis on the expression of spiritual pain during her search for liberation with her later focus on a spiritual pleasure as gained in the course of her body and mind liberation. Pain and pleasure, as well as her longing for the future and her practice in the here and now, are all recurring themes included in both contexts. This is not only characteristic for Tanaka but applicable also for those individuals

who embody the genealogy of a spirituality of liberation as found in feminist counseling and the self-help movement since the 1980s.

At Prasad, the bookstore established by Yamao Sansei, publications by Tanaka Mitsu are displayed for high visibility. This is especially due to the strong interest in women's spirituality of now-manager Takahashi Yuriko, who runs the shop under its current name Nawa Prasad (Nawa Purasādo ナワ・プラサード) since 1994, next to Hobbit Village School.

### *The Spread and Application of 'Spirituality'*

Both Yamao Sansei and Funai Yukio must have felt that *seishin sekai* (the spiritual world) paralleled what they themselves were already searching for when the term came into use in 1977. The Prasad bookstore of Hobbit Village, which in part came to life by the efforts of Yamao Sansei, was one of the first stores with plans to cover a large array of *seishin sekai* literature. Funai Yukio had books about the spiritual world on his mind constantly and devoured them. Kashiwagi Tetsuo and Tanaka Mitsu, on the other hand, showed no substantial interest in the rise of *seishin sekai* or the new spirituality movement (*shin reisei undō* 新靈性運動). They rather considered it an estrangement from original spirituality or *inochi* self-liberation, and thus were somewhat opposed to the concept.

Until the 1980s, *seishin sekai* and the development of a new spirituality movement were considered dubious and even dangerous by promoters of traditional religions and political or social liberation movements. The spiritual world was said to lack a solid basis. Those spiritual trends observable in the liberation movements of traditional religious organizations, hospitals, and political or social groups, were not perceived as part of the new spirituality movement, but as clearly distinguished from *seishin sekai*.

Kashiwagi Tetsuo, on the basis of a Christian understanding of mind or spirit (*seishin*), had the intention to introduce a new dimension of care-related practices. Tanaka Mitsu decided to include the self-liberation of 'life' (*inochi*) into a socio-political movement. Both Kashiwagi and Tanaka created a new dimension not seen before in existing religious groups, socio-political movements, or the care system. They did so quietly, yet arguably nurtured a strong beacon of change. As far as their intentionality is concerned, however, it is safe to say neither Kashiwagi Tetsuo nor Tanaka Mitsu aimed for identification with the rising new spirituality movement of their time.

Subsequent developments, on the other hand, do show a mutual identification between the new spirituality movement Yamao and Funai were

involved in, and the new trends in traditional religious organizations, the care system, or the socio-political movement as shaped by Kashiwagi Tetsuo and Tanaka Mitsu respectively. Both sides shared a common basis on top of which this merger took place. It was under these circumstances that spirituality (*supirichuariti*) became a widespread term, while new age and *seishin sekai* fell out of use.

It appears that Tanaka Mitsu by herself turned towards healing techniques with roots in the new spirituality movement. This turn however did not only apply to Tanaka alone, but rather was in line with a broad trend in the self-help and consciousness-raising movements (*konshasunesu rējingu undō* コンシャスネス・レイジング運動, *ishiki kakusei undō* 意識覚醒運動) that occurred in conjunction with feminism. The 1980s and 1990s saw a rapid increase in psychotherapy and bodywork-induced forms of healing (*iyashi*) and therapy (*serapi*). This increase in healing techniques and therapy methods overlapped with the large-scale rise of the new spirituality (see Shimazono and Tanabe 2002; Shimazono 2003a) and strengthened the notion of social and political movements as movements of self-liberation (see Melucci 1989).

Kashiwagi Tetsuo meanwhile gradually moved from a standpoint of advocating hospice care on the basis of Christianity to a standpoint that pays attention to the experience of death itself, and to the fact that everyone is directly confronted with death. This again was in line with the trend of a growing awareness of spirituality-related questions in the field of health and education.

### *Spirituality and Hospice Care*

As previously noted, the concept of 'spirituality' attracted considerable attention as being different from conventional religion. At the same time, this growing discourse became loaded with a whole range of hopes and expectations by its practitioners. Common reasons given for the rise of this spiritual discourse include a growing discomfort with religion and an intensified sense of distance towards religion; the questioning of one's personal identity; and new attempts to shed light on assumed ultimate concerns and interests.

Another factor, however, comes from within modern institutions operated under the apparent supremacy of science and rationalism. Caused by the dynamics of a field of inquiry covered neither by science nor rationalism, we see here a growing awareness of a demand for new aspects of knowledge and practice that is neither religious nor scientific. This

approach is especially prominent in the field of health care and education: hospitals, schools, and universities, as well as influencing those specialists and teachers involved in higher learning and universities.

People in postwar Japan have become keenly aware of the fact that care for the dying in hospitals is a necessity. An ever-growing number of patients have been dying in hospitals rather than at home since the 1950s.<sup>14</sup> Yet modern medicine as taught at universities has not been concerned with insights about care for dying people, other than in its overall mission to offer knowledge and techniques for the cure of aching body parts. These circumstances fueled a demand for hospices in terms of facilities that are open to all kinds of people, regardless of religious affiliation; a facility to care for the dying instead of a hospital for treatment.

A role model for the international hospice movement was St. Christopher's Hospice in London, founded by Cicely Saunders in 1967 (du Boulay 1984). Her influence on Tamiya Masashi in Japan contributed to his proposal of 'Vihara' (*bihāra* ビハラー) in 1984, a terminal care concept based on Buddhism (Tamiya 2007). Hospices and Vihara-institutions, like hospitals, were initially designed to enable a life-in-care within a facility. This changed gradually towards an emphasis on home-based care. Home-based care aims at an improvement in quality of life by enabling people to die at home.

The physical and medical profile of hospice care consists of a physiological relief of suffering, also known as palliative care. The psychological and mental aspects of hospice care, on the other hand, are strongly related to the understanding of a spiritual pain (*supirichuaru pēn* スピリチュアル・ペイン). Spiritual care helps individuals face this pain and aspires to enrich the lives of those who are dying by providing humane conditions and better standards during a patient's last stage of life.

### *The Concept of Spiritual Care*

Kubotera Toshiyuki, a chaplain of the spiritual care program at Yodogawa Christian Hospital where Kashiwagi Tetsuo engaged in Japan's first

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<sup>14</sup> According to Suzuki Hikaru (2003: 662), 90.8 per cent of registered deaths in Japan occurred at home in 1947. Since 1977, the majority (50.6 per cent) of people in Japan died in hospitals. This percentage rose to 75.1 per cent in 1990 (93.3 per cent in case of terminal cancer). See both Kawano and Tanabe in this volume for studies on changing notions of death in Japan.

hospice-related care practice, gives a precise semantic description of ‘spiritual care’ based on his theological background. He says the concept ‘spiritual care’ (*supirichuaru kea* スピリチュアル・ケア) “refers to the spiritual existence of man and the natural interest of people in things ‘mental’ [*seishinteki*] and ‘spiritual’ [*reiteki*], their interest in being detached from worldly things [*datsuzokuteki* 脱俗的], and their interest in the sublime [*sūkō* 崇高], the noble [*kedakai* 気高い], the holy [*shinsei* 神聖] and the religious [*shūkyōteki* 宗教的].” He then explains that it is only natural that “especially people facing death show interest in these matters. This is where they search for a foundation on the basis of which they can deal with their misery” (Kubotera 2000: 13).

So what are those spiritual aspects inherent to humans, or in other words, what is spirituality? Kubotera defines the concept as follows:

Spirituality is the ability to search for a new foundation in life by turning to an outer being that is higher than oneself in times when you face a life-crisis and lose your grip, or when you are lost because things did not go according to plan; spirituality is the power to live in this crisis and to find your dreams. It is the ability to find a new meaning and purpose of life inside you when all seems lost. (ibid.)

He furthermore explains the relationship between ‘spiritual care’ and ‘religious care’. They form two distinct, yet partly overlapping subjects. Some patients asking for prayers want spiritual care, while others do so in asking for religious care. The difference, according to Kubotera, is as follows:

‘Religious care’ implies an absolute and ultimate being (Buddha, god). Worshipping this being and praying to it is a religious care-specific matter that distinguishes it from other forms of care. An important point of religious care lies in strengthening and deepening the personal relationship with the object of prayer (the object of worship) while constantly being aware of its existence. The rehabilitation of this relationship with the object of prayer is the most important task. Achieving a rehabilitation of the relationship with Buddha or god in terms of trust will bring about a direct feeling of flowing supernatural grace [*chōshizenteki onchō* 超自然的恩寵]. That is the experience of salvation [*kyūsai no taiken* 救済の体験]. In ‘spiritual care’, on the other hand, the object of prayer is not fixed. The most important focus in the concept of spiritual care is the individual patient, the relationship with whom is highly valued. (2000: 57)

Kubotera believes the emphasis of spiritual care is on the patient’s own views, interpretations and understanding. Caregivers will try their best to support those in need by responding to their individual concerns and ideas. Most important is what gives the patient ‘life energy’. This understanding

is rooted in the experience of hospice care and clearly shows a consideration of spirituality by the field of Thanatology or death studies.<sup>15</sup>

*'Spirituality' and the Influence of Thanatology*

The spread of the term 'spirituality' (*supirichuariti*) in Japan is said to have started in 1995, an assumption based on the use of related words in book titles. This is not to say that 'spirituality' and 'spiritual' or 'spiritualism' (*supirichuarizumu* スピリチュアリズム) were not in use before this time. Prior to 1995, those terms were considered specific vocabulary used by specialists and insiders only. Most people with an interest in matters 'not religious but spiritual' referred to the common terms *seishin sekai* and *reisei* until around 1995 (Horie 2003: 14–15).

This shift was related to two trends. The first was the spread of the terms 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' in the field of Thanatology and second was the growing acceptance of these terms by a wide range of people in general (on the development of Thanatology in Japan see Shimazono 2003b). By the turn of the century, 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' had turned into fashionable words even when used in contexts previously described by words such as *reikai* 霊界 (ghost world, spirit world) and *shinrei* 心霊 (spirit, ghost).

Among those who played a key role in this development is Ehara Hiroyuki, born in 1964. Ehara had learned about spiritualism in the United Kingdom. He then adopted 'spiritual counseling' and in 1989 initiated the Institute of Spiritualism Studies (*Supirichuarizumu Kenkyūsho* スピリチュアリズム研究所) in Japan. Spiritualism is a religious movement with a focus on communication with the afterlife and psychic performances. Its history traces back to the 1860s, including a reception in Japan, where terms commonly attributed to spiritualism are *reikai*, *shinrei* or *reigaku* 霊学 (psychic studies), among others (Tanaka C. 1971).

Titles of books by Ehara Hiroyuki from the 1990s include *Jibun no tame no reigaku no susume* 自分のための「霊学」のすすめ (*Psychic Studies for Yourself—A Recommendation*), *Shinrei baiburū* 心霊バイブル (*Ghost*

<sup>15</sup> Thanatology developed in close association with nursing and medical care in hospitals and health care institutions. The focus of Thanatology is on death and the process of dying, including social implications of death and dying that relate to grief, stress and the experience of loss. In Japanese, Thanatology is frequently translated as *shiseigaku* (死生学; death and life studies). In recent years in Japan, *shiseigaku* (as Death and Life Studies; DALs) emerged as a new interdisciplinary approach which seeks to further academic exchange between the medical field, the humanities, and social sciences.

*Bible*; both published in 1995); *Anoyo no hanashi* あの世の話 (*Stories of the Other World*, 1998, together with Satō Aiko). His real bestseller, however, came with *The Spiritual Book to Attract Happiness: Kōfuku wo hikiyoseru supirichuaru bukku* 幸福を引きよせるスピリチュアルブック in 2001. This volume sold over 600,000 copies. Since then, Ehara established a strong presence in the mass media (Ehara 2003; see also Lisette Gebhardt's discussion of Ehara in this volume).

Ehara's use of the word 'spiritual' is closely related to his understanding of 'spiritualism' and thus differs from the use of 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' in the hospice context and Thanatology. Yet, it is no coincidence that Ehara became successful with the term 'spiritual counseling' (*supirichuaru kaunseringu* スピリチュアル・カウンセリング). He achieved a change in terminology by dusting off 'spiritualism' from its musty connotations derived from established religions and self-help movements. Instead, he brought 'spiritualism' closer into the culture of contemporary therapy (Tanabe and Shimazono 2002). Therapy culture (*serapī bunka* セラピー文化) includes psychotherapy, bodywork, and other healing-concepts and techniques for body and mind. The collective term furthermore expresses the ongoing trend of outsourcing care practice, with a shift from family and neighborhood-related care to care conducted by welfare institutions and commercial facilities. Another characteristic aspect of *serapī bunka* is the emergence of a new scientific-religious worldview. This is based on a growing awareness about the limitations of modern science's dualistic separation of body and mind.

The words 'spiritual' and 'spirituality', which were mostly used in Thanatology and hospice care, were already showing signs of expansion in 1995, especially in fields related to hospice care and death studies. Their dominance may have been caused by the success of the work by Ehara. He helped to shape this discourse in part because he pulled the word 'spiritual' into the spotlight of overall therapy culture and the popular religious field (Shimazono 1992, 2001). His efforts, alongside those of television commentators, actors, academics and other media headliners, helped turn 'spirituality' into a term accepted by the general public.

### *The New Spirituality Movement as a Global Phenomenon*

#### 1. *Globalization and the Media*

The new spirituality phenomenon evolved in close relationship to the globalization of the modern world, especially in regards to the development of the media, and is tightly intertwined with the proliferation of

new means of communication. Participants of the new spirituality movement and culture often receive sought-after information through books, videos, or audio, or via online media, in their own private living space rather than through group settings and face to face contact. The emphasis, even in cases of a participation in meetings, courses or workshops, is on individual practice rather than on practice in a group.

There is strong evidence that, except for the few who make a living as providers of knowledge and practice, most participants come in touch with information on an individual basis, as a client or audience member, rather than in belonging to an organization, group or church (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). It is therefore common for those involved, and by and large also for scholars, to understand this movement and culture as comprising a 'loose network' (York 1995).

The rapid sharing of information by the means of modern media technology enables an ongoing expansion of culture on a global scale. This is not to conclude that local cultures disappear in the process, since people keep practicing and inventing them, but to say that local concepts, practices, and material culture are far more likely to expand and intersect globally. Transcultural, transnational, and global flows enable information, practices and even material culture to enter new settings and contexts instantaneously. The new spirituality culture, within which characteristics of national and regional cultures of the world are already reflected and evident, is part of this new global culture and discourse.

The ongoing reception of spirituality culture is most visible in the U.S., Europe, Japan and India, each of which has generated cultural patterns of response in their own way. In recent years, China and other countries such as Russia have also developed rich pools of new spirituality culture. In that sense, this global phenomenon is plural and multi-centered. While it is true that *shin reisei bunka* has been shaped largely by the Western new age movement, it would be misleading to overemphasize its 'Western' characteristics, let alone to equate them with a global culture of new spirituality.

## 2. *Multiple Sources and Applications*

The new spirituality culture in Japan shows a remarkable continuity with traditional religions. Moreover, it hardly opposes dominant contemporary religious trends. Many concepts and practices of the new spirituality culture are already present in the long history of folk religion, as well as in Shintō and Buddhism. Shamanic cultures of healing and exorcism, and



divination practices that stem from folk-religious traditions all appear in a modern guise, using vocabulary and techniques from the new spirituality movement.

New religious innovations are also presented as revivals of long lasting traditions despite a lack of historical evidence. In the Japanese context, this new spirituality culture is also seen frequently in close relation to nationalism (Shimazono 1996, 2001). There is an ongoing debate, for instance, about animism as the core of Japanese religious culture. Animism, a recurring theme in the new spiritual culture,<sup>16</sup> is seen as a tradition that differentiates the religious worldview of Asia from other traditions, such as Christianity, Islam, and even Buddhism. Animism is understood by some writers as a suitable model for the modern world, due to its premised non-oppressive quality and its harmony with nature.<sup>17</sup> It is promoted as a cultural and religious tradition of which East Asians can be proud, similar to the regional popularity of *qigong* in China, Korea, and Japan.

Considering that the new spirituality culture in Japan and elsewhere may contribute to nationalistic perspectives, a critical distance is needed in scholarship that emphasizes these spiritual trends as strongly individualistic. There is indeed a close relationship between the individualistic side of this movement and its global, pluralistic and multi-centered aspects. Apart from a few leaders and participants of the movement, most individuals have multi-faceted ties to a variety of cultural resources and information that are spread globally. Individuals do not participate in only one discourse or practice one ritual system exclusively, nor do they share connections with only one doctrinal system or community.

This contemporary situation is different from premodern contexts and traditional religion which is supported by a group of religious specialists and intellectuals who maintain a systematized discourse on the one hand, and by the community of general believers and practitioners on the other. The fact that those involved in new spirituality culture see a certain validity regarding its relatedness to religion, even though they claim their movement and culture to be not religious, also has to do with the social configuration of this cultural transmission.<sup>18</sup> There is no question that we can call this phenomenon 'religion' if we broaden our definition.

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<sup>16</sup> See for example the passage on Yamao Sansei in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Aoki 1990 and Umehara 1992.

<sup>18</sup> For Robert Redfield's discussion on what he called 'great traditions' and 'little traditions' see Redfield (1956).

However, the fact that participants of the new spirituality understand their movement and culture to not be a 'religion' does have some basis in reality. Many of those involved grasp what deeply reflects and shapes their identity as spirituality and not religion. Their use of terms such as *shin reisei undō* (new spirituality movement) and *shin reisei bunka* (new spirituality culture) illustrates the emic factor of their self-understanding. From this perspective, religion is frequently distinguished as being more restrictive, impersonal and institutionalized than spirituality.

The array of shared and private meanings attributed to spirituality by authors of spiritual literature in Japan is evident within the expressions of individual identity and national distinction. Encompassing their diverse concepts of spirituality enhances our understanding as to how the rise of this plural and multi-centered new spirituality culture was shaped. This awareness requires an assessment of the authors' individual biographies as well as further study of general sociocultural trends such as the proliferation of new means of communication in a globalizing world. The interplay of spirituality and Thanatology in the study of religion, on the other hand, suggests that careful consideration is needed regarding how the new spirituality movement as a global phenomenon is being institutionalized in society, most notably in hospice care and in the overall marketplace. It is through these contexts that spirituality impacts the ways in which shifting norms and needs are noticed, challenged, and contested in Japan and the world today.

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*PETTO KUYŌ*: CHANGING VIEWS OF ANIMAL SPIRITS  
IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN\*

BARBARA AMBROS

Early in the afternoon on Sunday, July 15, 2007, the small main hall of Jikeiin 慈恵院, a Rinzai temple in Fuchū in Western Tokyo with one of the largest and busiest pet cemeteries in the metropolitan area, is crowded with sixty people—mostly middle-aged women and a few young women and elderly men. Despite the heavy rains of a typhoon that morning, they have



Figure 1. Segakie service at Jikeiin, Fuchū, Tokyo on July 15, 2007. (Photograph by the author, 2007)

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\* This article is based on fieldwork at thirty pet cemeteries in the larger Tokyo metropolitan area, Nagoya, Kanazawa, and Niigata, where I interviewed Buddhist clerics, cemetery employees and cemetery clients and engaged in participant observation. I also surveyed popular publications, cemetery websites, and Internet chat rooms. A longer version of this article has previously appeared as Ambros 2010.

come to attend the yearly *segakie* 施餓鬼会 ritual for pets. The patrons have received booklets so that they can chant along with the clerics as they intone the *Heart Sūtra*, a Kannon *dharani*, and the Bodhisattva's Four Vows. A censer box is passed through the rows of patrons so that they can offer incense. The service ends with brief a dedication of merit. There is no sermon, and the pets are not mentioned individually, but some patrons will commission individual services later in the afternoon.

As the ritual is about to begin, Mrs. M., a middle-aged, slender woman, slides into one of the last open chairs next to me. She whispers:

You know, it was my cat who woke me up this morning so that I would attend this ritual on his behalf. I nearly overslept because of the typhoon. He kept licking me with his rough tongue. I would not have made it in time without him waking me up. When I opened my eyes though, he was gone.

Her mackerel tabby Jun had died only eleven days earlier at the age of twenty. She did not immediately want another cat, but her neighbor brought her a kitten that was Jun's spitting image, except that his tail was a bit longer. The new cat took immediately to her so she became convinced that Jun had been reborn as this kitten. When the kitten had woken her up this morning, it was a message from Jun that he did not want her to miss his memorial service.

In the 1990s, the Japanese pet industry expanded into a trillion-yen business. Estimates place the number of pets above the number of children under the age of fifteen (cf. Weekly Ōsaka Nichinichi 2008). With the pet boom, there has also been a dramatic growth in the pet funeral industry. Indicated by the pervasive usage of the term 'our little ones' (*uchi no ko* うちの子) to designate pets, contemporary Japanese pet owners increasingly view their companion animals as family members (*kazoku no ichi'in* 家族の一員); therefore, pets often buried and memorialized with rites due to a family member. There are now over 900 pet cemeteries in Japan, about 120 of which are operated by Buddhist temples (Yamamoto 2006: 64). Even pet cemeteries not operated by Buddhist temples usually have ties to Buddhist clerics who officiate during rituals on major holy days dedicated to the dead such as the equinoxes (*higan* 彼岸) and festival of the dead (*obon* お盆). Buddhist mortuary rites for pets have become an institutionalized practice, even though some temples, particularly those of the Jōdo Shin sect, reject the performance of pet memorial rites. However, in my ethnographic fieldwork at over thirty pet cemeteries over the past four years, it was apparent that Buddhist clerics left their views on the afterlife of pets largely unarticulated even though one would

assume some explanation to be crucial for providing a rationale for pet mortuary rites. This is not to say that this discourse does not exist, but it occurs in popular publications and discussions in Internet chat rooms rather than at Buddhist temples.<sup>1</sup>

As Shimazono Susumu has pointed out, there has been a growing interest in spirits and spirituality in Japan's highly urbanized society of the late twentieth century. Spirit belief and magico-spiritual practices occur mostly outside the framework of established religion: in the New New Religions, the writings of spiritual intellectuals and what Shimazono terms 'New Spirituality Movements and Culture' (*shin reisei undō/bunka* 新靈性運動・文化).<sup>2</sup> Shimazono argues that such spiritualist practices and spirit beliefs are particularly compatible with the postmodern world because they work well within the context of disintegrating traditional family structures and weakening ties with established religious institutions. They are also appealing because they play on the notion of complexity and uncertainty, which they appear to make somewhat controllable through the manipulation of spirits (Shimazono 2004: 164–77, 275–79, 290–92, 304). Shimazono has also repeatedly noted the emphasis on individuality and personal gratification in the New New Religions and the New Spirituality Movements and Culture. He argues that these spiritual and magical practices are radically different from the communally oriented ancestral practices in established Buddhism and older New Religions, which emphasize the protection of the family rather than the existence of personal spirit guardians (Shimazono 1992a, 1992b, 2007: 275–306; Reader 1993: 237–38). It is no surprise then that the discourse about the afterlife of pets—with its implied redefinition of the meaning of 'the family' (*kazoku* 家族) and emphasis on vengeful and protective spirits—has primarily occurred in the context of this New Spirituality Culture.

In my survey of sermons at mortuary rituals for pets (*petto kuyō* ペット供養), interviews with Buddhist clerics and clients at pet cemeteries,

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<sup>1</sup> Kenney briefly refers to some of the published materials (e.g., the works of Izumo Sayoko and Tomidokoro Gitoku) discussed in this article, but does not elaborate on it in detail. Furthermore, the discourse has changed over the past five to six years. In addition to changing attitudes toward pet spirits, I also noticed a growing willingness among the public as well as some Buddhist clerics to embrace joint-species burial, another phenomenon much more uncommon during Kenney's fieldwork (cf. Kenney 2004: 56–57). Nevertheless, Kenney's article provides a very useful discussion of the ritual aspects of pet memorial rites.

<sup>2</sup> Shimazono's term 'New Spirituality Movements and Culture' refers to a phenomenon that parallels the New Age movement in the West but that tends to be more inclusive of traditional religious practices.

publications by popular psychics, and Internet chat rooms, I encountered several influences that shape ideas about the afterlife of pets: (1) Buddhist ideas of transmigration, rebirth, and salvation; (2) notions about unsettled, vengeful spirits and benign, protective spirits; and Western influences including (3) popular ideas of heaven as well as (4) spiritualist and psychological notions from the field of pet-loss therapy. The growing influence of pet-loss literature early in the new millennium as well as the post-Aum climate have altered the ways in which Japanese pet owners, ritualists, and psychics conceptualize the afterlife of pets: from potentially vengeful spirits and spiritually inferior beasts to benign, faithful companions.<sup>3</sup> The transformation of pet spirits during the past two decades illustrates the changes in the New Spirituality Culture through the Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 incident and increased globalization through the rise of the Internet.

*Buddhist Clerics: "Animals Are Sentient Beings but not Beasts"*

Traditional Japanese views of the spiritual status and the afterlife of animals are ambivalent. Even though divine, human, and animal realms are seen as interconnected, there has also been a sense of differentiation and hierarchy. Animals have been regarded as powerful, even potentially threatening, spiritual forces that can punish those who wrong them and reward those who treat them well. Within Buddhism, animals are also sentient beings (*shujō* 衆生, *ikimono* 生き物, or *ujō* 有情) with the potential for better rebirth and salvation. Yet, they are also lower beings in the cycle of death and rebirth that are spiritually inferior and inherently unclean. As residents of the realm of beasts (*chikushōdō* 畜生道), one of the three lower—or evil—realms of rebirth, animals are regarded as emblems of delusion and attachment. Being reborn as a beast is the result of karmic retribution for unwholesome deeds and viewed as a punishment. Furthermore, while animals appear frequently in Buddhist didactic tales beginning with the Jātaka literature, there are no Buddhist scriptures specifically for animals, let alone pets.

This leads to dilemmas when contemporary Buddhist clerics who conduct pet memorial rituals turn to traditional Buddhist doctrine to describe the posthumous fate of pets. Operating largely without any definitive

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<sup>3</sup> Their transformation is not unlike that of demons (*oni* 鬼) in contemporary popular culture from frightening to cute, as chronicled by Noriko Reider (2003: 133–57).



guidance from sectarian headquarters on these matters, individual Buddhist clerics have to reinterpret Buddhist scriptures and teachings creatively and selectively if they want to appeal to contemporary pet owners. In general, Buddhist clerics conducting pet memorial rituals tend to promote the notion of pets as fellow sentient beings and the idea of rebirth near the former owner in this life or the next, but many clerics tend to avoid equating pets with what might be called ‘beastly existence’.<sup>4</sup>

The case of Narita Junkyō, the abbot of Kannōji 感応寺, a Jōdo temple in Kamiuma (Setagaya Ward, Tokyo), which has a small pet cemetery on the temple grounds, illustrates how Buddhist clerics struggle to appropriate traditional scriptures to suit contemporary needs. Since Narita’s sectarian leadership offered him no guidance on how to integrate pets doctrinally and ritually, he searched keywords related to animals in Internet versions of the major three Pure Land scriptures. Of course, the modern term ‘animal’ (*dōbutsu* 動物) does not occur in the texts. However, the older Buddhist term ‘beasts’ (*chikushō* 畜生) appears but only in the comment that there is no beastly realm in Amida’s Pure Land. Narita interpreted this to mean that pets cannot be reborn directly into the Pure Land. On his temple’s website he mentions the six realms of existence but carefully avoids the term *chikushō*, opting instead for the modern term *dōbutsu* (see Narita). Perhaps this reluctance is due to the fact that in colloquial modern Japanese, *chikushō* is used to describe someone as a ‘brute’. The term is also used as an expletive with a similar meaning as a four-letter word in English while *chikushōdō* (beastly existence) colloquially means ‘incest’.<sup>5</sup> Instead of dwelling on the beastly realm, Narita emphasizes themes of kinship and karmic connections. In an interview with the author in 2006, Narita firmly insisted that animals cannot be immediately be reborn in the Pure Land because they cannot recite the *nenbutsu* 念仏 and therefore cannot be saved directly through the power of Amida’s original vow. However, when the owners recite the *nenbutsu* and memorialize their pets, the pets are able to be born as humans or heavenly beings and thus

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<sup>4</sup> Contemporary publications with testimonials of pet owners who lost pets occasionally mention how Buddhist clerics addressed the posthumous fate of the pet, usually by promising a good rebirth near the owner but carefully avoiding any reference to the idea of the beastly realm. See, for example, Yasuda Yuriko 1999: 144, and Seto Tamaki 1999: 80–81.

<sup>5</sup> In the past, the characters ‘畜’, ‘玄田’ (read *chiku*) and ‘玄田牛一’ (read *chikushō*) were also often used in discriminatory posthumous names for outcasts in an apparent allusion to the supposedly unclean professions of these groups, which were often related to the handling of animal products (such as hides and carcasses).

have a chance to gain salvation in the Pure Land. Though it is somewhat delayed, they can gain salvation through the agency of the owner. This view was initially also reflected on Kannōji's website, but recently Narita rephrased the text to make it more appealing to his clients.<sup>6</sup> Of note in his comments is that once reborn via a human life into the Pure Land, the pets will be reunited with their loved ones. The notion of a happy reunion in a future existence must be appealing to pet owners; yet the delay through an intermediary rebirth might be dissatisfying for some.

However, more often than not Buddhist clerics leave the posthumous fate of pets and the rationale for the performance of the rituals up to the imagination of the pet owners. Unable or untrained to produce appealing answers based on doctrinal sources, many clerics avoid addressing the issue of the afterlife of pets entirely. For example, in 2007, I asked Suzuki Wajun, a Jōdo cleric who founded Azusawa Memorial Park 小豆沢墓苑, which allows joint human-pet interment, whether people ever asked him about what happened to pets after their deaths. He responded:

No. That doesn't come up. I think that we don't really know. Religions such as Christianity have come up with the notions of heaven and hell and other stories. In Buddhism, we have the Pure Land and so forth, but I believe that we don't really know. Ultimately, Buddhism is for the living.

Here Suzuki resists any speculation about the afterlife of pets. He further questions several fundamental concepts of Pure Land Buddhism: rebirth and the existence of Pure Land. Instead, he adopts a rationalist and agnostic point of view. This was an attitude that I commonly encountered at Buddhist temples offering pet memorial rituals. Many clerics saw the performance of the rites as a service for the living, that is, the pet owners. When pet owners come to a Buddhist temple, a pet funeral is not seen as an occasion to dwell on the uncertain fate of the deceased pet but one to preach on Buddhist themes in general.

In her study of memorial rites for aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō* 水子供養), Helen Hardacre notes a similar dynamic. Except for Jōdo Shinshū,

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<sup>6</sup> Kenney (2004: 58) cites an eighteenth-century tale from the *Kinsei nenbutu ōjōden* 近世念仏往生伝 compiled by the Buddhist cleric Jun'a Ryūe (1759–1834) that contains the story of a dog that practiced chanting the *nenbutsu* and was thus reborn in the Pure Land. In my fieldwork, I found no evidence that any contemporary clerics or pet owners were familiar with this tale. On the contrary, postings in chat rooms occasionally reflect the idea that pets cannot be reborn in the Pure Land. See for example, posting 264 (28 March 2005) on “Inu neko kuyō ni tsuite.” Kenney (2004: 59) also acknowledges that her informants were unfamiliar with the tale and were more likely to refer to the idea of universal Buddha nature.

most Japanese Buddhist sects do not offer a standardized, systematic policy toward memorial rites for aborted fetuses. The liveliest discourse on the spirits of aborted fetuses occurs in other channels, particularly among localized and independent spiritualists and religious entrepreneurs (Hardacre 1997: 155–74). In the case of pet memorial rites, much of the development occurs at individual temples rather than through promotion by the sectarian headquarters. There are few channels of communication between clerics of different temples although a few efforts to collaborate on a business level do exist, but there is little cohesion in terms of the contents of the rites or the teachings represented.<sup>7</sup> As in the case of *mizuko kuyō*, independent spiritualists rather than Buddhist clerics are the most vocal participants in the discourse on pet spirits.

*Pet Spirits in the Psychic Literature of the 1990s: Vengeful Spirits*

Popular psychics and clairvoyants have been eager to address the topic of the afterlife of pets. As pet memorial rites were gaining popularity and the occult boom was reaching a pinnacle in the early 1990s, spirit mediums and clairvoyants painted a very threatening picture of dead pets that were not buried or memorialized ‘properly’. They portrayed the spirits of pets as threatening entities that would haunt their owners or those who mistreated them when they were alive. A Buddhist term that often appears in this context is the concept of ‘*jōbutsu* 成仏’. As Kenney has aptly noted, the term literally means ‘to become a Buddha’, but in the context of Japanese memorial rites it usually has the meaning of ‘to have a happy afterlife’ (2004: 59). One might also translate the term as ‘becoming a spirit that is at peace’. Memorialization is seen as essential to the pet’s spirit finding peace.

In the early 1990s, clairvoyants, such as Izumo Sayoko (1943–), Gibo Aiko (1932–2003), and Tomidokoro Gitoku (dates unknown) published

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<sup>7</sup> For example, One Heart Communication, a stone masonry business developed by a Jōdo temple in Kyoto, offers urns in the shape of pets. The company has managed to develop a loose network of temples offering pet memorial rites while promoting the urns (One Heart Stone Company). Furthermore, Fujii Masao, professor emeritus at Taishō University, has edited a volume entitled *Petto kuyō, reien seibi un'ei jissen kōza* aimed at Buddhist clerics who want to establish a pet cemetery. For this work, the compiler surveyed several pet cemeteries and solicited detailed information about the pet memorial rites conducted at each. Some of the participants, however, were reluctant to divulge detailed information about the rites, such as the verse for the merit transfer, because they feared being reprimanded for being unorthodox by their sectarian headquarters.

on the subject of the memorialization of pets. All three focus strongly on the spiritual harm that animals will cause when they are memorialized incorrectly and therefore are unable to find peace. They promote a highly anthropocentric worldview according to which animals exist on a lower spiritual plane than humans and are locked into a nearly endless cycle of rebirths as animals. They give pets the highest spiritual status among animals because of their close relationship with humans. They also provide highly prescriptive instructions on how to conduct funerals and memorial rites for pets. Failure to follow these instructions is said to lead to spiritual retribution by the restless, distressed spirits while compliance promises to usher in personal happiness (*shiwase o maneku* 幸せを招く). With the exception of Izumo, these psychics engage in a forceful critique of the practices promoted by Buddhist institutions that run pet cemeteries (Izumo 1994; Tomidokoro 1993; Gibo 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1991a, 1991b, 1995, 2002, 2003).

Gibo, the most widely known among these three psychics discussed here, also espouses a highly anthropocentric view of the spiritual status of animals. From the 1970s until the mid 1990s and again from 2001 to 2003, Gibo was frequently featured on Japanese radio and television and published numerous books on spirit matters, including occasional books and book chapters on animals. In the mid 1990s, Gibo's career experienced a five-year hiatus in the aftermath of the Aum Shinrikyō affair, when alternative religion was strongly criticized as heterodox and potentially dangerous. Her career rebounded briefly from 2001 to 2003 (Harada and Suginami 2006). Gibo's theories were largely a prescriptive critique rather than a descriptive observation of common practices. Her death in 2003 ended her prolific career, but it is questionable whether her views would have continued to have any considerable impact on the performance of pet memorial rituals had she lived longer.

Clairvoyants writing during the mid 1990s stressed the harmful potential of vengeful pet spirits, the relative inefficacy of institutionalized Buddhist rites, and issued highly prescriptive recommendations on how to avoid spiritual harm. They constructed pets as close to humans but ultimately and essentially Other. They also strongly argued against wastefulness and extravagance in pet funerals and memorial rites—a common charge levied by the Japanese public against pet memorial rites, which are widely seen as money-making schemes conceived by excessively entrepreneurial Buddhist clerics.

The widespread negative attitude toward pet memorial rites can be explained as follows. First of all, the use of pets as symbols of material

excess is a common trope across different cultures. As James Serpell has pointed out, pets have little utilitarian value; thus pet-keeping has often been depicted as a wasteful extravagance. In the past, pet-keeping practiced by the social elites was an image of decadence. Even in the contemporary period, this image is very potent and often stressed in the media (Serpell 1996: 43–59). In Japan, critics see the recent boom in pet keeping as an outgrowth of late twentieth century consumerism—particularly among women (Skabelund 2004: 230).

Second, the Japanese mortuary industry has a similarly tarnished image of being exploitative and commercialized. The media have accused funeral companies of predatory practices in recruiting clients and fixing prices (Bernstein 2006: 173–74). Funeral workers may earn the gratitude of bereaved clients, but their work also entails aspects considered dirty by larger society (Suzuki 2000: 123–78).

Third, the roles of Buddhist clerics in the mortuary practices are also charged with negative connotations. Buddhist clerics are widely criticized for charging exorbitant amounts of money for posthumous names and for the exploitative nature of rites for aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō*) (Covell 2005: 140, 153). They are also widely regarded as treating their profession as a business rather than a religious vocation (Suzuki 2000: 167–76). The spiritualists' criticism of pet memorial rites conducted by Buddhist clerics needs to be understood in this context.

To distinguish their own practices from lavish funeral practices at Buddhist temples, the spiritualists of the 1990s favored simplicity and moderation, which they argued would best help to propitiate the spirits of dead pets. Many Japanese pet owners seem to agree that pet memorial rites need not be lavish or expensive, that animals need to be memorialized to be at peace, and that they are subject to rebirth. Some pet owners, especially those belonging to an older generation, might believe that disturbing the cremains by keeping them in the home indefinitely or moving them about prevents the pets from finding peace. Likewise excessive grief or attachment is thought to prevent the pet's spirit from settling.<sup>8</sup> However, in my fieldwork I have not found much evidence that the

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<sup>8</sup> For example, in the 1960s, Shiragi Misae annually dug up her golden retriever's urn that lay buried in the backyard upon returning home for *obon*. After ten years, her mother told her that if she continued indefinitely the dog would not be able to become a Buddha, implying that he would not be able to find peace (Shiragi 1999: 147–54). See also postings 526 and 527 (19 November 2006) on chat room "Inu neko no kuyō ni tsuite," and posting 371 (29 September 2006) on chat room "[Shi] Petto ga shindara."

majority of pet owners believed strongly in the harmful potential of pet spirits. On the contrary, some pet owners, like Mrs. M. at Jikeiin, consider the idea that pets are locked into a cycle of continuous rebirth as animals desirable. Instead of wishing for a higher rebirth for their pets, some pet owners would like their pets to be reborn as their new pets so that the bond between owner and pet can continue without interruption. Many contemporary Japanese pet owners also interpret the lingering presence of the pet (e.g., in the cremains) as positive. Rather than fearing being haunted, many think that pets have the potential to become benevolent protective spirits. The discourse on this subject appears to have shifted.

*New Concepts: Loving Spiritual Companions in Heaven  
or under the Rainbow Bridge*

It appears then that neither traditional Buddhist concepts about rebirth, salvation and impermanence nor the image of vengeful spirits is completely satisfactory for contemporary Japanese pet owners.<sup>9</sup> The influx of Western pet-loss therapy and spiritualist literature regarding pets in the 1990s and the growth of Japanese pet-loss literature in the first decade of the millennium have propelled psychics, and even a few Buddhist clerics, to respond to these new concepts.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary views blend Western and traditional Japanese ideas in order to present a very comforting, benevolent rather than a frightening, vengeful vision of the afterlife of pets.

The spiritualist scene has responded to the emerging pet-loss discourse. For example, Fuwa Kyōzō is a self-proclaimed pet therapist. His book entitled *Pettorosu to aikentachi no 'chō-nōryoku 'chō-sekai* ペットロスと愛犬たちの「超」能力「超」世界 (Pet loss and the paranormal powers and paranormal world of our beloved dogs) is a mixture of, on the one hand, practical advice on how to overcome pet loss, pet-loss testimonials, the emotional benefit of therapy pets and, on the other hand, testimonials to the uncanny, spiritual abilities of dogs, possession by animal spirits, and speculations on the afterlife of animals. To resolve spiritual difficulties with dogs, he recommends a mixture of memorial rituals, amulets,

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<sup>9</sup> For example, posting 35 (28 April 2006) on chat room “[Reien] Petto no ohaka dō suru? [Niwa]” summarizes Gibo Aiko’s recommendations for pet memorials in detail, but the posting is completely ignored by the other chat room users.

<sup>10</sup> Kenney (2004: 58–59) notes that during her fieldwork on pet memorial rituals early in the new millennium, pet loss was not a widely recognized concept among pet owners. However, the term has arguably gained greater recognition and currency since.

geomancy and psychotherapy (Fuwa 2004). Ultimately, Fuwa emphasizes individual choice, internal attitude, and companionship over rigid form. Thus he embraces a much more moderate message than the previous generation of spiritualists, who tend to be much more rigidly prescriptive.

However, Fuwa's book does not sell nearly as well as those of others that have adopted a much more positive view of the afterlife of pets, such as Harold Sharp's *Pettotachi wa shigo mo ikite iru* ペットたちは死後もいきている (Pets also live after death). The central tenets of the book are advertised on the front leaf as:

- The life of pets is immortal.
- Even though we cannot see pets once they have died, they are always present near their owners.
- People will be reunited with their long-time pet companions after death.
- Animals that died of illness or due to accidents also have happy and healthy lives in the 'new world' (Sharp 2002).

These tenets are very much representative of the current literature on pet death and pet loss in Japan. Ehara Hiroyuki, the most popular TV psychic in Japan today, also stresses the spiritual companionship between pets and their owners. Ehara (1964–) was trained as a Shintō priest and has ties with the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain. Since 2003, he has regularly appeared on television<sup>11</sup> and his publications are widely available. He enjoys wide popularity, particularly among a female audience. On television and in his *Petto wa anata no supirichuaru pātonā* ペットはあなたのスピリチュアルパートナー (Pets are your spiritual partners)—advertised on the slip cover as “the first spiritual book that fosters the eternal bond between you and your pet”—Ehara proclaims that animal spirits are not sources for spiritual harm to humans, but instead they can be harmed and hampered by human conduct. His vision completely eliminates all traces of vengeful spirits and replaces them with a notion of lasting companionship and the promise of a future reunion in the afterlife. Ehara's pet spirits still obey the call of their former owners and rely completely on their owners for their spiritual advancement. Like earlier psychics, he posits a spiritual hierarchy among animals and humans, but unlike earlier psychics, he does not openly criticize institutionalized religious practices

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<sup>11</sup> He previously appeared regularly on Kansai Television's *Tsūkai eburidei* 痛快エブリデー Tuesday segment, Ehara Hiroyuki *kokoro no shohōsen* 江原啓之心の処方箋, and until recently on Asahi Television's *Ōra no izumi* オーラの泉 and Fuji Television's Ehara Hiroyuki *supesharu tengoku kara no tegami* 江原啓之スペシャル 天国からの手紙. For an analysis of Ehara's television presence see Koike Yasushi 2007: 11–58.

as dangerously misguided. Instead, he offers an individualized, feel-good, internalized spirituality that transcends the formalities of institutionalized religious practices (Ehara 2007).

An important idea that also emerges in Fuwa's, Sharp's and Ehara's work is that animals go to heaven (*tengoku* 天国, or *ten* 天). As noted by Kenney (2004: 58), the idea of heaven as the destination for deceased pets has become pervasive. Sometimes pet owners use the expressions 'going to heaven' or 'called to heaven' merely as synonyms for 'death'. Popular Western notions of heaven are often reflected iconographically in the pet funeral industry: they are often shown as little angels with haloes and wings, sometimes even against a background of blue sky and clouds. Other subtle visual references to heaven are also common.

The notion of pet heaven is an avid topic of discussion in chat rooms that focus on pet death and pet loss. Posters paint a paradisiacal picture of pet heaven. Heaven is a highly physical place that meets the pet's needs—food, health, sleep, and sexual relationships. Heaven is also a place of happy reunions and companionship with other pets and with former human companions. Thus, many pet owners express the hope of meeting



Figure 2. Outdoor grave at the pet cemetery on the grounds of Jindaiji, Chōfu, Tokyo. Note the cat with a halo and angel wings. (Photograph by the author, 2007)



their pets in heaven after their own death. Owners can communicate with their deceased pets in heaven through prayer and the act of remembering them. In return, pets in heaven can communicate with their owners through dreams. Pets in heaven can also protect their owners. Many of these aspects parallel Western notions of heaven; however, Japanese pet heaven is not imagined as an eternal resting place but more like a traditional Buddhist heaven that promises utmost bliss and long life spans, a state that is said to end with another rebirth in a lower realm. Eventually, the pets will be reborn—ideally to meet their former owners again or at least to have a happy future life.<sup>12</sup>

There is another related notion that often appears in conjunction with heaven: the Rainbow Bridge. The idea of the Rainbow Bridge has influenced contemporary notions of the afterlife of pets due to the growing awareness of pet-loss literature. The anonymous poem called “Rainbow Bridge,” which is common on web-based pet-loss sites worldwide since the 1990s, initially made its way to Japan through the Internet.<sup>13</sup> The poem describes the afterlife of pets immediately after death. The setting is a utopian, carefree world without illness, suffering and strife where pets play with each other on a green meadow at the foot of a rainbow. The space is a liminal world where pets are waiting to be reunited with their owners upon the latter’s death so that they can pass over the rainbow into heaven together.

Japanese pet-loss counselors, pet-loss websites and popular publications on the subject have embraced the idea of the rainbow bridge. Such publications sell well on amazon.co.jp and are often found in waiting rooms at pet cemeteries.<sup>14</sup> The décor of many pet cemeteries and funeral services includes rainbows. The idea of the Rainbow Bridge is even beginning to

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see 2 Channel chat rooms entitled “Tengoku e itta petto no omoide kakinaguru sure” (Threads with scribbles on memories of pets that went to heaven), posted 5 April 2004–28 May 2008, and “[Shi] Petto ga shindara” ([Death] If your pet dies).

<sup>13</sup> The Rainbow Bridge is also referred to in Japanese chat rooms. For example, “[Reien] Petto no ohaka dō suru? [Niwa]” and “Tengoku e itta petto no omoide kakinaguru sure” are filled with references to the poem and to the image of reunion under the Rainbow Bridge. Occasionally, posters wonder if the Rainbow Bridge truly exists. For example, postings 149 (15 September 2007) and 150 (28 September 2007) on “[Reien] Petto no ohaka dō suru? [Niwa]” express doubts about whether the Rainbow Bridge exists but come to the conclusion that they would still like to meet their pets there.

<sup>14</sup> Japanese books on the Rainbow Bridge are currently top sellers among pet-loss literature offered on amazon.co.jp. Founded in 2000, amazon.co.jp is Japan’s largest Internet bookseller. Unlike its closest rival, Kinokuniya, it does not just handle the sale of new books but also provides links to used bookstores throughout Japan. Many of the books for sale on amazon.co.jp are ranked by sales. It therefore provides a good estimate of the nation-wide trends in books sales.

influence young Buddhist clerics who conduct pet memorial rituals. For example, the precinct of Sōhakuji 宗栢寺, a Nichiren temple in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo, contains a columbarium wall in the courtyard that incorporates the Rainbow Bridge. According to the young abbot, the monument was erected in 2006 and was designed by the abbot himself. The wall features individual, small stone chambers, which flank the collective grave at the center of the wall. A Buddha watching over several small animal statues is depicted above the collective grave. The scene is framed by a colorful rainbow in allusion to the Rainbow Bridge. The reference is made clear by the inscription: “Rainbow Bridge Monument” (*Niji no hashi no hi* 虹の橋の碑) and the poem inscribed on the base. The temple website advertises the memorial in the language of loss, healing, and reunion:

Our pets spend their lives as family members. Witnessing the end of their lives is truly painful. We are assailed by unspeakable sadness. To help you heal your aching hearts, Sōhakuji has erected a memorial stone for pets, which is called Rainbow Bridge Stone. . . . The Rainbow Bridge Memorial Stone is a place where our hearts can always meet. (Sōhakuji)

Yokota Harumasa (1971–), the abbot of Chōfukuji, a Sōtō temple in rural Niigata prefecture and recent author of a pet-loss book entitled *Arigatō: Mata aeru yo ne: Pettorosu—kokoro no sōdanshitsu* ありがとう。また逢えるよね。ペットロソー心の相談室 (Thank you, let’s meet again: Pet Loss—Counseling for the Heart, 2008), has undergone training as a pet-loss counselor to better serve his clients at his pet cemetery. Yokota became ordained as a Zen cleric in 1998 at the age of twenty-seven after working at a pet supplies company and an advertising company. In 2001, he opened a pet cemetery at his wife’s family temple in Niigata and opened a branch in his native Tokyo in 2002. Unlike contemporary spiritualists—perhaps in reference to Ehara, he states clearly that he is neither a clairvoyant nor able to see auras (Yokota 2008: 227). A self-proclaimed ‘cleric for animals’ (*dōbutsu no obōsan* 動物のお坊さん), his position represents the most radical departure from the notion of vengeful spirits and even places pets above humans on a spiritual scale. His views are the most revolutionary among his contemporaries, but he strikes a cord with pet owners. His recent book sells well on the Japanese *Amazon* website *amazon.co.jp* even though he is not a TV celebrity like Ehara. His urban clients seek out his small temple in Niigata, and a wealthy benefactor in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, donated some land so he could set up a branch pet cemetery in the metropolis.

Yokota makes skillful use of the Rainbow Bridge and the idea of heaven. He promotes a vision of the afterlife of pets that combines Buddhist,



Figure 3. Rainbow Bridge Memorial Stone at Sōhakuji, Komagome, Tokyo. The Buddha meditates under a rainbow. Small animal figurines are at the Buddha's feet. The memorial is marked as "Rainbow Bridge Memorial Stone" and bears an inscription with the Japanese translation of the Rainbow Bridge poem. (Photograph by the author, 2007)

animistic, and Christian notions with psychology and pet-loss therapy. On his website, he clearly states that there is a heaven for pets, which is just like the one in the “Rainbow Bridge.” This happy, harmonious place is sustained by the happy thoughts of the former pet owners who can partake of this world by thinking of their deceased pets. By identifying this heaven as a powerful mental construct, he can skirt the issue of whether this place actually exists. It is a heaven without barriers and discrimination where all the pets can dwell in good health regardless of their tragic ends and where they will eventually be reunited with their owners (Yokota 2002a, 2005). In his recent book on pet loss, he reproduces the “Rainbow Bridge” poem and asks:

On the other side of the Rainbow Bridge there is heaven. Pets wait for us to cross into heaven together. We will go to heaven together. And then? Is this the end or just the beginning? . . . We call those whose souls are connected through the bond of love ‘soul mates’ [*sourumeito* ソウルメイト], which can be translated as ‘spirit companions’ [*tamashii no hanryo* 魂の伴侶] or ‘spirit friends’ [*tamashii no tomodachi* 魂の友達]. (2008: 182–83)

Soul mates have a lasting bond across the ages and multiple rebirths through familial ties, place of residence and position in life. They live together when they have physical form and look after one another when they do not. They are always together (Yokota 2008: 183–84). The bond of souls that Yokota is describing sounds reminiscent of Ehara’s “pets are your spiritual partners” but in its totality is even more permanent and encompassing. Since Yokota is a Buddhist cleric, the absence of any references to the teaching of impermanence is striking.

Elsewhere, his language is replete with references to basic Buddhist concepts, but he radically reinterprets and even repudiates them. For example, in contrast to humans, Yokota argues, pets will face rebirth more quickly without passing through the liminal stage of the forty-nine days because they will not be judged for killing, evil deeds or verbal misconduct. Their prospects for rebirth are better than that of humans because they have not committed any evil acts. Pets are not subject to the law of cause and effect. Moreover, not only are they exempt from being reborn as hell beings or hungry ghosts but they cannot be reborn as beasts. Pets are exempt from moral judgment. Their *raison d’être* is entirely focused on the wellbeing of the owner. Their future existence depends on the mutual love between pets and their owners, but they are likely destined to be reborn in a heaven regardless. Pets emerge as beings that are entirely benign. They are angels. They are completely pure and sacred compared to the sinfulness and delusion of human existence (Yokota 2002b, 2002c).

Yokota's view of the afterlife of pets is a *mélange* of traditional Buddhist ideas, Japanese folk religion, and Western concepts. Like others before him, he depicts pets as liminal beings close to humans, but rather than placing them in a marginal space between animals and humans, he places them between humans and divinities.

Yokota's view of pets as soul mates makes no room for vengeful, unsettled spirits. Like many other contemporary Buddhist clerics, he strongly rejects the notion of spirit possession and curses, which he identifies as a means to pressure people into paying money for purifications and memorial rites (Yokota 2008: 225). Yokota's comments indicate that the notion of vengeful, unsettled spirits continues to exist, but that a strong discourse has emerged that provides a prominent alternative, according to which the promotion of vengeful spirits is considered predatory and difficult to market openly. The reader might react suspiciously to Yokota, who manages two pet cemeteries, for pointing the finger at other ritual specialists and their supposed predatory practices. Be that as it may, Yokota tries to keep the costs for his patrons down at this modest Niigata cemetery by performing many of the chores himself, even cremations, which other temples with pet cemeteries tend to pass on to hired staff. As a result, his temple's pet cemetery is considerably cheaper than many of his competitors. Yokota's saccharine image of angelic pet spirits might also leave an unpleasant aftertaste for some, but his patrons appear to deeply appreciate his skillful and unique method of pet-loss counseling.

### *Conclusion*

Contemporary Japanese conceptualizations of the spiritual potential and the afterlife of pets have undergone a radical transformation in the last ten years. Until the mid 1990s, pets—especially mistreated and neglected ones—were mostly feared as potentially powerful, threatening spiritual forces after death. These spirits could be propitiated through correct memorial services that followed strict parameters set by psychics. Nowadays, pets are predominantly presented as beloved family members rather than a threatening Other. Separation from pets through death is feared much more than the potential harm they could visit upon the owner. Thus pets have become constructed as faithful companions even after death. Memorial services then are no longer carried out to propitiate but to demonstrate the owner's lasting love for the deceased pet. Pets are seen as pure, incapable of making immoral decisions or meting out punishment.

Ultimately, we could ask whether this shift from vengeful spirits to benevolent, loving companions has raised the status of pets in Japan. One could argue that even though pets are viewed more positively, the shift has diminished the agency attributed to them. Many Japanese pet owners seem to have a strong urge to perpetuate the bond that they felt with their pet even after the pet's death. This longing for a continued relationship with the pet focuses on the needs of the pet owners, such as companionship and protection. Even though pet owners often state that they hope the pet will not be lonely after death, it could also be interpreted as a narcissistic projection of their own fear of loss and abandonment. Whether the pet's spirit is envisioned as reuniting with them under the Rainbow Bridge or in heaven, as lingering in this world as a protective spirit, or as being reborn as another pet in the same household, the pet remains in its function as a companion rather than an autonomous agent. Ultimately, how one interprets the recent development depends on how one interprets pet-keeping itself. Is the practice of keeping a pet, as Yi-Fu Tuan argues, an act of dominance veiled in affection or, as James Serpell and Erica Fudge argue, a symbiotic relationship that can have great benefits for the pet owner and the pet (Tuan 1984; Serpell 1996; Fudge 2008)?

What has made Japanese pet owners so receptive to this change? The most obvious factors are the increased proliferation of pet keeping since the 1990s and the concomitant acceptance of pets as family members, as well as the influx of pet-loss literature from abroad via the Internet. Additionally, clairvoyants of Gibo's generation flourished during the Japanese occult boom of the late twentieth century. However, the Aum Shinrikyō incident tempered the occult boom through the resulting mistrust in New Religious Movements and occult practices (Shimazono 1995: 411). After Aum, a highly negative image prevailed among the media and the public. New Religious Movements and the New Spirituality Culture were seen as potential threats (Dorman and Reader 2007: 7). New Religious Movements were attacked by the press and by the growing anti-cult movement and subjected to harsher legal restrictions (Reader 2001: 225–32). Already attacked by Ōtsuki Yoshihiko (1936–), a scientist on a mission to debunk occult superstitions, Gibo, who promoted a highly negativistic message, disappeared from television for several years (Koike 2007: 120–22; Kurihara 2008: 33–37).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ōtsuki published an entire book dedicated to the misconceptions of Gibo Aiko. In a critique of her views on animals, such as the notion of *tatari*, he argues sarcastically that if it

As Ben Dorman has shown, popular diviners such as Hosoki Kazuko reacted in the wake of the Aum incident by repackaging their message in ways that were acceptable to the larger public despite the prevailing negative image of religion (2007: 34, 46). Similarly, as Koike Yasushi observes, Ehara regards institutionalized religion as nothing but a skillful construct of humans and only recognizes spiritual experiences as genuine, a hallmark of contemporary new spirituality in Japan. Ehara has been able to find the right balance between fate and self-effort, Western spiritualism and traditional Japanese concepts, spirituality and counseling that appeals to a contemporary audience (Koike 2007: 22, 43, 46–47). Other popular spiritualists and ritual specialists also modified their message about pet spirits by adopting the psychological language of pet-loss therapy and by constructing pet spirits as non-threatening, personal guardians. This does not mean they have no detractors,<sup>16</sup> but they still have been able to appeal to a large and loyal audience.

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were true that the souls of animals that died an untimely death bore a grudge then we should have to fear the spirits of dinosaurs and other extinct species (Ōtsuki 1993: 148–49).

<sup>16</sup> As Gibo Aiko's apparent successor, Ehara Hiroyuki has been soundly critiqued by Ōtsuki Yoshihiko as well. Ōtsuki (2008) calls Ehara's claims to clairvoyance, divination by auras, supernatural powers, spirit communication, healing, purification, aversion of spiritual harm, and spiritual counseling 'lies' (*uso* 嘘).

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CELEBRITY FORTUNES:  
DEFINING 'RELIGION' IN THE POST-AUM ERA

BENJAMIN DORMAN

This chapter considers media representations of religion in contemporary Japan by focusing on the case of celebrity fortune teller Hosoki Kazuko (1938–). Studying Hosoki's career and writings provides a window into contemporary religion in Japan, particularly in terms of the redefinition and renegotiation of religion in the years after the 1995 sarin-gas attacks on the Tokyo subway committed by Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教. For a period in the mid-2000s Hosoki seemed to be one of the most powerful women in Japan. With a formidable publishing record and regular national television shows (she appeared on as many as three different networks per week occasionally), she became a highly successful spiritual entrepreneur at a time when the public image of religious groups and religion in general was extremely low. One strategy in her work is the claim that she can dispense advice that should be 'common sense' to all Japanese. Her fame initially developed from the massive sales of fortune-telling books, which she began producing in the mid-1980s. Some of these books present prescriptions for applying the principles of her method of divination to memorializing ancestors supposedly tailored to the Japanese people. In these books her message was relatively easy for many people to accept, particularly in relation to ancestor veneration, because it did not challenge mainstream beliefs. But once she moved into television, she developed a persona as a wise arbiter and visionary on a whole range of matters relating to lifestyle choices and religious practices. Thus, Hosoki was placed in a position in which she was able to define certain parameters of acceptable behavior in connection to religion and religious practice. Supported by a large group of famous entertainers and public figures who sung her praises, Hosoki was crowned "the new ratings queen" in 2004 by the media monthly *Tsukuru*.<sup>1</sup> For all her successes and influence, however, she came under significant and sustained criticism by some journalists for allegedly shady dealings with gangsters

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<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of 2004, various media commentators began to predict that Hosoki's reign would end soon (Nanase 2004: 80). She surprised her critics by not only continuing to appear on more television programs and drawing significant ratings on a regular basis.

on the one hand, and ordinary people who took offence to her suggestions about Shintō practice.

In Daniel Boorstin's classic critique of American culture and the inauthentic nature of media-generated 'pseudo events', he produced perhaps the most widely-quoted aphorism about celebrity: "the celebrity is a person who is well-known for their well-knownness" (1992: 57–65). Celebrities, in his conception, do not develop like heroic figures who are distinguished by their achievements or by "the great simple virtues of their character," such as Charles Lindberg. In criticizing commentators like Boorstin for being motivated by an "elitist distaste for the demotic or populist dimension of mass cultural practices," Graeme Turner argues that unlike figures such as public officials, the fame of celebrities today "does not necessarily depend on the position or achievements that gave them their prominence in the first instance" (2004: 4–5). This position presents a challenge to purely normative perspectives relating to the social or cultural value of what famous people offer to the public, and seeks to examine celebrity as a phenomena of contemporary society.

Turner's argument certainly seems to reflect aspects of contemporary Western culture, such as reality television and forums like *YouTube*, whereby previously unknown individuals can enjoy their fifteen minutes of fame, to borrow Andy Warhol's expression. But it also rings true for Japan, where the latest *tarento* タレント on television can become famous, for a brief time at least, with a simple catchphrase or unusual manner. Yet Hosoki is not simply a fly-by-night celebrity with a limited cultural shelf-life; she has clocked up some remarkable achievements by any standards. She was listed in the Guinness Book of Records in 2001 as the "World's Best-selling Author of Fortune Telling Books" (81 different titles in all), a feat attained after she had sold over 34 million units. That year she began to appear on television, and for the next seven years she developed a very significant television presence. Yet while her popularity is massive, she does, as mentioned above, have her critics. Thus, sociologist Chris Rojek's definition of celebrity as being "the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere" (2001: 10) is appropriate when considering Hosoki because of the range of feelings that are publicly expressed about her. Although for a while she seemed to be a media juggernaut whose opinions were often sought, by 2006 'Hosoki bashing' had developed into a minor industry in itself.<sup>2</sup> Part of Hosoki's 'glamour'

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<sup>2</sup> For example, *Shūkan Shinchō* published an article in its August 4, 2005 issue (*Hosoki Kazuko no yogen: Daikenshō*, 140–42) that listed somewhat gloatingly her recent

included her well-publicized associations with other people in the entertainment industry and sports stars whose endorsements lent credibility to her claims of authority. Paradoxically, her 'notoriety' also developed as a result of seemingly ubiquitous presence in the media and counter-claims to her authority to pass judgment on religious issues.

The case of Hosoki is significant when considering representations in the Japanese media of religion and spirituality in the post-Aum era. In order to place some aspects of her career in perspective, we first need to consider the impact of the Aum affair and 'non-religious religiosity' in contemporary Japan.

### *The Impact of the Aum Affair*

The Aum affair of the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in the horrendous sarin gas attack incident of 1995, highlighted the problem of public understandings of 'religion' (*shūkyō* 宗教). Public education on religion continues to be defined to a large extent by media representations of issues with religious dimensions. Like most Japanese people, many journalists do not have a background in religious education, and the reporting of controversial issues and groups often reflects rather than challenges prevailing social prejudices about religion. Established Buddhist and Shintō groups were often harshly criticized in the media during the Allied Occupation period (1945–1952) for colluding with the wartime military regime. It seemed that religion in general became a convenient scapegoat in the new era of democracy at a time when such finger-pointing helped cover up some of the media's acquiescence of the military regime's worst excesses. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, the reputation of Buddhism in its traditional forms did recover to a certain extent. Japanese media representations of Buddhism have generally developed into somewhat benign perspective of a religion that appeals to foreigners wishing to subject themselves to strict yet ultimately enlightening training, or one that is inherently connected to Japanese identity.

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predictions as "4 hits, 6 misses." A more serious problem occurred when freelance journalist Mizoguchi Atsushi began a series of articles from May 2006 in *Shūkan Gendai* called *Majo no rirekisho* (Resume of a Witch). He asserted that she had close links to gangsters, and raised rumors of prostitution and fraud. In response Hosoki wrote a piece in the rival *Shūkan Bunshun*, but Mizoguchi countered by claiming that she had employed gangsters to apply pressure on him. She took the matter to court, claiming damages for libel. Critical books found an audience among those not convinced of Hosoki's powers or integrity. For example, see Hosoki Kazuko Higaisha no Kai 2005; Mizoguchi 2006; Nozaki 2006.

Apart from particularly controversial issues, such as the complex Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社 question, Shintō is generally presented in mainstream media forums as a natural set of understandings and practices that all Japanese share. By contrast, many of the so-called new religions faced significant prejudice from the mainstream media in the postwar era. Unreconstructed views amongst the press from the prewar period about 'superstitions' and heresy carried over into the postwar era of freedom of religion. Many new religions struggled with their public image as a highly suspicious and critical press occasionally printed rumors as fact for the sake of a story, or exaggerated events to a point far beyond the original incidents. Eventually, given that the postwar authorities could not interfere with religious activities as their prewar counterparts had, the reporting of religion became a taboo area (apart from weekly magazines, or *shūkanshi* 週刊誌) (see Dorman 2005b). Of course, there were cases in which groups abused the new legal framework of freedom of religion to conduct illegal activities, and the most prominent example of this was Aum Shinrikyō. What makes the Aum case exceptional is that a great deal that was reported about the group in weekly magazines before the Tokyo gas attack turned out to be true. The negative images of religious groups that many held before the Aum affair were reinforced as the facts of Aum's kidnapping, drug abuse, and murder came to light.

Aum developed in an environment in which young people were questioning existing social arrangements, including the education system and traditional work ethics. Throughout the 1970s and 80s there was a growing interest in spiritual practices and ideas that existed outside the traditional structures of religion and society. Ideas relating to psychic powers and the supernatural, the prophecies of Nostradamus, divination of various forms, esoteric practices from Tibetan Buddhism, and New Age philosophies from the West gradually filtered into Japanese society through new religions such as Aum. While these ideas remained on the periphery of mainstream culture for the most part, major celebrities like the famous comedian-actor-director Kitano 'Beat' Takeshi showed an interest in questioning social values related to religion, spirituality, and the marginalization of groups through film and television.<sup>3</sup> He also met with Aum's Asahara Shōkō and other leaders of religious groups. In a manner that is

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<sup>3</sup> Well before he made movies that became known in the West, such as *Hana-bi*, he made feature-length films for television based on two widely-criticized new religions in Japan: Jehovah's Witnesses and Iesu no Hakobune, both of which had received significant negative publicity. Kitano still appears on television programs that discuss supernatural

not unusual for new religious groups to present their message as socially acceptable and a viable alternative to other spiritual offerings, Aum cultivated such contacts, including the Dalai Lama who met with Asahara on one occasion.

Nevertheless, when the extent of Aum's crimes became clear and were publicized widely in the Japanese media, representations of spirituality of various forms virtually disappeared from television screens. One prominent casualty was Gibo Aiko, a popular clairvoyant who appeared in the early 1990s on numerous television programs and was widely feted for her purported ability to communicate with spirits. She was unceremoniously dumped from network schedules. Little was heard of her until the late 1990s, when she reemerged briefly on television with much less success before passing away in 2003 (Iwai 1992). During 1995, as seemingly endless television news reports and 'special programs' rehashed the gruesome details of its activities, the story of Aum's blatant abuse of privileges enjoyed by religious corporations somehow turned into one related to the supposed dangers posed by all 'suspect' religions, particularly those with political influence. Naturally the public required assurance that their safety would not be compromised by radical, uncontrolled groups. Yet religious groups also wanted the postwar guarantees of religious freedom that protected them from the kind of abuse many suffered at the hands of prewar authorities to remain in place. Rational responses to the gassing incident and subsequent arrests were replaced by tabloid-like innuendo, resulting in an environment of fear and 'moral panic' that continues on to this day.<sup>4</sup> After the Aum affair the popularity of esoteric and alternative spirituality plummeted. Anti-cult movements became more vocal, and there was a clampdown over so-called 'spiritual sales' (*reikan shōhō*

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phenomenon, although he is not associated with any particular religious group or philosophy publicly.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Cohen originally held that moral panics occur when a "condition, episode, person or group of persons . . . become defined as a threat to society values and interests" (2000: 9). Ian Reader (2001) argued that the post-Aum environment reflected the conditions of a moral panic. Following from this, Benjamin Dorman (2005a) considered the case of Pana Wave, a small religious group that appeared in 2003, based on a redefinition of moral panics formulated by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994: 149). They argued that moral panics occur when significant numbers of people are subject to intense feelings of concern over a threat which a sober assessment of the evidence would suggest is either nonexistent or much less than would be expected from the concrete harm posed by the threat. Although Pana Wave was widely reported as being vaguely similar to Aum, a massive police investigation revealed no evidence to prove the claims.

靈感商法) whereby groups or individuals coax or coerce money out of people, often through playing on beliefs about the spirits of ancestors. While problems related to this area became widely publicized from the late 1980s and opponents like the National Network of Lawyers against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku reikai shōhō taisaku bengōshi renraku kai 全国靈感商法対策弁護士連絡会) emerged.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this, the post-Aum climate that elicited fears for public safety certainly does not spell ‘the end of religion’ in contemporary Japan. It does mean that questions of how ‘religion’ is defined, who is doing the defining, and to what purpose the definitions serve become extremely important. Although definitions are crucial when looking at any historical issue, the sheer scale and influence of the Aum affair—which still affects media, the police and other government authorities, religious administration, and academia to name just a few social institutions—necessitates close examination of these questions.

### *‘Non-Religious’ Religiosity*

An extensive survey conducted on Japanese college students each year between 1992 and 2001 showed that the Aum incident has had a negative impact on the image of ‘religion’. However, the survey also indicated that the general image of ‘religion’ was not particularly good among college students even before the Aum incident (Inoue 2003: 20–28). Going back further, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper began a national survey in 1979 that contained the question “do you believe in a religion?”, which yielded a positive response of approximately thirty-five percent. Subsequent surveys conducted in 1984 and 1989 indicated gradual drops in those who stated that they ‘believed in a religion’. After the Aum incident in 1995, the positive response reached around twenty percent, which was a sharp drop of five percent from the previous year’s survey response to the same question. Nevertheless, between sixty to seventy percent claimed that they had some belief in *kami* 神 (gods), *hotoke* 仏 (buddhas), spirits, and souls, as well as supernatural phenomena, destiny, and retribution for past deeds.

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<sup>5</sup> This organization has launched a number of campaigns in court against the Unification Church in Japan. Although Hosoki herself has been criticized for making up ‘horror stories’ predicting dire consequences for those who do not follow her advice concerning rituals related to ancestor veneration, these negative voices are in the minority (see Honjo Tatsuya, “Senzo kuyō”).



Although this distancing from direct affiliation with a particular religion while holding onto certain ideas that have been attached to Shintō and Buddhism may seem contradictory, it does make sense if we consider the category of *mushūkyō* 無宗教 (lacking religious belief). In an influential book, Ama Toshimaro argues that Japanese for the most part avoid or lack an understanding of organized religion, and classify themselves as lacking religious belief. Nevertheless, he states that around seventy-five percent of the population acknowledges the importance of ‘religious feelings’ (Ama 2005: 1), thus indicating that Japanese are not atheists, but rather that they are not affiliated with any particular religious denomination. The reason why the majority of Japanese do not align themselves specifically with ‘revealed religions’ like Christianity, Buddhism, or some new religions is not because they are uncomfortable with the teachings but because they lack the courage to find true meaning in life through such religions. In contrast, Ama argues, they feel more comfortable with ‘natural religion’, which was established in communities and gradually spread over the region as time passed (ibid.: 8). Manifestations of ‘natural religion’ include *hatsumōde* 初詣, the first visit to shrines and temples during the New Year holidays, and *obon* お盆, an annual Buddhist event commemorating ancestors. The increasing aversion to affiliation with a religious group combined with acceptance of the spiritual value of concepts such as *kami* and buddhas is, in Ama’s terms, “the religious feeling of the non-religious” (ibid.: 3). According to Nishiwaki Ryō, while the increase in the *mushūkyō* category after the Aum incident seems to reaffirm that ‘religion’ remains problematic, it also indicates the cultural characteristic that most Japanese tend to “reject what is extreme yet are tolerant toward what is not” (2004: 67–69).

How does all this relate to Hosoki Kazuko? As the fallout from the Aum affair gradually faded from people’s minds and spirituality and related matters began to appear again on television toward the end of the 1990s, Hosoki soon became a dominant presence. What is noteworthy about Hosoki’s approach is that she managed to apply a message of ‘common sense’ (used consistently in her divination books) into the new medium of television. While her divination books focused on venerating ancestors, part of her main message was that concepts about ancestors and rituals related to these ideas had nothing to do with religion *per se*, but rather were related to what it means to be Japanese. While this approach was fine for the books, when she started to appear on television and became highly, if not over-, exposed, her stern messages of common sense concerning religion met with some resistance.

*A Star is Born*

Hosoki was born in Tokyo, and from her high school days started working as a hostess in clubs, leaving at seventeen to run her own business. She operated clubs in the Ginza and Asakusa areas of Tokyo but incurred a large debt after being swindled. After recovering from this in 1983 she met and married Yasuoka Masahiro (1898–1983) who taught her about Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese divination. Yasuoka was a nationalist intellectual and spiritual advisor to many high-ranking members of Japan's political and business elite, including several postwar prime ministers. He was influenced by Confucian and Neo-Kantian perspectives on personal refinement, emphasizing character cultivation as the foundation for a revival of Asian thought and culture. Although he was never a well-known public figure, Yasuoka was responsible for writing a famous passage of Emperor Hirohito's 'surrender' speech of 1945 and for naming of current era (Heisei, or 'Realized Peace') (Brown 2004: 1). The intellectual bedrock of Yasuoka's thought, Roger Brown argues, is "the cultivation of a moral character . . . enabling one to become a cultured individual who was self-consciously Japanese" (ibid.: 2–3). Although Yasuoka died some nine months after meeting Hosoki, she invariably refers to him in her writings as her mentor.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, critics argue that Hosoki merely refers to Yasuoka in her books because his 'name value' lends credence to her claims. Others have claimed that she is linked with right-wing nationalists and gangsters.<sup>7</sup>

She began her career as a fortune teller in 1982 with the publication of her first divination book, which was not a major success. In 1985 she published a book based on 'six-star astrology' (*rokusei senjutsu* 六星占術), a type of Chinese astrology that includes the idea that a person's destiny or fate is created through the four components within the moment of birth: year, month, day, and time. This book became a runaway bestseller, and since 1985 she has produced at least one book related to divination each year. While this output is impressive, sociologist Taneda Hiroyuki argues that the books contain more or less the same information (2000: 147). As

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Hosoki 2005: 39–40. In this book, she discusses his influence on her ideas of ancestor veneration.

<sup>7</sup> One critical opinion is listed on the website *Chōjōshūki genshō no nazotoki*: The page "Hosoki Kazuko" questions Hosoki's claims and also the circumstances behind her marriage to Yasuoka (Honjō Tatsuya, "Hosoki Kazuko"). Similar questions were raised in books like Mizoguchi 2006.

opposed to many other divination books on sale at bookstores that often show images of stars or a horoscope, Hosoki's works often have a highly personalized touch. For example, the cover of her 2005 work, *Shiawase ni naru tame no senzo no matsurikata* 幸せになるための先祖の祭り方 (How to become happy through venerating your ancestors), displays her rather stern face prominently on the cover looking directly at the reader. She wears expensive and somewhat garish jewelry that conveys the message that she is hugely successful. Her face has a no-nonsense expression that suggests an air of authority which she eventually brought to her television appearances. While her publishing achievements until that point marked the 'first Hosoki boom', the 'second Hosoki boom' occurred when she moved into television in 2001 (Nanase 2004: 80).

While huge amounts of money are spent each year on divination in Japan, national surveys carried out in the early- and mid-1990s indicate that large numbers of people did not actually *believe* divination works (Taneda 2000: 145). Taneda holds that fortune telling and divination are not institutionalized but rather marginalized forms of knowledge that are not broadly accepted in society. Given this situation, he argues that fortune-telling professionals like Hosoki need to develop strategies to justify and legitimize their claims. It is not enough for such professionals to impart their knowledge in a one-way manner and expect to be successful given the level of popularity divination has. They must use concepts and phrases that will appear plausible and legitimate, and will ultimately strike a chord with the public. After Hosoki's 1985 publishing success, there was a distinct change in her approach in some of her books. She began to incorporate strong religious themes, including references to *kami*, *hotoke*, ancestor memorialization rites (*senzo kuyō* 先祖供養), and practices centered on the deceased and their graves, all of which remain extremely important in Japan. In these books, she consistently uses images that form part of the popular Japanese religious consciousness specifically related to ancestors.

### *Japanese Identity, 'Shared Meanings', and 'Common Sense'*

When discussing representation, Stuart Hall holds that culture can be viewed as being primarily concerned with the production and exchange of meanings—'shared meanings'—between members of a society or group (Hall 1997: 2). Culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world

in broadly similar ways. In her books and television appearances Hosoki draws on ‘shared meanings’ relating to ancestors and other beliefs. While many Japanese people associate the veneration of ancestors with a specific religion, particularly Buddhism and to a lesser extent new religions, in the divination books that look into these themes, Hosoki explicitly denies that such practices are connected to religion. She holds that they are an inherent part of Japanese identity. These ‘shared meanings’ are presented as a form of ‘common sense’ that should be perfectly natural to Japanese people. Her explicit denials of religious connections can be related to the notion of *mushūkyō*. Hosoki’s claims about honoring ancestors and the place such practices hold within her form of divination can be seen as an attempt to affirm an aspect of Japanese identity that has no connection to ‘religion’, that is, practices and philosophies associated with organized religious groups.

In her first books on the subject Hosoki claims that her divination had historical roots, and that contemporary Japanese people were connected in some way to ‘the holders of ancient wisdom’. In one early work, she argues that if one simply reads one’s destiny following the path she has outlined, no significant change can occur in one’s life. In other words, one will simply be able to determine what will happen in the future and will not be able to do anything about it. She declares that if one disregards one’s ancestors, no amount of divination will help change one’s life (Hosoki 1986a: 206). In another book published in 1986, Hosoki argues that ‘in the past’, rituals related to ancestors were commonplace for all Japanese people.

Placing rice and water in front of a *butsudan* [仏壇, Buddhist altar] . . . before leaving the house, clapping one’s hands together and bowing before the family shrine . . . visiting the graves of deceased ancestors during festivals and memorial services—all these practices come naturally for Japanese people. (1986a: 36)

Hosoki presents rather stark warnings for people who do not carry out such practices. In her view, these people are selfish, they do not care for their children and families, and will “casually engage in prostitution” (or “selling their souls”). She warns that such people will lose the ability to judge things correctly. She argues that as people’s ancestors are the point of contact between themselves and *kami*, the source of life, they will receive benefits if they carry out correct practices. If they hold “feelings of gratitude” towards their ancestors, this constitutes venerating ancestors. On the other hand, if they neglect this, their connection with *kami* is lost

and they lose 'life force'. She asserts that venerating ancestors is actually a 'deepening' of her divination. In order to understand one's destiny, one needs *rokusei senjutsu*, and in order to "take control of destiny," venerating ancestors and cultivating oneself through *rokusei senjutsu* are indispensable (Hosoki 1986a: 27). She states that if people categorize and separate her divination method from venerating ancestors, thus considering them as two unrelated issues, they would be mistaken.

Nevertheless, she certainly does not deny the connection to rituals for ancestors and Buddhist sects. For example, in an early work she argues that if a *butsudan* is not set up, it would be the same as offering one's ancestors' miso soup mixed with milk. The ancestors would be angry with these actions and it is for that reason that this must be carried out correctly (ibid.: 43).<sup>8</sup> Yet she also argues,

venerating ancestors is different to having religious faith. It is an issue that concerns thinking about what one's roots are, and thus overcomes sectarian boundaries. If someone gets the meaning wrong, they become confused and run off to a 'newly arisen religion' or to a spiritualist. . . . The important thing is not belief in a religion but rather respecting and showing gratitude to ancestors. (Hosoki 1986a: 57)

Hosoki continued along this theme in 2005, writing that, "most people think that visiting a grave constitutes a religious [i.e., Buddhist] activity. However, this is a big mistake. Originally ancestor veneration and religion had no connection. Śākyamuni preached nothing about ancestor veneration and his disciples left no records" (2005: 32–34).<sup>9</sup> She states that it was Confucius, rather than Śākyamuni, who taught the importance of ancestor worship through his *Analects*. Confucianism, she declares, is not a religion but a "way of life for human beings." The most important thing is that ancestor veneration is "the beginning of the road of humanity," in the sense that ancestors transmit messages to us through the umbilical cord while we are still in our mother's womb (ibid.: 38–40).

Hosoki's views are traditional, conservative, and seem to hark back to the ideals that lay behind the once legally binding patriarchal *ie* 家

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that there is another rumor that Hosoki is connected to a business that manufactures *butsudans* that are built according to the way she specifies them. But as with the other rumors about her connections to gravestone manufacturers, she denies these claims (see Honjō Tatsuya, "Hosoki Kazuko").

<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, in this book she criticizes people for not carrying out rituals for ancestors and for claiming that they are 'not religious'. Such people, she says, are destined to fall into the condition of a 'spiritual shell' (Hosoki 2005: 40).

(household) system.<sup>10</sup> She argues that the household forms “the center of the world.” ‘Household’, ‘family’, and ‘ancestors’ are things that we cannot cut off from our lives; ‘ancestors’ are the people who established our ‘households’. She insists that it is taboo for married women to place ancestral tablets or memorials from her natal family in her husband’s home next to or near his ancestral tablets (1986a: 101).<sup>11</sup> Hosoki also declares that the male of the family must have ultimate responsibility in terms of ancestral rites because of the importance of the male successor to the continuation of ‘the household’ (2005: 63–65). Therefore, Hosoki is not promoting values that Japanese people would be unfamiliar with, even if they have moved into urban environments and do not actually live according to the former ways of the traditional ‘household’.

Taneda argues that Hosoki’s teachings in terms of ancestor veneration and her divination are framed in a manner that does not present her audience with statements that would generate serious doubts. In the context of ‘shared meanings’, therefore, she is not asking readers to accept information that would directly challenge well-established or firmly-held beliefs. Given that many people believe in honoring ancestors, specific criticism or denial of related practices is unlikely to be accepted as legitimate by many. Therefore, Taneda contends, teachings like Hosoki’s that uphold the importance of practices for ancestors are relatively easy for people to accept (2000: 153). In this sense, it can be said that Hosoki promotes ideas that do not necessarily deviate from mainstream thought in contemporary Japanese society. Hosoki’s conservatism and appeals to ‘common sense’ found a place in her divination books, yet she managed to extend her range in the media with her entry into national television.

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<sup>10</sup> The *ie* system reflected the Confucian-based pattern of the upper classes during the Tokugawa period. Elder sons were expected to take over the household, younger sons to establish their own household. The system, which formalized patriarchy and suppressed women’s rights, was legally dismantled by the Allied Occupation in 1945 and replaced by a new family ideology based on equal rights for women, equal inheritance by all children, and free choice of spouse and career. Nevertheless, elements of this system are still quite common, particularly in country areas. Elder sons often assume responsibility as the household head, and younger sons leave and are expected to establish another household.

<sup>11</sup> With changes toward the nuclear family and the disintegration of the *ie* system as a legal entity, it became more common for a husband and wife to have an altar to venerate the parents of both.

*'The New Ratings Queen'*

"Thank you, Sensei, for teaching us things we Japanese have forgotten." This remark, made by one of the young male MCs to Hosoki on her hit TBS television program *Zubari iu wa yo!* ズバリ言うはよ (I'm gonna give it to you straight!) on May 31, 2005, was in response to Hosoki's assertion that people should never place photographs of deceased relatives beneath their Buddhist altars (*butsudan*). The regular MCs on the program, a comedy duo, would generally react to Hosoki's pronouncements in this manner, making her appear to be a wise arbiter who reminds Japanese people of issues that should be common sense to them. In a sense, their role was not only to provide some light relief to the proceedings but also to reaffirm Hosoki's authority and remind the audience of 'shared meanings' that should be common sense to all Japanese.

At the peak of her popularity on television, Hosoki was appearing up to three times per week on different networks. For example, during the week April 15–21, 2007, she appeared on TV Asahi's *Hosoki Kazuko no kore ga hontō no hanashii yo!* 細木数子のこれが本当の話いよ (Hosoki Kazuko's "This is the Real Story!") on April 16, her regular TBS show *Zubari iu wa yo!* on April 17, and Fuji TV's *Shiawasette nandakke: Kazu Kazu no takara banashi* 幸せなんだっけ: 数数の宝話 (What is Happiness? Kazu Kazu's Pearls of Wisdom) on April 19. These appearances turned her into a multimedia celebrity, and they featured not only popular entertainers and politicians, but also housewives, schoolgirls, teachers, and businessmen who lined up to receive Hosoki's guidance. Her connections to celebrities was often mentioned in the programs as famous clients appeared and acknowledged how long they had known her and how much they were indebted to her. In fact, Hosoki seems to have acquired a legion of celebrity fans, including the sumo wrestling Yokozuna (Grand Champion) Asashōryū and an assortment of pop stars and actors.

On these shows, Hosoki would not only analyze her clients using *roku-sei senjutsu*, she also presented her essentially conservative ideas on faith, practice, and ritual, as well as more worldly concerns such as how to clean shoes, make miso soup, and sweep a floor. Some notable segments in *Zubari iu wa yo!* included *Unmei no karute* (Destiny Reading), in which Hosoki read the subject's life and future in sixty-seconds, *Onna hyakunin shiawase hakusho* (The White Paper on Happiness for One Hundred Women) where the assembled crowd included ten female entertainers, and *Yomeiri mae no jōshiku sukūru* (The School of Pre-Marital Common

Sense). In this segment, Hosoki's patriarchal views were on full display. But in all these segments, her authority was rarely challenged but if people happened to disagree with her reading of their lives and futures they would be rebuked with a sharp put-down like "*shinakereba jigoku ni ochiru yo!*" (If you don't listen you'll fall into the pits of hell!). On other occasions she would unleash the very harsh "*bakayarō!*" (you idiot!) to a particularly recalcitrant client, and sometimes the hapless, fawning MC would be referred to with the slang second-person singular pronoun "*omae!*" Such exclamations did seem to fly in the face of other injunctions she issued, such as "*tadashii Nihongo o tsukau no ga Nihonjin no kihon*" (using proper Japanese language is absolutely fundamental for Japanese people). Some reactions to her television appearances underlined the fact that there is a wide range of opinions about her.

Certainly her fans and the program's participants labeled her with honorific title of 'Sensei', but she has also been labeled derogatorily as a mere 'shaman' or 'simply a fortune teller' (*tada no uranai shi* ただの占い師).<sup>12</sup> In 2006 she faced some of her harshest criticism not only in books and magazines but also through the new media platform of Web 2.0. Although *Hosoki Kazuko o fumitsubusu burogu* 細木数子を踏み潰すブログ (The Blog that Crushes Hosoki Kazuko) posted its last article about her on January 17, 2006, it still receives comments concerning scandalous news about her.

In late 2006, Hosoki announced on television that when women visit a Shintō shrine to pray, they should perform *kashiwade* 拍手 (clapping the hands together) without a sound. This story was taken up by the online business and media news 'watcher' *J-CAST* on March 1, 2007, when it reported that the number of women visiting shrines and not performing *kashiwade* was on the rise (*J-CAST nyūsu*). The report declared that this was "apparently erroneous because this type of practice is reserved for funerals," and it specifically pointed to labeled Hosoki as the source of this error. *J-CAST* noted that the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁) received complaints from shrines across the nation concerning this issue. Of particular note was the following statement that

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<sup>12</sup> Journalist Higashi Shinpei uses the term *shāman* (shaman) to indicate Hosoki, although he does not mention her specifically by name. Higashi (2005) has proposed in *Seikyō Shinbun* that Japan is currently in the midst of an 'age of shamanism', particularly through the medium of television. *Seikyō Shinbun* is the newspaper of the new religion Sōka Gakkai.



the Hikawa Shrine in Shakujii, Nerima Ward, Tokyo, posted on its webpage on February 28, 2007:

Recently, we have sometimes seen women coming to worship who clap their hands together without making a sound. It seems that at the end of last year, a certain fortune teller made a pronouncement on television to the effect that “women should not make a sound when clapping their hands together at a shrine.” This is a big mistake. This practice is called *shinobide* [忍び手] and is part of funerary etiquette.<sup>13</sup>

*J-CAST* contacted the Association of Shintō Shrines for comment, asking whether it would be issuing some kind of rebuttal to Hosoki, pointing out the error. The Association responded by saying: “We not going to do anything in particular [regarding Hosoki]. This is her own idea and we cannot negate what people choose to believe.” The Shakujii Hikawa Shrine followed a similar line when questioned by *J-CAST*: “We are not going to issue a protest, and if people who come to worship wish to know the right way to do it, we will teach them.”<sup>14</sup> *J-CAST* apparently tried to contact Hosoki’s office on numerous occasions for comment with no success.

Between March 1, 2007, and December 31, 2008, there were a total of 93 posts related to this article. It is difficult to say much about those who wrote the posts; indeed, one of the features of the blog is the high rate of anonymous postings.<sup>15</sup> There were 83 responses that directly related to the article itself and related content: 10 were either concerned with questions other than those raised in the article or appeared to have no relation to the content. Not surprisingly, the bulk of the postings are critical of Hosoki (74), with very few supporting her stance (5). The critical postings begin with the first contributor, who asserts that Hosoki’s stance is a clear indication of the destruction of Japanese culture using public airwaves. Rather than merely attacking Hosoki, the writer also demands that the shrines do something about this because defining modes of practice is their ‘mission’. Another writer, posting on the same day, states that Hosoki has become deified, given that she has ‘disciples’. A third states that as long as Hosoki appears on television, the number of female believers in the ‘Hosoki religion’ will simply increase. One of the more

<sup>13</sup> This statement is a translation from the *J-CAST* webpage mentioned above.

<sup>14</sup> However, the Shakujii Hikawa Jinja has since posted a two-part announcement concerning how to worship at the shrine. This contains a reference to Hosoki’s ‘error’ (see Shakujii Hikawa Jinja).

<sup>15</sup> 69 out of 93 used ‘Anonymous’ (*tokumei* 匿名), blank spaces, or question marks in place of their names. Some referred to previous posters as ‘73-san’, for example.

interesting comments was that there was an attempt to nationalize Shintō worship in the Meiji era but that these days there are different forms of worship depending on the region. The poster argued that rather than being concerned with what she said, we should be concerned with her superior attitude when she ‘preaches’ to people. One person, borrowing from Hosoki’s own language (*Zubari iu*), states: “I’m gonna give you a prediction straight. Hosoki Kazuko is going to disappear from the TV screens this year.” In fact, this prediction proved to be correct and she retired from television two months later.

### *Authority, Celebrity, and the Power of Definition*

At sixty-nine years of age, Hosoki announced her retirement from *Zubari iu wa yo!* on January 15, 2008, citing the need to ‘recharge’. Although she has left television for a time, and still continues to publish books, she left the door open for a future comeback in some capacity. According to Miyazaki Tetsuya, a commentator and critic who appears regularly on television and other media, Hosoki simply became overexposed in the media (Kokusai Shūkyō Kenkyūjo 2008: 4). While this assessment is probably reasonable considering the circumstances and the growing criticism she faced, she made a significant impact on society. Although she has now retired from the screens, Hosoki has displayed such a remarkable capacity to reinvent, reposition, and renegotiate her image through different media according to the circumstances that it may be too early to assume her career is over.

In the continuing post-Aum ‘spirituality boom’, which is characterized by a high level of distrust toward religious organizations combined with popular acceptance of beliefs in *kami*, spirits, deities, and also ancestors, the question of authority becomes crucial. While she could be seen as simply a versatile ‘spiritual entertainer’ with consummate networking skills, Hosoki managed to develop a kind of authority through representations in a variety of media. Apart from trying to point out that ancestor veneration was not a religious activity, which would have some appeal given the apparently widespread idea of *mushūkyō*, she did not challenge standard ways of thinking. Although her views are conservative, they are commonplace enough to ensure that her divination books continue to sell in vast quantities. But when we consider her television career, Hosoki’s authority is also derived from her association with celebrities in the entertainment and sporting fields, as well as other public figures. But while her

assessments of these people vary from positive to scathing, and there were reports of some being none too happy with her predictions, what is important is that her association with people who have a significant cultural presence provided her with authority and the power to define certain elements of Japanese culture. Furthermore, the programs themselves were invariably set up so that Hosoki's comments became the focus of attention only after selected guests had presented their opinions (which were always represented as inferior to Hosoki's).

An example of this is a clip on *YouTube* (masudat22) featuring Hosoki in action on a panel featuring two MCs and the well-known comedian Komatsu Masao as a guest on the Fuji Television program *Shiawasette nandakke* (What is Happiness; original broadcast date unknown). This clip demonstrates Hosoki's cross-promotional media entrepreneurship and her assertion of authority in matters related to ancestor veneration. It begins by introducing the book she had just published concerning the proper veneration of ancestors (Hosoki 2005). It then shows an anonymous woman seeking advice on a matter related to her family's grave. After the situation is acted out and then placed on a storyboard and explained to the panel and audience by one of the MCs, the other MC declares that, "this is something we can't answer." Komatsu is then given the opportunity to offer his opinion concerning the solution to the question asked. Hosoki waits patiently for him to finish, with a somewhat imposing expression on her face. She steps in and announces dismissively that "none of you can answer this" (presumably others on the panel tried to but this was cut from the broadcast) and then proceeds with her advice. On the program, Komatsu was merely used as supporting figure in a show designed to favor Hosoki's advice, and the clip shows how Hosoki's authority before the audience is first established (with the introduction to her book) and then reinforced (with the inclusion of opinions that she is able to dismiss lightly afterwards).

The case of Hosoki indicates the continuing powerful appeal of divination and the search for answers to spiritual questions in contemporary Japan. Certainly the Aum incident dealt a serious blow to public understandings and acceptance of religion, leaving religious groups on the defensive and once-feted television clairvoyants out of work. In the years immediately following the Aum incident, issues concerning religion did not make sense for the public. Questions such as why the government did not do enough to stop Aum murdering people or why scholars of religion failed to warn the public of the dangers of religious groups were of great concern to the public. Although the image of religion deteriorated and

the media generally avoided the subject, the public's need for answers to questions that can be considered religious did not disappear. When Hosoki started to appear regularly on television in the early 2000s, she had already authored a significant number of best selling publications, some of which focused on religious issues, such as ancestor veneration. After a period when questions concerning religion made no sense to many, an important part of her strategy was to emphasize, as she had in publications prior to her television success, that her teachings were simply 'common sense'. In this way, without explicitly stating her case as such, Hosoki was able to redefine one aspect of religion in contemporary Japan, albeit one that focused on her teachings.

Along the road to phenomenal mainstream success, Hosoki has had her share of critics. Some texts critical of Hosoki, such as the 2005 publication *Hosoki Kazuko: Jigoku e no michi*, authored by Hosoki Kazuko Higaisha no Kai, attempt to paint her as a swindler whose uncontrolled ramblings resemble the worst type of 'cult' leader. The above-mentioned blog, *Hosoki Kazuko o fumitsubusu burogu*, contains similar criticisms. While these criticisms tend to focus on her personality and appear to relish the opportunity to point out the (numerous) times her predictions fell wide of their mark, they do miss an important point. In continuing to promote her teachings, including ones concerning ancestor veneration, she managed to appeal to a wide audience on prime time television for a number of years. Hosoki did not frame her teachings as promoting any kind of religion. Nevertheless, if her remarkably long run on mainstream television can be used as a yardstick, she did manage to achieve something that many religions would most likely desire: a widespread acceptance that her views were 'natural' and 'common sense' for all Japanese.

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ZEN ART: PURE GESTURE, NATIONALIST AESTHETIC,  
OR NOTHING AT ALL?

GREGORY P. LEVINE

Everyone's looking for something. Some of us have found it, or part of it, in Zen Art, though the types of things we look at and the sorts of Zen we perceive in them may be quite different. Moreover, the easily joined words 'Zen' and 'Art' exist in dynamic tension, grammatically as well as conceptually, and bring to mind other intersections: 'East' and 'West', past and present, religious practitioner and academic scholar. This essay explores some of the tensions, or currents and cross currents, which accompany modern looking at and thinking about Zen Art. Shared reflection and reappraisal are what I have in mind here, for we have been in dialogue about Zen and Art for some time now and I suspect we will be for the foreseeable future.

For religious masters and practitioners in Chinese Chan, Korean Sŏn, and Japanese Zen religious lineages, paintings and calligraphies by monks and nuns may be saintly relics that are cherished in religious practice as embodiments of the awakened teachings of the Buddha, patriarchs of old, and living teachers. Viewers not inclined to practice Zen meditation or seek 'enlightenment' may find that the same types of scrolls focus spiritual attention, offering a way to be religious without official religion and fussy rituals. For practitioners of Chanoyu 茶の湯 (one Japanese tradition of tea-based culture), Zen scrolls are indispensable in the tea room: they evoke Buddhist doctrine, philosophical concepts, and historical figures that resonate with Chanoyu's own teachers, aesthetic principles, and social interactions. Many of us are drawn to intimations of 'Buddha mind' in Zen Art, while the 'Zen aesthetic' in art, or equally in home furnishings and commercial design, may make us feel 'meditative'. Maybe we simply like the monochromatic minimalism of an *ensō* 円相 (circle) in ink (complete but incomplete, perfect but imperfect against white paper) and smile at paintings of the Zen patriarch Bodhidharma (J. Daruma) or "Zen tramps" (Watts 1958: 6) and "Zen Zanies" (Hyers 1989: 267).

Did Alan Watts (1915–1973), one of the first Western popularists of Zen, have it right when he described Zen Art as the "art of artlessness, the art of controlled accident" (Watts 1994)? Zen Art produced by East Asian

painters and calligraphers, some active as early as the twelfth century, certainly inspired artists of the Western avant-garde during the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these artists developed deep affinity for Zen Buddhist philosophical concepts and the formal characteristics of Zen Art in response to the writings and lectures of D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1870–1945), and other Japanese scholars and philosophers (see Yoshimoto 2005 and Westgeest 1996). For the composer John Cage (1912–1992) and other Western and transnational artists, musicians, and performers, Zen Art was often understood as a process (not an end result) and a portal to unmediated creativity. Zen opened one's eyes, they opined, to unfamiliar modes of representation seemingly free of rules and schools, and it suggested the expressive possibilities of inward subjectivity, spontaneous gesture, silence, imperfection, empty fields, and the unity of subject/object, art/life. Since the 1950s, Zen Mind has been for some counter-mind and Zen culture counterculture (see Hoover 1977); the arts, one might say, have never been the same.

Followers of postmodernism's high priests of theory and culture may see Zen Art, often mediated by the concept of *Ma* 間 (space-time-interval), as a visual verification of Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) propositions on nothingness, the postmodernist critique of representation, or Japan being, as Roland Barthes (1915–1980) saw it, full of empty signs (see Olson 2000: 12; Parkes 1987; Barthes 1982; Iimura and Isozaki 1989). For some of us, Zen Art may be a bridge to our family heritage or function as a short hand for unfamiliar Japan or Asia. Perhaps it preserves a sense of holistic cultural and religious tradition that softens the edges of scientific rationalism, capitalist consumerism, and hyper-connectivity. Each time we purchase a miniature, rake-it-yourself rock garden, simulating the famous dry landscape garden at the Japanese temple Ryōanji 龍安寺, or a facsimile of a famous Zen painting, we participate in the postmodern cult of the simulacrum and in cultures that cross borders of media, message, and market. Zen Art is also an established field of art collecting with a not insignificant amount of buying and selling. Academics of varied ilk and ideology, meanwhile, apply scholarly skill sets to works of Zen Art to elucidate authorial traces, expressive form, as well as layers of poetry and performance, doctrine and discourse.

These and other responses converge around Zen Art as if they were, to corrupt a metaphor, ripples returning to a stone cast into a clear pool. But perhaps the pool is less limpid than we imagine, for Zen Art elicits reactions of enchantment but also critical comment, a gnashing of teeth, and even flat disinterest. This is hardly one of our so-called 'culture wars', and



Zen Art ripples come into view only occasionally, in a review, an article, a book, a conference, an exhibition. Nevertheless, some believe they know it when they see it. Others are dubious and wish to know more.

Zen Art, frankly, can put an art historian such as myself in a bind. According to my colleagues in religious studies, we art historians have for decades missed the point in our emphasis on aesthetic quality, artist identity, and the development of pictorial style and, simultaneously, our tendency to ignore the ritual roles of objects and the miraculous powers often attributed to them within Zen monastic contexts. Our bread-and-butter practices as interpreters and curators of the visual may be called into question by the Zen religious establishment. The abbot of a renowned Zen temple, for instance, politely refuses my requests to reproduce paintings in his temple's collection: they are not art objects, nor are they for art historical analysis, publication, or public display. At a lecture, a lay Zen practitioner balks at my historical analysis because I lack long experience with authentic *zazen* 座禪 (seated meditation) and *dokusan* 独参 (private meetings with a teacher). Even my university audience may be dissatisfied: students in a survey course on the arts of Japan gripe because my lecture on Zen Art doesn't provide enough Zen or Art or, in the spirit of critical thinking, eschews a packaged answer suitable for pre-exam memorization. As someone concerned with the questions of history, meanwhile, it is difficult for me not to wince at statements about Zen Art that traffic in free-floating ahistorical generality and ignore the complex and changing lives of Buddhist communities and specific contexts of visual representation past and present.

We may not all see eye-to-eye or think mind-to-mind about Zen and Art, but I would offer that such differences are Zen Art's fascination rather than bane. This is because they adumbrate questions that, if explored thoughtfully, may help us walk through the shadowy landscapes we call 'religion', 'art', and 'culture'.<sup>1</sup> Is Zen Art *sui generis* and inherent to the entire culture of Japan and 'the Japanese mind' or a product of multifaceted exchanges and even competition within the visual arts? Can a work of art be called 'Zen' simply because of particular formal qualities? Can one have an intuitive sense of Oneness or Emptiness as well as a knack for the spontaneous and, therefore, make or appreciate Zen Art without disciplined *zazen* and koan training? Indeed, one Zen master warns bluntly: "Zen arts without Zen study is just cultural junk" (Yasuda Joshu Dainen Roshi 1976). If Zen

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<sup>1</sup> My phrasing borrows from Berger 2000: 505.

Art embodies mystical experience or relies upon transcendental perception or expressive ability, how do we engage it in historical inquiry? What happens when we apply to Zen Art distinctions of geography, time, status, gender, and power? If Zen is said to be antagonistic to words and images then how are we to explain all the paintings, calligraphies, gardens, tea bowls, and so forth *ad nauseam* that fill Zen monasteries and temples? Is Zen Art pure experience, a nationalist aesthetic, or really nothing at all?

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Zen and Zen Art have been objects of enthrallment, suspicion, and debate in the West throughout the twentieth century and especially during the postwar period.<sup>2</sup> Once Zen had taken root outside Japan its followers emerged as an uneven bunch. Alan Watts's essay, "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen" (1958) captures one moment of slippage (and recovery). Watts suggests that the allure of Zen arises from "the 'modern' spirit in the West, the work of [D.T.] Suzuki, the war with Japan, the itchy fascination of 'Zen-stories', and the attraction of a non-conceptual, experiential philosophy in the climate of scientific relativism." But he is skeptical of the 'Bohemian affectations', 'protestant lawlessness', and stridency of the Jack Kerouac-associated Beat Zen crowd and, equally, the prudish hunger for orthodoxy and institutional affiliation on the part of Square Zen Westerners who believe that Zen is to be found only in temples in Japan. Both Beat and Square Zen are just so much fuss for Watts; both miss what he believes is the *real* Zen, which is devoid of affectation, the need to justify unconventional behavior, or anything special. Nevertheless, in the spirit of 'non-grasping', he offers that, "fuss is okay too" and, waxing libertarian, concludes that, after all, "it's a free country" (Watts 1994: 3–11).<sup>3</sup>

Another skeptic was Ruth Fuller Sasaki (1892–1967), who in 1958 became abbess of the subtemple Ryōsen'an within the Zen monastery Daitokuji 大徳寺, where she hosted numerous foreign students, including Gary Snyder. Sasaki had mixed feelings about the Zen boom in the West:

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<sup>2</sup> A full history of the reception of Zen and Zen Art in the West is beyond the scope of this essay, but both were objects of fascination and knowledge formation from the first Western contacts with East Asia in the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century 'opening' of Japan to the West.

<sup>3</sup> The essay appeared in a highly influential issue of the *Chicago Review* alongside contributions from D.T. Suzuki, Jack Kerouac, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Ruth Fuller Sasaki, and Gary Snyder, among others.

Today, due in large part to D.T. Suzuki's voluminous writings in English on Zen... Zen is known *about* in almost every part of the civilized world. Furthermore, Dr. Suzuki's numerous followers have written on Zen from almost every possible angle. Zen has always been credited with influencing various forms of Far Eastern art and culture, and quite correctly. But now the discovery has been made that it was existing all along in English literature. Ultra-modern painting, music, dance, and poetry are acclaimed as expressions of Zen. Zen is invoked to substantiate the validity of the latest theories in psychology, psychotherapy, philosophy, semantics, mysticism, free-thinking, and what-have-you. It is the magic password at smart cocktail parties and bohemian get-togethers alike... How far away all this is from the recluse Gautama sitting in intense meditation under the Bodhi-tree trying to find a solution to the problem of human suffering!

Sasaki's opinion of Suzuki aside, her point is that Occidentals simply need to sit *zazen* and not confuse the by-products that arise from Zen with 'Zen itself' (Sasaki 1960: 2–3; Stirling and Snyder 2006). In a sense, her words were a sermon on religious authenticity and a critique of what we might call the *Zen flâneur*—the 'self-styled Western Zennist', as Sasaki put it, wandering around Tokyo, New York, or Berlin, and observing and participating in a world of Zen Art.

The establishment and growth of Japanese Zen in the West has had its share of tussles between purity and assimilation, yielding various interpretations of Japanese monastic ritual and teaching and, occasionally, scandal (see Collcutt 1988: 199–207; Downing 2001). In certain respects, these tensions and exchanges were embodied in D.T. Suzuki, often viewed as the founding father of Zen in the West: a lay Buddhist spiritual insider who purportedly experienced *satori* 悟り in 1895 at the Kamakura monastery Engakuji 円覺寺 but remained an outsider to the monastic institution per se; an affable monkish figure who was also a modern statesman in a suit; a scholar who published dozens of books and essays but who insisted on the non-verbal, non-rational nature of spiritual Truth; and a Japanese nationalist schooled in Western thought.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps because of the pervasiveness of his writings and the 'Suzuki scene' that grew around his lectures at Columbia University in the 1950s—attended by, among others, Thomas Merton (1915–1968), Erich Fromm (1900–1980), Philip Guston

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<sup>4</sup> Especially influential was D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1959). The text, which began as lectures presented in England and America in 1935–1936, was published by the Eastern Buddhist Society as *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* in 1938 and issued in Japanese in 1940 as *Zen to Nihon bunka*. A shorter explanation of Zen and Japanese culture appears as *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (Suzuki 1934).

(1930–1980), John Cage, and Arthur Danto—we tend to forget that he was not without critics even in his own time and was by no means the single fount of Zen to the West.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary historians of Chinese literature, religion, and Chan/Zen, such as Arthur Waley (1889–1966), Hu Shih (1891–1962), Heinrich Dumoulin (1905–1995), and others challenged the ahistoricity, scholarly limitations, and inconsistencies of Suzuki’s explanations of Zen and Zen Art. Arthur Koestler (1905–1983), who called Suzuki the “sensei of Zen senseis” and relied upon his writings, nevertheless seems to have found his version of Zen a bit absurd. The Japanese philosopher and cultural critic Umehara Takeshi, meanwhile, confronted Suzuki’s Zennification of Japanese culture and the militarism implicit in his espousal of Zen and Bushidō (see Dumoulin 1963: 52; Koestler 1961: 235; Faure 1993: 62–74, 89–99; LaFleur 1987: 67–87; Fujioka 1994: 247–50).

In 1959 and 1960, English-language reviews of Suzuki’s adored and oft-cited book, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, which has had almost incalculable impact upon postwar perceptions of Zen and the arts, suggest as well friction between different authenticities. Although Nancy Wilson Ross (1913–1986) gushed in the *New York Times* about the “delightful book” and its description of the “inexpressibly soothing . . . old Japanese virtues of *wabi* [侘] and *sabi* [寂],” critics within the scholarly establishment were not content with its history or art history (Ross 1973). One reviewer noted that *Zen and Japanese Culture* had been written for the lay public and might therefore be excused for its lack of a “consistently historical scheme” and “technical presentation of Zen,” while another noted that “Occasionally [Suzuki] descends to pure nonsense or to unbearable repetition” (Nagatomi 1959 and Gardner 1960). One critic praised the book’s copious plates, but questioned Suzuki’s inattention to works of art themselves:

. . . this book seems at first sight to promise enlightenment on the relation of Zen to Japanese painting. In this the reader will be disappointed. Dr. Suzuki dwells at length on Zen and swordsmanship, Zen and the samurai, Zen and the art of tea, but his remarks on painting are meager in the extreme. The illustrations are left to speak for themselves. (Gardner 1960)

The eminent art historian Alexander Soper (1904–1993), surprised as well by Suzuki’s emphasis on the samurai, was similarly unconvinced:

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<sup>5</sup> On Suzuki at Columbia, see Danto 2004: 54–55; Westgeest 1996: 88–89n45.

The book is generously illustrated, chiefly with reproductions of Chinese and Japanese paintings and calligraphy. By no means all of these have any connection with Zen: some provide pictorial footnotes to Japanese history... and others summarize the interests of rival sects of Japanese Buddhism. At the same time one finds no chapter with a title like “Zen and the Art of Painting”; and the one entitled “Love of Nature” makes no use at all of the whole *sumi-e* tradition. (Soper 1960)

Perhaps Suzuki and his followers viewed such comments as scholarly claptrap that was undercut by a lack of Zen spiritual experience, but Suzuki’s descriptions of individual works of art, even as they contributed to the Zen Art canon, were cursory at best. For Suzuki, *sumi-e* 墨絵, literally ‘ink pictures’,<sup>6</sup> didn’t require the sort of intense gaze and explicit prodding preferred by art historians because they are self-evident embodiments of the mystical Zen experience of nothingness manifested visually in suggestion, irregularity, and unexpectedness; within the confines of a piece of paper, we find infinity and absolute being, in an ink circle eternity. As Suzuki slyly put it, they “may not be art” but are instead “perfect in [their] artlessness” because the *sumi-e* painter engages in the spontaneous transfer of artistic inspiration without the intrusion of logic or deliberation; artist and brush fuse together such that the “brush by itself executes the work quite outside the artist, who just lets it move on without his conscious efforts.” This implies that the *sumi-e* painter works in an artistic void exclusive of surrounding pictorial traditions and taste. *Sumi-e* rejects equally mimesis and is indifferent to form, for resemblance is subordinate to each brush stroke within which moves the spirit of the *sumi-e* painter. The *sumi-e* artist paints, therefore, with the same *mushin* 無心 (‘no mind’) and *munen* 無念 (‘no thought’) of the awakened Zen master and strives to give “form to what has no form” (Suzuki 1934: 307, 309, 315; 1959: 17, 31, 36). *Mushin*, in fact, “is where all arts merge into Zen,” while the Zenman “transforms his own life into a work of creation” (Suzuki 1959: 94).

Flavorsome and convincing as such exegesis has been to many—and indeed the brush moving by itself became a trope of twentieth-century notions of mystical Asian culture—Soper and other art historians and critics found it wanting, not so much with regard to the importance of Zen

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Sumiye’ (*sumi-e*) functions in Suzuki’s description as a totality for Japanese ‘ink painting’ that homogenizes and overcomes a historically diverse field of pictorial practice in ink monochrome with antecedents, schools, styles, subjects, and commentaries that have little or nothing to do with Zen. The term *sumi-e* has often been applied by Western commentators to Chinese and Korean paintings as a result of Japanese art historical writing.

or Suzuki's claim that Japan's artistic practices embody and express the non-duality and formlessness of Zen Mind. Rather, Suzuki didn't do the hard looking or archival digging needed to directly explain the visual and historical warp and weft of specific paintings, styles, and painters. Instead of letting the paintings recount their own stories, Suzuki gave them all the same tale to tell.

Suzuki was not an art historian, of course, and we should not insist upon his allegiance to this discipline's peculiar practices. The art historians, for their part, have been hard at work crafting different explanations of Zen Art. Scholars active in North America and Europe across the second half of twentieth century, such as Shimada Shūjirō (1907–1994), Yoshiaki Shimizu, and Helmut Brinker, and formidable scholars in East Asia, including Ebine Toshio and Shimaō Arata, focused upon the historical study of medieval Chan and Zen painting and calligraphy through exceedingly close visual, textual, and historical analysis of particular heirloom works often preserved in temples and museums in Japan but which in some instances migrated during the postwar years into Western collections. Their groundbreaking publications marshaled the energies of postwar art history, with its shift from traditional connoisseurship to a more scientific formalist method, and drew deeply from the equally vibrant disciplines of East Asian and Buddhist studies. What resulted from their efforts was a strikingly new platform for the study of Zen Art distinguished by deliberately shaped understandings of pictorial styles, such as Apparition Painting (Ch. *Wangliang hua*, Jp. *Mōryōga* 罔両画), and the careers of specific artists such as Muqi (active mid 13th century), Mokuan Reien (d. 1345), Kaō (fl. first half 14th century), and Sesshū (1420–1506) as they developed within monastic contexts and in relation to elite patronage of the arts (see Shimada 1961, 1962, 1964, 1938 and 1939; Shimizu 1974; Fontein and Hickman 1970; Shimizu and Wheelwright 1976; Brinker and Kanazawa 1996). More recent scholarship builds upon this highly disciplined foundation, while sometimes bending the resulting structure in surprising directions or even knocking out some of its footings.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Lachman, for instance, points out that "The term *Chan painting* does not occur in any Tang or Song dynasty texts, and does not appear to have been recognized as a category of painting by traditional Chinese writers" and that masterworks of Chan painting such as Muqi's *Six Persimmons* owe their status more to modernist sentiments than monastic Chan understandings of painting (2005: 41, 46). See also Levine 2005; Lippit 2007: 35–51. New critique of the art historians has come from Yoshizawa Katsuhiko, Professor at Hanazono University, Kyoto.

It almost goes without saying that the postwar art historical coterie and more recent scholars, who prefer the term *suibokuga* 水墨画 (lit. 'water-ink-painting') to *sumi-e*, have begged to differ with the still influential psychological, mystical readings of visual form that characterize Suzuki's Zen Art. They have been equally skeptical of the concepts and schematic terminology deployed by Suzuki's colleague Hisamatsu Shin'ichi. Hisamatsu, a follower of the philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), was the founder of the lay Zen society F.A.S. (Formless self awakening itself, All humankind, Suprahistorical history) and an avid campaigner for Zen as a transcultural truth of 'Oriental nothingness' (*Tōyōteki mu* 東洋的無) unique to the Japanese (see Sharf 1995: 132–33). His lavishly illustrated and widely-read *Zen and the Fine Arts*, first published in Japanese in 1957 and appearing in English in 1971, argued that all works of Zen Art, be it painting, calligraphy, ceramics, Nō drama, or landscape garden design, are creative expressions that emerged from the 'unitary cultural complex' of Zen and are distinguished by Seven Characteristics: Asymmetry, Simplicity, Austere Sublimity or Lofty Dryness, Naturalness, Subtle Profundity or Profound Subtlety, Freedom from Attachment, and Tranquillity. This is, to put it one way, Hisamatsu's "Magnificent Seven," to borrow the title of the near contemporary John Sturges 1960 western film: idealistic, bold, and each disciplined in their own way, they ride in to save the day through the power of Zen and Art.<sup>8</sup>

Hisamatsu was eager to clarify for his Western audiences that all seven of his psycho-aesthetic principles are Zen because of their fusion with "the Self-Awareness of the Formless Self" (Hisamatsu 1971: 45). They are, moreover, always interrelated: when one of the seven "stands alone, unrelated to the other six characteristics . . . it remains unsuitable as a description of Zen culture." It is this aesthetic-spiritual symbiosis, in fact, that differentiates Zen Japan from the West. Thus, the architect Bruno Taut's (1880–1938) beauty of simplicity finds embodiment in Japan's renowned Ise Shrine but is entirely different from the simplicity evident in Japanese Zen-influenced tea house architecture, where all the other six characteristics are also present (Hisamatsu 1960: 64). Modern architecture in the West, to the extent that it lacks this interfused aesthetic structure, cannot be 'Zen' architecture; never the twain shall meet. And while Hisamatsu explained that the experience behind the Zen aesthetic is fundamentally

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<sup>8</sup> *The Magnificent Seven* was modeled after Kurosawa Akira's (1910–1998) *The Seven Samurai* of 1954.

timeless and universal, he declared that to really grasp the characteristics of Zen Art you “must await Zen-religious realization.” The Zen master or awakened lay practitioner, therefore, retains authority over experience and interpretation; if you haven’t attained Zen-Mind you won’t be able to see Zen Art (Hisamatsu 1966).

Postwar historians of religion and some art historians have discounted Hisamatsu’s Seven Characteristics as unproductive because they have little historical traction as far as medieval Chan and Zen are concerned. Moreover, scholars of East Asian painting traditions have been concerned first-and-foremost with the study of paintings as visual objects grounded in historical circumstances and less interested in philosophical tropes that organize and explain paintings and other works of art irrespective of time period and pedigree. In the art historical gaze, paintings, their inscriptional content, and their contexts of production reveal their ‘Zenness’ in rather different ways. Instead of discussing Zen Mind, their voices were raised around the ways in which painters and calligraphers worked within Chan or Zen communities, employed established Buddhist visual traditions, appropriated non-Buddhist pictorial modes such as the Untrammelled Style (Ch. *yipin*), formulated distinctive Chan/Zen pictorial styles (such as *Mōryōga*) and themes (such as Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi or Chan encounter narratives), or dispersed Chan/Zen styles outside monastic settings and practice (see Shimizu 1985).

Method matters, therefore, and disciplinary and interpretive deviation, if not friction, characterize postwar Zen and Zen Art in the academy. Indeed, in the wake of Edward Said’s (1935–2003) *Orientalism*, Michel Foucault’s (1926–1984) writings, and the postmodernist critique of the author and grand narrative, strikingly different counter-arguments about Chan/Zen and the arts washed ashore. Scholars of religious studies in particular have offered a sophisticated reassessment of the Chan/Zen tradition and its origins, practices, beliefs, and institutions, rendering vulnerable what seemed monolithic and customary. In their view, popular notions of Zen enlightenment and mystical mind-to-mind transmission from master to disciple, commonly held notions of koan as non-rational and psychotherapeutic riddles, and an iconoclastic emphasis on Emptiness are in large measure a product of twentieth century Buddhist modernism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> On ‘Buddhist modernism’, see Lopez 1998: 184–91; McMahan 2008. On koan, see Heine and Wright 2000: 3.



What is this 'Modern Zen'? It is Zen stripped largely of the trappings of actual monastic practices that the Chan/Zen textual record and present-day practice preserve in large measure from centuries past: exacting regulations, pervasive ritual, copious ornament and offerings, broadly Buddhist doctrine and devotional practices, and a profusion of iconic forms.<sup>10</sup> It is Zen that turns its nose up at the magic and veneration of numinous objects that was often evident during the medieval and early modern period. It is defined instead by particularly modern notions of experience and a psychological state of 'enlightenment' absent history, culture, rational discourse, and ideology (Sharf 1998: 94–116). It shies away from a hermeneutically suspicious view of the rhetorical and ritualized performances through which Chan and Zen masters have long manifested awakening and unfettered freedom (many in fact used tried and true scripts and props; see Sharf 1994: 43). The heritage claimed by this particular sort of modern Zen, meanwhile, finds its apogee in medieval Japan, while Chan is said (incorrectly) to have simply died out after the Southern Song period in China and to never have found significant purchase in Korea. Study of the precise dialogue between art and monastic life and what monks and nuns wrote about works of art (often focused upon patriarchal lineage, veneration of ancestors, and broadly Buddhist ritual) is replaced with anecdotes about the antinomian behavior of Zen patriarchs and the 'psychosphere', as Suzuki put it, of artistic practice within non-duality.<sup>11</sup>

Disseminated actively by Japanese lay Buddhist figures from the 1930s onward, such as Nishida, Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and Abe Masao (1915–2006), this sort of Zen was formulated not solely by looking back into the Chan/Zen past but also in response to Western philosophy, psychology, theology, and scientific rationalism. As Thomas Merton put it in his eulogy for Suzuki, the latter was so effective in the West because "he had a rather remarkable capacity to transpose Zen into the authentic totalities of western mystical traditions that were most akin to it" (Merton 1967: 6). In other words, don't be surprised if your (Suzuki-style) Zen has in it traces of the medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), the American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910), and the American

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<sup>10</sup> On Chan monasticism, see Foulk 1993: 147–208; 2004: 275–312.

<sup>11</sup> 'Psychosphere' is from Suzuki 1959: 295. On pre-modern writings consider Mujaku Dōchū (1653–1745) discussed in App 1987.

philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859–1952) (see Sharf 1995; King 1999: 157; Westgeest 1996: 80).

This Zen is also Janus-faced: universal, and therefore somehow available to East or West, it is simultaneously nationalistic and implicated in assertions of Japanese uniqueness and militarism. Japanese culture writ large and across time, meanwhile, was measured according to ‘Zen characteristics’ of modern conception and colonized internally by Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and others in order to assert the superiority of Japanese Zen and culture over Asia and, indeed, the West: Zen Art, in turn, became part of ‘Zen nationalism’ (Sharf 1994: 46).<sup>12</sup> The universalist allure of this sort of Zen in the West during the twentieth century can be easily imagined, for it seemed able to assuage certain anxieties about modernity and to fulfill desires for spiritual experience without the encumbrances of traditional religion in the post-Enlightenment and post-industrial age (ibid.: 49–50; King 1999: 156; Faure 1993).

But Zen and Zen Art, some now argue, are about power; no one who speaks, writes, paints, sculpts, inscribes, or views is neutral, and acts of expression, explanation, or interpretation, be they ancient or modern, are inherently partisan.<sup>13</sup> The consternation that can be felt along certain hallways of the academy, meanwhile, is due not strictly to the ideas of Suzuki and Hisamatsu but rather their reception. Robert H. Sharf (1995: 145) has written:

I am dismayed by those Western scholars who uncritically accept these Japanese missionaries as living representatives of an unbroken tradition, and who refuse to acknowledge the ideological and rhetorical dimensions of the Zen of men like Suzuki. It is time to demand the same critical and dispassionate rigor in the study of Zen that we casually demand in the study of other religious traditions.

These are fighting words, and they are applicable to the study of Zen Art. While some argue that the interpretation of Zen Art should be left to awakened masters or knowledgeable practitioners, because of its metaphysical nature, others (including myself) counter that the tradition’s self-portrait is only one of many possible likenesses.

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<sup>12</sup> There were others before Suzuki, including Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913) and Nukariya Kaiten (1867–1934), who promoted Zen in nationalist terms.

<sup>13</sup> Suzuki, for instance, was partisan to his Rinzai lineage and disdainful of the Sōtō tradition. See Faure 1993: 55–58.

One thing appears almost certain. Most writers find that to explain Zen Art they must first explain Zen. This has pragmatic value, of course, but countless books and articles condense ‘all you need to know’ into a paragraph or two, or a scrawny chapter. Suzuki’s *Zen and Japanese Culture* begins with a shockingly brief exegesis, “What is Zen?,” that comments impressionistically on Chan’s emergence from Chinese culture as a transformation of Indian Buddhism and its departures from the prayer and books of typical Buddhism; offers stories about Chan patriarchs and peculiarities of Zen verbalism and actional behavior as instrumental within *satori*; explains the presence of Zen in daily experience as ‘being itself’ and an ‘isness’ free from conceptualization; and speaks of the attainment of a “structure of mentality which is made always ready to respond instantly” (Suzuki 1959: 3–18; see also Blyth 1942 and Munsterberg 1965: 13–21). As illuminating as this *précis* (and others like it) may be in certain respects, Suzuki collapses a colossal and complex institutional, doctrinal, philosophical, and social tradition into a discrete touchstone that can turn art into Zen. And if Suzuki’s Zen is a particular sort of Zen, as many have noted, this explanatory strategy leads naturally to a particular sort of Zen Art. Put differently, when an author begins a book on Zen Art by indicating, in a prefatory chapter, that he or she wishes to “acquaint the reader with the rudiments of Zen, its characteristics and those of Zen Art” (Westgeest 1996: 8), we find ourselves in a land of congenial, yet simplistic generality. For scholars as well as practitioners who believe that Zen should be more of an open question, susceptible to cultural and epistemological critique, an explanation of Zen Art that fails to treat Zen itself as unstable sets forth on rather wobbly legs.

As any exploration of the inscriptions found upon paintings produced within the Chan/Zen monastic milieu during the medieval and early modern eras quickly demonstrates, meanwhile, quotation from and allusion to canonical works of Buddhist scripture, Zen discourse and koan records, and Chinese literature was a central preoccupation and enjoyment.<sup>14</sup> During the twentieth century, Zen Art acquired a different sort of intertextuality. Countless publications on Zen Art cite as their primary sources of information and interpretation modern authors such as Okakura Kakuzō (1863–1913), R.H. Blyth (1898–1964), Nishida, Suzuki, Watts, and

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<sup>14</sup> See Levine and Lippit 2007; Parker 1999; Shimada and Iriya 1987.

Hisamatsu.<sup>15</sup> Texts such as Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Yasuichi Awakawa's (1902–1976) *Zen Painting* (1970), and Hisamatsu's *Zen and the Fine Arts*, meanwhile, became a secondary scriptural canon. This modern canon has, in turn, overwritten the copious and not always univocal writings about the visual arts of preceding and even still-active Chan, Sōn, and Zen communities and has become irreducible truth for many subsequent writers. Indeed if one looks at the citation of textual authorities, and the recursive reference to modern authorities as primary voices, one discovers a series of begets in Anglophone explanations of Zen Art. Okakura beget, among others, Ernest F. Fenollosa (1853–1908). Suzuki beget Eugen Herrigel (1885–1955), famous for his *Zen in the Art of Archery*; the Zennophile Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983); Watts; and the art historian Hugo Munsterberg (1916–1995). Watts, in turn, beget the art historian Langdon Warner (1881–1955). Hisamatsu beget the postwar art critic Helen Westgeest, and others, so on to the present. Scholarship always has its lineages, but to permit these prophets and their modern canon to speak so loudly for the past rankles some whose allegiances lie with the delicate negotiations inherent in close historical, textual, and art historical study. To be fair, however, the art historians and Buddhologists themselves have their own patriarchal figures, hallowed modern scriptures, and family myths that may not make sense to outsiders.<sup>16</sup> We all have stories, if not tall tales, to tell.

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In the modern and postmodern world, therefore, the act of explaining Zen and Zen Art reveals something of a divide between believers and atheists/agnostics, between the metaphysical tradition and the secular humanist tradition of history (Faure 1993: 89). Recent critique of the 'Suzuki effect' and arguments regarding Zen modernism are likewise a meeting between Zen and critical theory and an effort to "discover the recent origins of 'age-old' Japanese traditions" (Vlastos 1998: 8; Morinaga 2005). Alongside Bushidō, which even in 1905 was deemed by one prominent Japanologist as "fabricated out of whole cloth, chiefly for foreign consumption"

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<sup>15</sup> Okakura Kakuzō's *Ideals of the East* (1903) and *The Book of Tea* (1906), which hold formative positions in twentieth-century writing on *Zen Art*, must be dealt with elsewhere. The exceptions are a handful of books and exhibition catalogues written by art historians, including Fontein and Hickman 1970; Brinker and Kanazawa 1996; Levine and Lippit 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the author resides in one particular lineage of Zen Art study within the academy, one evolving from Princeton University.

(Chamberlain 1905), Zen and Zen Art—especially as they are popularly understood—are wholly continuous with the ancient past and Chan/Zen monastic communities only, one might say, in our wildest, or most cherished, dreams. While this need not compel anyone to throw out beloved Zen scrolls or suppress fondness for non-attachment, Nothingness, or the Zen aesthetic, it asks us to consider the following: far from being a free-floating, timeless, or inherent Truth, Zen and its expressions in Zen Art, like all religions and cultures, take shape within specific moments of realization, production, reception, and rhetoric.

If history is relating questions and ideas to particular moments, places, things, and stories, one quickly discovers that there have been multiple sorts of Zen across time and geography.<sup>17</sup> And if Zen is full of historical diversity, then it is not surprising that there is a growing counterhistory of Zen Art (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 52). Recognition of the postwar (rather than premodern) creation of the category of Japanese art known as *Zenga* 禅画—paintings of Daruma, Zen patriarchs, allegorical themes, and *Ensō* produced by monks from the Edo period (1615–1868) onward—has become part of art history's recent reconsideration of commonly-held assumptions about the visual traditions of Japan (see Yamashita 2000: 19–28; Guth 2002: 203–12). Art historians, directly questioning the Suzuki-Hisamatsu model, now examine the role of 'traditional' icons in Zen monasteries, aside from fierce paintings of Daruma and quirky sketches of eccentrics, and also particular ways of adorning and ritually activating and encountering images (see Levine 2005).

In the case of ink paintings of the Muromachi period (1333–1573) there has been a sea-change from fuzzy statements about the spirit of the *sumi-e* artist, on the one hand, and predominantly biographical and formal evaluations of pictorial hand and style, on the other, toward more sophisticated examination of the philological content of and aesthetic, philosophical, social, and soteriologic practices behind Zen Buddhist literary and painterly production (see Parker 1999; Lippit 2011; Levine and Lippit 2007). Ink monochrome is no longer perceived to be the sole medium of Zen Art, gender has become part of our interpretive terrain of Zen culture, and premodern and modern Zen monks and nuns are found to be far more art historically savvy and commercially engaged than previously acknowledged (see Levine 2005 and Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies 1998). In film studies we are now apt to be suspicious of critics who characterize

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<sup>17</sup> Here, I paraphrase and adapt from Faure 1993: 92.

Kurosawa Akira (1910–1998) and other Japanese directors as ‘Zen artists’, a notion that is often symptomatic of essentialist assumptions that Japanese film, as purportedly embodying a “collective essence called the ‘Japanese mind’,” must necessarily be Zen inspired (Yoshimoto 2000: 10–12, 74). If the two do meet—Kurosawa and Zen—we learn more through an understanding of this encounter within the particularities of postwar intellectual and religious discourse than through generalized notions of Zen and Japanese film. Similarly, if the work of avant-garde artists of the postwar period is to be interpreted as Zen, it is so by virtue of the particular understandings of Zen and Zen Art in circulation at that time. Stimulated by the explications of *satori*, Emptiness, spontaneous gesture, *sumi-e*, and others, offered by the likes of Suzuki, occasionally engaging in serious *zazen*, and bouncing off Dada, Psychoanalysis, and Surrealism, these artists generated their own understandings of Zen and Zen Art as sets of affinities, resemblances to the Modern; they lengthened the chain, creating Cage’s Zen Art, Ad Reinhardt’s (1913–1967) Zen Art, and so on, jazz riffs off ‘Suzuki-Zen-like art’ (Westgeest 1996: 224). Zen Art, in other words, has been changing before our (or at least some of our) eyes.

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Does this sort of reappraisal matter if our responses to Zen Art are aesthetically subjective or guided by practice and faith? Does not an idealized, ahistorical sort of Zen still lead us to appreciate non-Western religions and visual traditions? Perhaps it’s a tussle over who has the authority to pass judgment on Zen Art, but a historian’s reply might be: if we’re talking about here-now, fine, but don’t make today yesterday, for the past “is another country; they do things differently there” (Hartley 1953: 9). An art historian mindful of Michael Baxandall’s (1933–2008) concept of the ‘period eye’, meanwhile, might ask us to explore the distinctive cultural and visual skills that different communities at different times employed when making and looking at Zen Art, be it those of a monk or nun in the fifteenth century, an avant-garde artist of the 1950s, a designer in the twenty-first century, and so forth (see Baxandall 1988). A postcolonial critic might caution that appreciation, however sincere, may cloak unequal power relations and that fantasies of the exotic and ethnic stereotyping can sneak in and do harm.<sup>18</sup> Witness art criticism that seems almost inevitably to see in the work of contemporary artists and architects

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<sup>18</sup> On exoticism, see Bohrer 2003: 10–41.

of Japanese nationality or heritage (regardless of where they work, their dialogues with diverse currents of art and design, and so forth) a “riddling Zen reticence” or “the Zen stillness of his native culture’s art” (Updike 2004: 106; 2006: 14). Those with affinities for New Historicism and Visual Culture Studies might propose that we consider the “mutual embeddedness of art and history” and allow our favored assumptions about Zen Art to be jostled, even upset, by varied categories of visual imagery (especially those previously overlooked, seemingly inconsequential) (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 7–9).

Rather than producing anxiety, the loss of an idealized, simplified Zen Art is our gain. For one thing, we would likely ask more and new questions about still more intriguing works of art, dilating our gaze beyond the canon and its ‘usual suspects’. A rougher but nonetheless pleasing texture may become noticeable as we trace the in-between (for example, the exchanges between monastic and professional artist, patron and consumer, native and foreign, abstract and mimetic, center and margin) or risk a touch of the unexpected (that monks were often players in the art market and even art forgers or that there are aesthetic dimensions to Zen Art that the normative lexicon fails to account for). We may, in turn, come face to face with deeper artistic and spiritual energies, past and present.

When we look at works of art and discourses about them as visual and verbal moments that occurred in the past and kept going until they meet our eyes and thoughts, we also learn about ourselves in relation to our imaginings of the past. By risking the complications of history, moreover, we may find new meaning in the ‘timeliness of things’ that compels us toward wonder. In fact, many of us already give Zen Art more than one sense of time. A Chan/Zen painting may have historical gravitas and the capacity to elicit a sense of astonishment as if we were actually ‘there’ in medieval China or Japan when brush met paper.<sup>19</sup> We may thrill equally to the sense that the painting has an eternal now-ness because it captures a glimmer of Truth. We adore works of premodern Zen painting held in museums and cloisters because they are old and accompanied by encomia (National Treasure and such), but we may flock just as easily to see a traditionally garbed present-day Zen master performing calligraphy before our very eyes. Ultimately, a painting of the Sixth Patriarch attributed to Liang Kai (late 12th–early 13th century) *and* a tattoo of Liang Kai’s painting posted on a website become meeting points, places for us

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<sup>19</sup> On the sense of ‘being there’, see Bohrer 2003: 2.

to think about making and viewing art and how images mean and change meaning.

Whether or not one agrees with such views or finds them interesting, the ripples appearing on the surface of Zen and Zen Art seem less concentric or smoothly dissipating than one might think. Put differently, they suggest a sort of differential gear set, which allows several wheels of understanding to turn at variable speeds. Surely we benefit from such variation and plurality, and Zen art followers as well as Zen art skeptics are more dependent upon each other (and even alike) than we may imagine. This brings to mind two venerable doctrinal formulations in Chan/Zen and Mahāyāna Buddhist discourse: the dialectic of ‘sudden’ versus ‘gradual’ enlightenment, on the one hand, and the doctrine of the ‘two truths’ on the other.<sup>20</sup> Some Zen practitioners and aficionados of Zen Art might be likened to followers of the sudden camp in Chan/Zen who say, I see it, it’s Emptiness, *satori* right now, right there in the painting—you either get it or you don’t, and in any case stop mumbling over the details, for they are impediments to awakening to Zen and to art. The scholarly crowd, meanwhile, might be likened to proponents of the gradual model: whatever initial wonderment and insight the painting may elicit, sustained and deliberate investigation is required to dig incrementally through the historical facts, scrutinize the pictorial and inscriptional surface, and penetrate the accumulated rhetoric of tradition before one can grasp what is really there. Each takes the other to task for particular failings. The academics just don’t get it—or more properly *see* It in a flash of realization; the wide-eyed aficionados occasionally seem overzealous in their pursuit of Truth unaware of power, ideology, and exoticism.

This is partly tongue-in-cheek, and no matter which way one unpacks Zen Art, one always repacks it in one way or another. It is also true that many monks, nuns, lay followers, and collectors do hard scholarly work and art historians may practice *zazen* alongside what they teach and publish. For this reason, Zen Art might also be described as a shared dream, a ‘necessary fiction’, to borrow from Wallace Stevens, or a willing sign that encourages realization and knowledge at different levels and moments (see Bohrer 2003: 3).<sup>21</sup> It allows us to ask questions and seek answers, to believe certain things and build upon them and renew our thinking. This

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<sup>20</sup> For sudden/gradual in Chan/Zen and the ‘two truths’, contingent and ultimate, see Sharf 1994: 41; Faure 1991: chap. 2.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Necessary fiction’ was suggested to me by the late Jay Fliegelman, Stanford University.



is not to say, *à la* Oscar Wilde's comment about Japan, that the whole of Zen Art is pure invention or, *à la* Roland Barthes, an empty sign.<sup>22</sup> Rather it is to suggest that it might be likened to a Buddhist Expedient Means (Jp. *hōben* 方便, Skt. *upāya*) that bridges between the Two Truths of the absolute and conventional, transcendent and immanent, emptiness and form. After all, it is the bounding contour of the ink circle that suggests emptiness, the use of language that loosens our reliance upon language, and the *painting* of a Buddha statue being burned that urges us to move beyond outward form. Difficult to come at head on, therefore, Zen Art seems at its clearest today when imagined as a field of converging and colliding things, notions, and interpretations in which the visual is open to debate. Authenticity, adaptation, interpretation, and performance—this is arguably what Zen Art has always been and perhaps what it will always be.

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<sup>22</sup> For Wilde's comment on Japan, see "The Decay of Lying: An Observation," in Wilde 1891.

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WIDELY READ WRITINGS ON RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN:  
POPULAR BOOKS ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES, 'SPIRITUAL LITERATURE'  
AND LITERARY WORKS WITH RELIGIOUS THEMES

LISETTE GEBHARDT

*Introduction: Widely Read Writings on Religion in Japan*

Books on religion and, in a broader sense, writings that treat religious issues enjoy a remarkably high circulation in Japan. For anyone seeking to assess the status of religion and all that pertains to it in Japanese society, such works demonstrate the popularity of the topic. They can also be seen as significant insofar as they shape Japanese awareness of what is understood as constituting religion. If we assume that certain images of religion are conveyed to the reader and render the content of religious thinking or religious practices more familiar, then it would seem worthwhile to examine more closely some relevant Japanese publications. These materials may be subdivided into three broad categories: works by the founders of new religions, publications of intellectuals on religious and spiritual themes, and literary works addressing issues related to religion or spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

Appearing as religious bestsellers in the strict sense of the term are the writings of new religion founders. Ōkawa Ryūhō (1956–), the founder of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* 幸福の科学 (Happy Science) has sold, as of the present date, tens of millions of his books and thus counts among the top-ranking stars of all Japanese writers. His name appears on the best-seller lists in 1998 with *Kōfuku no kakumei* 幸福の革命 (The Revolution of Happiness), in 1999 with *Han'ei no hō* 繁栄の法 (The Law of Prosperity) and in 2001 with *Kiseki no hō* 奇跡の法 (The Law of Miracles) (Nagae 2003). Ōkawa's successful titles—such as *Meiji Tennō/Shōwa Tennō no kotodama: Nihon kokumin e no yūkoku messēji* 明治天皇・昭和天皇の言霊・日本国民への憂国メッセージ (The Word-Soul of the Meiji and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Spirituality' is here seen as a modern category of understanding and interpreting the religious in a more personal and experience-orientated way. In defining the spiritual for contemporary Japan, I mainly rely on the writings of Shimazono Susumu, which are also the basis of my thoughts on spirituality in contemporary Japan (Gebhardt 2001). For a discussion of the term see the article of Shimazono in this *Handbook*.

Shōwa Emperors: A Patriotic Message to the Japanese People) and *Yume no aru kuni e: Kōfuku ishin* 夢のある国へ。幸福維新 (Towards a Country that has Dreams: The Restoration of Happiness, 2009)—are intended in a time of economic crisis to point the way towards a nationally conscious spiritual orientation and a new future-oriented vitality. Ikeda Daisaku (1928–; Sōka Gakkai 創価学会) and Fukami Tōshū (1951–; World Mate) likewise number among the authors of religious bestsellers. Fukami claims to have written over 100 books; his well-known *Kyōun* 強運 (1986; published 1997 as *Lucky Fortune*) has already sold over a million copies. The writings of the religious leaders are heterogeneous texts, whose *point de départ* is the promotion of their organizations' teachings. They also present themselves as psycho-therapeutic counselors. They are often written in a fervent nationalistic mode in praise of the Japanese nation or—particularly since the collapse of the bubble economy—to develop a form of economic esotericism for the so-called lost decade (*ushinawareta jūnen* 失われた十年).<sup>2</sup>

Another variety of popular books with religiously relevant content can be seen in the writings of the 'spiritual intellectuals' (*reiseiteki chishikijin* 霊性的知識人). The label was first suggested by the scholar of religion Shimazono Susumu and refers to the work of academics and journalists who were influential primarily from the 1980s through 1995, when, due to the sarin gas attacks carried out by the Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 cult, religion abruptly became an unsavory topic in the book market and public sphere.<sup>3</sup>

The writings of spiritual intellectuals discuss Japanese religious concepts and practices, ranging from Buddhist traditions and the worldviews of Shintō to diverse esoteric constructs—such as contemporary shamanism—influenced by Occidental spirituality and the New Age movement.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> An example of esoteric spirituality within an economic context are management advice books based on Shintoistic thought, promoted by the modern religious organization World Mate (see Prohl 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The long time postwar religion boom came to an end in the so called post-AUM-era, when even leading intellectuals writing on spirituality, including, for example, Umehara Takeshi (1925–), Yamaori Tetsuo (1930–), and Kawai Hayao (1928–2007), as well as their successors in the religion debate, Kamata Tōji (1951–) and Nakazawa Shin'ichi (1950–), all lost some of their popularity.

<sup>4</sup> The texts and the effect of the spiritual intellectuals are treated in the studies of Prohl (2002) and Gebhardt (2001), which for their part are based on the contributions of Shimazono Susumu. The study *Japans Neue Spiritualität* (Gebhardt 2001) is a comprehensive treatment of the literary discourse of religion and the religious in contemporary Japanese literature, while at the same time introducing numerous works by the spiritually

What is particularly striking is the display of self-Orientalism with which the authors elucidate the historical religious concepts of Asia and ‘Asian religions’, parallel to the adaptive approaches of Occidental travelers to India, Zen romantics, and adepts of Asian mysticism. A much talked-of book, representing the religious adaption of those spiritual intellectuals of the younger generation, ostensibly both postmodern and esoteric, is Nakazawa Shin’ichi’s *Chibetto no Mōtsaruto* チベットのモーツァルト (Mozart in Tibet; with the subtitle *Une sorte de Mozart tibétain*, 1983). *Chibetto no Mōtsaruto* could be regarded as one basis for the acceptance of the Aum cult within Japanese intellectual circles; it fosters the occult as an intellectual attitude for an educated Japanese in the 1980s. Nakazawa’s smart occult lifestyle offered a kind of esoteric dandyism.

Included in the category of ‘spiritual literature’, or works dealing specifically with the Japanese ‘spiritual world’ (*seishin sekai* 精神世界) are classics such as the India travelogue *Indo e* インドへ (Journey to India) by the painter and mystic Yokoo Tadanori (1936–), published in 1977, as well as the popular contemporary articles of the pop-mystic Ehara Hiroyuki (1964–). Sales of Ehara’s debut work *Kōun wo hiki-yoseru supirichuaru bukku* 幸運を引き寄せるスピリチュアルブック (The Spiritual Book for Attaining Happiness, 2001) quickly reached the 700,000 mark. The popular works of Itsuki Hiroyuki (1932–) likewise offer religiously imbued advice on happiness in life, human fulfillment, and a good death. Itsuki is the author of *Taiga no itteki* 大河の一滴 (A Drop in the Great Stream, 1998), a commercially successful work in which Buddhist philosophy is a consistent theme. Another example of ‘how-to-...’ literature (*ikikata no hon* 生き方の本) with an underlying religious message is *Dai ōjō* 大往生 (The Great Crossing, 1994) by the composer and essayist Rokusuke Ei (1933–); it became a million seller in 1994.

The discussion concerning a fully and autonomously lived ‘authentic life’ and a self-determined consciously experienced ‘authentic death’ should be seen in the context of a new Japanese awareness of thanatology (*shiseikan* 死生観). Along with the broad current of *iyashi* 癒し, or the search for solace and healing, these themes gained prominence no later than 1995 in an increasingly ‘cold’ post-Aum-society. Many articles take the form of ‘how-to-live’, a highly popular genre in Japan (cf. Gebhardt 2004). Through religious and philosophical perspectives, these works are

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engaged, e.g. Nakazawa Shin’ichi and Yokoo Tadanori. This article refers to the results of that study.

concerned with the fundamental questions of existence and the possibility of leading a meaningful life in an alienated consumer society. Included in the concept of a fulfilled life is aging in dignity and self-determined death, whereby the case is made for a time when each of us will create our own personal style of death (*jibun no shi wo tsukuru jidai* 自分の死を作る時代) (cf. Gebhardt 2008). This variety of religiously related writing seeks nothing less than the salvation of humanity (*sukui* 救い) through the rediscovery of spirituality and the spiritual rescue of modern Japanese from the clutches of a worldview oriented toward functionalism and materialism, thereby bringing about the ‘renewal’ (*saisei* 再生) of their existence.

Questions concerning how to cope with life and a turning to religion as a possible solution to personal problems are also treated in literary works by renowned writers. In contemporary Japanese literature there are a goodly number of works with religious themes. Writers come to grips with Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, with Christianity and with the esoteric-occult. At the time of its publication, *Fukai kawa* 深い川 (*Deep River*, 1993) by Endō Shūsaku (1923–1996) drew much attention, with its various characters being sent off on a journey to India.<sup>5</sup> An interesting text that points up a recent Japanese position on Zen is *Aburakusasu no matsuri* アブラクサスの祭り (*The Festival of Abraxas*, 2001) by the Zen cleric, Gen'yū Sōkyū (1956–). As the biggest literary bestseller to date, there is the three-volume work by Murakami Haruki (1949–), *1Q84*, which takes up the theme of religious conviction and the issue of indoctrination through new religious organizations; regarded by the critics as a post-Aum-novel (*posuto-Ōmu-shōsetsu* ポストオウム小説), it appeared in May 2009 and, as of August, 2009, has sold over two million copies.

This discussion about widely read writings on religion in contemporary Japan starts with the assumption that popular—in the sense of being remarkably best selling or vividly discussed in the media—religion-related writings represent the mood of an era and function as a kind of cultural storehouse containing temporal images of religion and indications of religious awareness. While the texts of religious leaders are excluded here, selected literary works on the topic of religion will be introduced, as well as some representative ‘spiritual’ writings as print-media examples of religious conscience in Japan. The central point in viewing these

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<sup>5</sup> Endō was one of the rare Christian authors in Japan and something of a cultural hero. He was prominent in the media and for a time even hosted a television talk show.



publications is the rather simple but crucial question regarding what the writer understands by the term 'religion', a rather volatile concept that depends on many factors.

Two authors of 'spiritual' writing, Yokoo Tadanori (representing the 1970s) and Ehara Hiroyuki (representing the years after 2000), will be discussed as typical *Zeitgeist*-approaches towards religious ideas. Three examples from the literary field, Endō Shūsaku, Gen'yū Sōkyū and Murakami Haruki will illustrate subtle variations both in an individual's concept of religion as well as in a religious awareness of a certain period in time. The different examples I will present in this discussion range from a travelogue to a novel by a Buddhist priest to works of one of Japan's leading novelists on the international scene.

Despite their obvious differences, all these writers share some common themes. First, they assume a spiritual crisis or a spiritual lack in Japan. Next, they introduce the necessity of a spiritual quest and argue that the religious could solve the problem of the disorientated individual. Further, their texts argue for different religious models in the East and the West, with preference for the Eastern model. At the same time, they are aware that the concept of this 'religious East' is already an East-West mixture that could be traced back to historical transactions and hybridizations of religious sensibilities around 1900. A final common feature may be the fact that although the texts argue against the oblivion of modern consumer and mass media society, they themselves do not always succeed in overcoming the logics of religious capitalism.

What is under consideration in this chapter is a 'spiritual literature' in its contemporary historical framework from the 1970s right up to the present day, with detailed attention to Yokoo Tadanori, Nakazawa Shin'ichi, and Ehara Hiroyuki, along with literary works with religious themes, including Endō Shūsaku's *Fukai kawa*, Gen'yū Sōkyū's *Aburakusasu no matsuri* and Murakami Haruki's *1Q84*. 'Spiritual literature' is seen as part of the Japanese discourse of religion and as a valuable representation of attitudes towards the religious. Together with case studies and field research that reveal religious behaviour in social reality, the exploration of spiritual literature gives testimony of the religious as having cultural, ideological and intellectual dimensions. The study of influential publications on religion that not only looks for bestsellers by the numbers but by cultural and intellectual impact very much recalls analyzing the construction of modular building blocks: one hopes to have pulled out those samples that most clearly and comprehensively reveal the structure of the edifice. Although the election of the discussed titles may seem fortuitous at the first glance,

it is the result of a longer reading experience. The six examples reflect the mood of the times over the last three decades and confirm just how close to the mainstream Japanese writers and spiritual intellectuals can be when they bring religious and spiritual topics to the surface.

*Soul Purification in India, or a Japanese Orientalist  
View of Religion in Asia*

The Japanese book market has, since the 1970s, featured a remarkable series of writings that deal with the themes of religion, spirituality, and the search for meaning, along with ‘Asian religious traditions’. Religion is treated not only philologically in fact, it has been understood primarily as religion lived and experienced. A representative figure of this kind of writing is Yokoo Tadanori, a famous graphic artist and painter. Through his publications, he contributed to the decade of Japan’s first esoteric wave in the 1970s, an era that is imbued with an ethno-esoteric turn toward Asia. He was also involved in the self-consciously nationalistic mood of the 1980s, when the search for meaning was more intensely focused on a specifically Japanese context, with journeys, for example, to fashionably spiritual locations within Japan.<sup>6</sup> Best known, however, is his travelogue *Indo e*, which, appeared in 1977 and documents his travels to the sources of Japanese spirituality. Yokoo stands for the sort of fashionable attitude toward the religious that one finds as a spiritual emphasis in artistic circles both at home and abroad. This conception of religion includes healing, renewal, meditation/bodily practice, mysticism, supernatural endowments/extrasensory perception (*chōnōryoku/reikan* 超能力・靈感), and ‘Asian identity’.

As he explains in the chapter entitled “Naze boku wa Indo ni iku no ka なぜ僕はインドに行くのか” (Why I am traveling to India; in Yokoo 1977: 103–17), Yokoo was stimulated to undertake his journey by the well-known writer Mishima Yukio (1925–1970). The artist emphasizes that he had been drawn primarily by the connection between Indian belief concepts with the supernatural (*chōshizen* 超自然) and the mystical (*shin-pisei* 神秘性), a factor that was likewise important according to Mishima. Mishima is a model for Yokoo’s journey, in part because he was Japan’s first prominent literary tourist to Asia (he initially went to India in 1967),

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<sup>6</sup> Japanese spiritual hot spots are for example Tenkawa 天川, Fuji 富士, Dewa 出羽, Kurama 鞍馬, Osorezan 恐山, and Kumano-sanzan 熊野三山.

and was convinced that the origins of Japanese culture were to be found on the banks of the Ganges. Another reason for Mishima's desire to visit the country was a news item from 1965 that awakened Japanese curiosity: the Beatles had themselves set off for India and meditated there in the ashram of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Yokoo was impressed by the transformation of a teen band into a 'group of philosophers', who with their lifestyle wanted to carry an important message by means of their music (1977: 104).

On a four-month long sojourn in America in 1967, Yokoo received authentic impressions of the hippie movement, which had incorporated numerous influences from Indian religion into its own lifestyle and convictions. The Japanese artist was nonetheless not so bold as to relate to or simulate hippiedom, with its rejection of society and radicality, as he witnessed it both in America and later in Goa (ibid.: 181). At times he gazed down on the 'people in t-shirts and sandals' with the condescension of a well-to-do hotel guest, and yet he wished to have a consciousness-expanding, journey-to-the-limits experience in the style of the hippie creed, for India itself appeared to work on him 'like a drug' (ibid.: 89).

In some places, Yokoo admits with astounding openness his intention to consume recreational substances and concedes that he finds the Orient of the hippies more attractive than Asian reality:

Here, through an American filter, the East makes such an exotic appearance. For me as an East Asian myself, the sophisticated, made-in-America India is both far more alluring than Asia in the raw and, at the same time, easier to understand. (1977: 194)

This statement is remarkable. It supports the conclusion that the Japanese perspective was already accustomed to the 'American filter' and alienated from the potentially binding ties with the basis of the Asian cultural sphere.

Despite the conflict between the sometimes disappointing reality of India and the pretense thereof, Yokoo again and again stresses the healing effect of his India experience: 'soul cleansing' (*kokoro no sentaku* 心の洗濯; ibid.: 191) is his motive for being on the move. The big cities and our modern lifestyle, laments Yokoo in chapter 15, have produced an unhealthy art, created by "the sick, the half-sick, and the mentally disturbed, inhabitants of a dubious society" (ibid.: 156). Yokoo, who often complains of insomnia, sees himself as one of the exhausted; he undertakes his rehabilitative journey in order to find a cure for the burdens of modern society, nervousness, and repressed anxiety. The confrontation

with death, which in India is ubiquitous and whose many faces he can see on the banks of the Ganges, helps to bring him to the recognition of what is essential and urges personal veracity (Yokoo 1977: 195). In India, the death of the individual is quite unspectacular, the cremated corpse being absorbed into the landscape of the river: Yokoo senses a comforting unity of man and nature. Confronted with Indian authenticity, he takes on an attitude of hostility towards civilization; he speaks out against the modern natural sciences, which have, he says, failed to explain the “wonders of the religious world” (ibid.: 155), as well as supernatural phenomena.

Yokoo’s descriptions reveal a psychological portrait of a schizophrenic traveler: on the one hand, the artist expects the country to provide an enhanced sense of inner elation, one that will give him, oppressed as he is by civilization, renewed strength. On the other hand, he shows himself to be an anxious and carping tourist from a land of affluence. Thus, his reports fluctuate between enumerating all the inadequacies he encounters and conjuring up those ‘epiphanic moments’ that drew him to India in the first place.

*Nakazawa Shin’ichi: A Spiritual Lifestyle and ‘Postmodern Knowledge’*

Nakazawa Shin’ichi (1951–) is one of the most striking of Japan’s ‘spiritual intellectuals’. Characterized as a postmodern thinker, he contributed to the 1980s avant-garde religious renaissance-movement that is critical of civilization and is anti-Western. Nakazawa’s spiritual discourse is a claim for something more than consumerism, something that can restore dignity to the Japanese people in general. For the Japanese intellectual, Nakazawa’s work embodies a kind of self-enigmatization which is drawn from an enigmatized Asian religiosity. His attitude is imbued with a resentment of ‘almighty bureaucracy’ and giant corporations, as well as with a rejection of modern utilitarianism and of the cold rhetoric that speaks only of what is functional or convenient, leaving very little room for the development of individual human beings in all their weaknesses and longings. Nakazawa initially studied religions at the University of Tokyo and in his writings presents the standpoint of a cultural anthropologist. As an academic, however, he also sympathizes with artists engaged with the esoteric, such as Yokoo Tadanori. According to Nakazawa’s own statements, he felt the desire to make a break with Christian-Occidental influences. He spent some time in Nepal and Tibet, where, again according to his own claims (Prohl 2000: 22ff.), he practiced esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教).

In a contemporary history of how religion is received in Japan, Nakazawa is thus of some significance, as his writings had influence on the young educated classes of the 1980s. To some extent, his perspective is relevant to the followers and leaders (*kanbu* 幹部) of the Aum sect. The Aum incident of 1995 threw Nakazawa and his involvement on behalf of the neo-religious community into the crossfire of public criticism, in part because he openly showed sympathy with Aum when he posed with the cult leader Asahara Shōkō in the popular magazine *Brutus* ブルータス (December 1991). In his work, he mixes various theoretical approaches such as poststructuralism and postmodern thought as well as cultural anthropology and religious studies. In calling for a revision of modern knowledge and a consideration for alternative visions, he pursues (within the conservative Japanese academic environment of the 1980s) an objective that is as ideological-reformative as it is ethno-romantic. In his critique of modern science and their premises, he takes as his models the controversial anthropologist and writer Carlos Castañeda (1925–1998), who in 1968 published *The Teachings of Don Juan*, as well as the post-structural thinker Julia Kristeva (1941–).<sup>7</sup>

In his collection of essays *Chibetto no Mōtsaruto* (Mozart in Tibet, 1983), the scholar-shaman Nakazawa, dedicated to the sensuality of language, attempted to produce a new theory of knowledge in relation to Castañeda, Kristeva, and esoteric Buddhism, one that was not based on the Occidental premises of transmission through language and logic. The book contains three chapters and consists of a series of essays that Nakazawa had first published in philosophical-intellectual magazines such as *Gendai Shisō* 現代思想 (Contemporary Thought) und *Shisō* 思想 (Thought). His anthropological essays in “Mozart in Tibet” describe his fieldwork experience and move on a level between science and literature. He seeks to make his models accessible to the Japanese public and reports in that context of experiential recognition in science, referring to his own experiences as a trainee of esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*) with a monk (*mikkyōzō* 密教増) in Tibet (Nakazawa 1983: 9). His aim is to make visible ‘a different reality’ and to synthesize a new system of knowledge (ibid.: 22). What draws him to the shamans is the state of trance into which they descend

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<sup>7</sup> Kristeva became influential in international critical analysis, cultural theory and feminism after publishing her first book *Semiotikè* in 1969. Her work includes books and essays which address intertextuality, the semiotic, literary theory and criticism as well as psychoanalysis.

on their journey into the deep regions of consciousness, those states of an altered awareness (ibid.: 15).

He reports having gone to Nepal in the spring of 1979 in order to enter studies with a Tibetan monk and learn meditation techniques with which he too was able to penetrate into the depths of consciousness. He claims that after approximately one and a half years these exercises had become effective. In one passage, he indicates to the lama he reached a 'higher spiritual level' after an intensive one-week 'phowa-practice' (*poa no shugyō* ポアの修行; ibid.: 10). But the lama rebukes him and informs him in effect that he has not yet attained true insight into perception of reality, although he also tells him that he has now taken a further step towards awakening (ibid.: 14).

Nakazawa's report from the 'field' of religious practice had an unanticipated resonance in Japanese society when Aum adopted the Tibetan Buddhist term *phowa* as a keyword—calling it *poa* ポア. Aum's leaders had perceived enemies liquidated with the justification that the victims might thereby attain a higher level of existence. Beginning in 1995, the related phrase *poa saseru* ポアさせる ('poa-cize') was bandied about derisively as representing a Japan whose myth as safe and secure had been shattered. The entire 1990s, not least because of an unpleasantly revealed vulnerability, came to be regarded as 'the lost decade'. The Aum affair deeply wounded Japanese society's understanding of itself and altered its perception of religion. In a conversation with the writer and Buddhist nun Setouchi Jakuchō (1922–), Nakazawa says that the Aum affair was a debacle for the cause of religion in Japan, one that may even contribute to its demise (Gebhardt 2001: 104).

Nakazawa's endeavor to follow an alternative way of knowledge and to portray Japan as a land intimately linked to nature and the cosmos, found a new platform on the occasion of EXPO 2005 Aichi (Aichi Banpaku 愛知万博). Together with the avant-garde architect Kuma Kengo (1954–), Nakazawa was still concerned to come up with a concept for representing Japan. Already at the beginning of the 1990s, his slogan 'nature's wisdom' (*shizen no eichi* 自然の叡智) was being used as part of the campaign to promote Japan. Nakazawa takes this one step further in successfully mediating the idea of a 'spiritual Japan', a Japan that has turned its back on Occidental modernity. To that extent the contents of the intellectual-ideological spiritual movement and religious renaissance that appeared in the national consciousness in the 1980s were communicated to a global audience in the twenty-first century. However, that same audience was aware of the internal debates that had taken place in reference to

Japan's self-understanding on the international stage. For EXPO visitors, Japan presents itself as consistent with a longstanding modern tradition of East Asian self-portrayal: as a land of the exotic Orient that is close to Nature and her laws. For some Japanese intellectuals and artists, as well those ministerial bureaucrats who support them, there is inherent in the concept of 'nature's wisdom' a proclamation of victory over Occidental modernity (*kindai no chōkoku* 近代の超克).

*Ehara Hiroyuki in the 'Spiritual Supermarket'*

Ehara Hiroyuki (1964-) is today one of the most popular representatives of Japan's 'spiritual world' (*seishin sekai*). Invoking the Western tradition of spiritualism by calling himself a 'spiritual counselor' (*supirichuaru kaunserā* スピリチュアルカウンセラー), he is the editor of the magazines A·NO·YO, 'the other world', and KO·NO·YO, 'this world'. Having scored a grand success with his first work *Kō'un wo hikiyoseru supirichuaru bukku* 幸運を引き寄せるスピリチュアルブック (The Spiritual Book for Summoning Happiness, 2001), he stands for the hyper-commercialization of the spiritual, an idea which, along with 'spiritual supermarket', had its beginnings in the 1980s.

Characteristic of Ehara is an expressly bright and cheerful access to the transcendent. Rather than cope with 'religion' *per se*, he combines in his occult life-counseling elements of modern Occidental spiritualism with so-called Japanese 'indigenous folk' practices of divination (*uranai* 占い). His understanding of spirituality (he uses the English term) suggests a certain casualness, in contrast to what might be implied by the rather old-fashioned term *reiteki* 霊的. The term *supirichuaru* スピリチュアル is clearly intended to relieve his readers of any timidity in the face of a world beyond our own that is somehow uncanny, dubious, or too demanding, and to invite readers to integrate his proposals into their lives. Ehara's messages are very much in line with the widespread advice literature of many recent authors. In their approach to the topic, they echo common themes that the writings of religious leaders address: love, marriage, work, interpersonal relations and family, illness, and money. Major questions in *Kō'un wo hikiyoseru supirichuaru bukku* are: How can I form my interpersonal relations in a positive manner? How do I meet people? How can my work bring out my personality? How are my dreams fulfilled? What are the rules for a happy life? How do I spend my days so that that happiness may come my way?

While these pieces of advice from Ehara, who also describes himself as a spiritual counselor (*supirichuaru kaunserā*; see Ehara 2001: 3), may seem initially to be mere variants of positive thinking, a closer reading reveals that he is presenting himself as a person imbued with the extraordinary ability to see things beyond the world we normally see. He claims to see the ‘invisible world’ (*me ni mienai sekai* 目に見えない世界; *ibid.*: 4), along with the past and the future of a person. To that extent the spiritual counselor harkens back to the model of *chōnōryoku* argumentation and places himself in the circle of those who in Japan are called ‘the spiritually gifted’ (*reinōsha* 霊能者).

Ehara’s system of a transcendental world is eclectically constructed. His authority as the leader of a research institute for spiritualism (Supirichuarizumu Kenkyūjo スピリチュアリズム研究所; *ibid.*: 3) and as a representative from within the tradition says in essence that there are no coincidences in the world. He speaks of guardian angels/guardian spirits/guide spirits (*shugorei* 守護霊) and a divine providence (*kami no setsuri* 神の摂理; *ibid.*: 4), all of which determine the events of the world. The amalgamation of all guide spirits constitutes the group soul (*gurūpu sōru* グループソール; *ibid.*: 27)—a grand existence that one may also designate as ‘wisdom’ (*eichi* 英知). Once we have ascertained that this power lies behind us, he says, we have no more need for fear.

Ehara, who early on earned his livelihood by providing supernatural advice (*shinrei sōdan* 心霊相談), links the tradition of Japanese religious specialists and the paranormal gifts that are ascribed to them to that of Occidental spiritualism and its self-understood scientific attributes. The medium claims to have given himself over first to Shugendō 修験道 (mountaineering asceticism) training, then practiced meditation, and registered for evening courses in Shintoism at Kokugakuin University. In 1990, he visited England for the first time and took up contact with English spiritualists. His years of learning there lasted until 1996 and included regular exchanges with the spiritual investigator Nella Jones (1932–) and the well-known medium and psychic Doris Collins (1918–2003). At the beginning of the 1990s, Ehara succeeded with the help of the author Satō Aiko (1923–), well known in Japan as a ‘cultural representative of the occult’ (*okaruto bunkajin* オカルト文化人), to make his leap into the mass media. He began, for example, to write for women’s magazines and later appeared on television and radio shows.

Ehara’s enormous popularity, garnered through his close contacts with those other-world enraptured artists such as Satō and fellow author Hayashi Mariko (1954–) who had been much criticized by opponents of



the occult scene, also attracted the negative attention of critics skeptical of his clairvoyance (*reishi* 靈視). In early 2006, former employees of his spiritualist research institute expressed criticism of his methods. Among his critics is also the well-known scientist and occult-basher Ōtsuki Yoshihiko (1936–), who, like other skeptics, complains that with his unprovable claims Ehara is leading astray an uninformed public and fueling it with dangerous assumptions. The debate went on into 2008.

Like the leaders of the new religions, Ehara offers a rudimentary psychology couched in the language of mysterious forces from the next world. His main themes focus on the development of personal talents on the part of the individual who must contend with the struggle against anxiety and an environment that stands in the way of her progress. His stance as a counselor thus fits in well with a time in which advice literature in general can count on huge circulation figures. If one is to believe many representatives of counseling, people have lost all basic knowledge for leading their lives, to say nothing of their lack of orientation regarding questions about the meaning of life. Above all, it is person-to-person interaction Ehara seeks to give positive shape by means of spiritual energy, an interaction that, in the twenty-first century, he has declared to be a pathogenic zone. Even as people shy away from meeting others (*taijin kyōfu-shō* 対人恐怖症), they seek aid in a supernatural zone. Ehara is the new prophet of a spiritual lifestyle, one which advocates a spirit world (*reikai* 靈界) that can result in an occult ‘conquest of traumas’ (Ehara 2001: 93).

*Literary Works with Religious Themes: From India to Rock’n Roll  
to the End of the World*

1. *Endō Shūsaku*

Endō Shūsaku (1923–1996) is known as one of the rare representatives of Japanese Christian literature (*kirisuto-kyō bungaku* キリスト教文学). With his 1993 novel *Fukai kawa* (*Deep River*), the aged author intended to leave a message regarding spiritual orientation to his native land.

*Fukai kawa* tells of the journey to India by a group of Japanese, each with personal motives for desiring an encounter with the country. The novel, which was made into a film in 1995, was greeted by critics as one of Endō’s most successful works. Endō, who himself undertook several trips to India in the late 1980s and early 1990s, offers through those motives case studies in the spiritual poverty in the affluent Japan of the 1980s. The novel has quite a different *Zeitgeist*. The protagonists are Ōtsu,

a former Catholic seminarian, Isobe, an older company employee whose wife has recently died, Kiguchi, a former soldier who was stationed in Burma, Numata, a lonely man who writes books about animals, Mitsuko, a psychically complex person who seduces the devout Christian and seeks to dissuade him from his beliefs, and a married couple named Sanjō, representing the younger, hedonistic generation. The group's leader is Enami, a person familiar with India and the mythology of Hinduism.

Kiguchi, who fought in Burma against Indian soldiers, suffers from the memories of his war experiences. In India, he wants to have a Buddhist mass said for his fallen comrades and for the enemy dead, both for their sakes and for his own spiritual peace. When he remembers the jungle in Burma, he thinks of the many Japanese soldiers who died of disease and starvation. His friend Tsukada had once treated him when he was ill with malaria, providing him with water and meat. After the war he happens to run into Tsukada in Tokyo. Now an alcoholic, Tsukada eventually tells him the reason for his wretched condition: in his search for food he had purchased from two soldiers meat that, he came to realize, is from the body of a dead comrade. He eats it in order to assure his survival together with that of Kiguchi. Kiguchi himself does not consume it; he vomits. Tsukada also relates that the dead comrade is Private Minamikawa, a student who was married just prior to his induction. Tsukada knows this because the flesh is wrapped in a letter from Tsukada's wife. After the war, he contacts her, so that she might get the letter. Her child, a son, stares at him with the eyes of his dead father; the look has haunted Tsukada ever since.

Isobe too is pursued by feelings of guilt as an ambitious corporation man in his workaday life who was never intensively concerned for or involved with his wife, a fact that he deeply regrets after her premature death. At first he hopes for the cure of her illness and offers mute prayers to 'the gods' or to 'the Buddhas', although he "believes in no religion of any kind" (Endō 1991: 14), making him one of many 'religiousless' (*mu-shūkyō* 無宗教; *ibid.*: 33) Japanese in a country where, according to Endo's understanding of religion, only a few people are religiously fully-satisfied. From his wife, who apparently was more concerned with religious matters, he learns about reincarnation. Having been requested by his wife before her death to seek her reincarnated form, he takes up the topic, which brings him to New Age writers such as Shirley MacLaine (he refers to the 1986 Japanese translation of her book *Out on a Limb*, see *ibid.*: 34ff.) and to the reincarnation researcher Ian Stevenson (1918–2007), head of the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia and author of *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (Endō 1991: 37ff.). He finally sets off for India

in order to fulfill his wife's dying wish, though he ultimately fails to find her reincarnation there. The Sanjōs have no 'spiritual objectives' in India; they are simply out to enjoy the exotic. The husband, a totally consumption-oriented 'new Japanese', would even like to profit from the journey as a would-be photographer by capturing on film cremations on the banks of the Ganges, something that is, according to Endō's novel, forbidden. This leads to the death of Ōtsu, who intervenes to save Sanjō from the violence that the enraged Indians seek to do to him.

Ōtsu is one of the most interesting figures in contemporary Japanese literature to execute an *Imitatio Christi*. After Mitsuko leaves him following her little seduction game, he opts for his Christian convictions and becomes a seminarian in Lyon, where Mitsuko pays him a short visit during her honeymoon. In the seminary, Ōtsu creates a scandal, abandons his career in the Church, and goes to India to help the poorest of the poor. There the Church keeps him at arm's distance, whereas Hindu ascetics (*sadhu*) embrace him. He sees himself as a priest who without the ecclesiastical institution follows the Christian way as he understands it. He brings the dead and the dying to the Ganges in accordance with the image he has of Jesus. Ōtsu personifies the idea of the active altruism that Endō describes as the noblest characteristic of Christianity. Altruism and the willingness to sacrifice himself are what characterize Ōtsu as he stands up against the raging mob that seeks to stop Sanjō from photographing the dead. He is badly injured and dies in a hospital, as Mitsuko ministers to him. At the end of the novel, which proposes the way of Jesus as a solution to the Japanese search for meaning, Mitsuko asks two Christian nuns why they are taking under their wing the misery of India. They reply that they are motivated by their faith and by Jesus. Mitsuko must now, according to the pedagogical parameters set by Endō, yield to the power of Jesus, which manifests itself in this world through unimpressive figures and misfits.

Endō's novel presents an illuminating religious debate. It speaks of numerous possibilities for an orientation toward a transcendent realm—one that only appears to open up in India, as Japan, with its modern achievement society, has rendered itself inaccessible to such. While the author points to various teachings (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, belief in reincarnation, New Age, New Science), he also develops particular views concerning a pantheistic sensibility within the religious outlook of Japanese. Some interpreters of the text see here a return to an 'Asian religiosity', but in the end Endō remains an author who endorses an active Christian compassion.

## 2. *Gen'yū Sōkyū: Zen and Rock'n Roll*

Gen'yū Sōkyū (1956–) became around the year 2000 a new star on the Japanese literary scene, uniting in his work the milieus of religion and literature. His successful debut in 2001 at the age of 45 came relatively late: for his story “Flowers in Limbo” (*Chūin no hana* 中陰の花) he received the renowned Akutagawa Prize. The author is a Zen priest (of the Rinzai denomination) and goes about his pastoral duties at a temple in Fukushima. His protagonists live their religion as Zen-adepts in daily practice. While he often portrays them as all too human in their weaknesses and endangering situations, he also hints at a level of the religious, at something mysterious, beyond the practice of communal Buddhism and the discipline of monastic Zen. The author, who by his own admission, came into contact in his younger days with neo-religious communities, describes the fascination of religion as it is embodied in soothsayers and prophets, speaks of *unio mystica*-understood moments of ecstasy, and evokes the reverberation of enigmatic coincidences.

In his more recent books, the author fulfills the expectations of his publishers and produces life-advice writings in the style of trendy, religio-therapeutic non-fiction. But the text under discussion here is *Aburakusasu no matsuri* (Festival of Abraxas), which was published in 2001 (and made into a feature film in 2010). The protagonist Jōnen is working with the priest Genshū in a Zen temple. Jōnen has had an eventful life. After an unsuccessful career as a rock musician, the Buddhist novice attempts suicide at age of 27; he ascribes his actions to an ever growing depressive anxiety disturbance. First diagnosed as neurotic, then as depressed with manic phases and schizophrenic stimuli, he is advised to take anti-psychotic drugs. He nevertheless endeavors to get through the day and to cope with his wife Tae, their small son Riu, and his temple duties. He attempts to overcome his self-doubts and sense of isolation with alcohol. Loneliness, sickness, alcohol, and medications are one side of Jōnen; the other points beyond these limitations to a resourceful musician and an able priest. In a long-planned rock-concert, he finally shows himself to be within his congregation a ‘magician’. He succeeds in invoking with his music a vision of oneness and in that instant liberates himself. The ecstatic moment, Jōnen’s religious experience, which he clearly also shares with his audience, is understood by means of a concept that does not correspond to conventional Japanese Zen culture; it is Abraxas, the gnostic god that is also a main figure in Hermann Hesse’s (1877–1962) famous novel *Demian* (1919).

The story offers an unconventional insight into the life of a Japanese Zen monk. There is on the one hand the biography and personality of the protagonist Jōnen, which surely does not correspond to that which one might normally imagine concerning a Zen adept. Gen'yū writes:

Depression was preferable to mania, because at least then his behavior was calm and orderly. And it did not end with his stripping himself stark naked next to Tae, who was putting together various clothing materials, and dancing to the music. If Tae simply sat there passively, continuing her work, he would display his penis, pointing it in her direction. Riu had already learned to imitate him. (2001: 50–51)

On the other hand, one is also again astounded here by the references to the Occidental underground- and esoteric movement. Jōnen's Zen is that of the monastic community, but in essential aspects it is an intercultural hippie-Zen as well. As a Japanese, Jōnen gains access to the Asian variety of experienced religiosity by means of the Occidental example; that is, he explains his turning to Zen as having been influenced, among other factors, by a report about David Bowie's experiences with meditation in Tibet, by popular musical Asian/Buddhist visions, and by the esoteric writings that were so typical of the 1970s. The heart of Jōnen's understanding of religion is contained in the formula 'Abraxas', which Jōnen sees as the self-affirmation of his existence and the reconciliation of all contradictions. In this world, the gods and the demons are one, just as all the facets of the schizoid-depressive personality of the protagonist, components both healthy and pathological, are integrated. The Abraxas-feeling is an uplifting experience of oneness in glistening light, an intoxicating, blissful sensation of self-expansion and delimitation. One may suppose that Jōnen borrows his idea of Abraxas from the hippies' adoption of Hermann Hesse, who since the 1970s has been seen in Japan, as in America, as a poet of self-discovery. Thus Jōnen obviously does not find invoking Abraxas and Hesse in response to his *satori* 悟り-filled experience inconsistent with a genuinely Japanese Zen tradition, however it is defined.

Admittedly, Gen'yū's line of argument does not lead towards an heroic, national vision, but rather toward the image, coming across as somewhat belabored, of an eccentric and flawed priest like Jōnen being accepted by his congregation. In short, the story concerns the reconciliation of the ecstatic with the demands of everyday reality. During his quotidian work at the Zen temple Jōnen has to attend funerals and pray for the deceased. One scene describes him performing a ritual for the late owner of a vegetable stand who hanged himself in his shop; the widow is very angry

because she felt her 'foolish' husband left for god while she remains with all their worries. Jōnen has, as a representative of the temple, to cultivate a good relationship with the small town community and the members of the temple. Especially the communication with the temple's membership is very hard on him due to his mental disease.

"The Festival of Abraxas" treats the search for alternative ways of life in inhospitable modern society, obsessed with success and consumption. In the sense of hope for 'healing', the author argues that even sick, weak, and failed beings deserve sympathy and have a claim to a life with dignity. The text expounds on how individuals in the realm of religion—and of art—lay claim to an enclave for themselves. Gen'yū represents thereby values such as tolerance, patience, modesty, humanity, and loyalty. It is a gentle sort of anarchy that he articulates in having the lives of his characters pass in review against the background of Japan's Sixties and Seventies counter-culture (marijuana, rock, protest, and religion).

The text also offers the Occidental reader an insight into contemporary Japanese history. Jōnen's wounds reflect those that Japanese society inflicted on itself in the course of its striving to catch up economically. We learn that the boom of the 1980s (the bubble era) and the accompanying loss of home, security, and identity have contributed to Jōnen's being traumatized. His father, the successful founder of a private school in southern Japan, undertakes an expansion, resulting in the sacrifice of the family home in which Jōnen and his sister grew up. His beloved grandmother leaves the family, as her vegetable garden is transformed into a construction site. The father and mother are preoccupied, with little time for their pubescent son. Jōnen first discovers the world of music and literature, together with their subversive side. He then decides on an unusual course of life: that of a Buddhist priest. When later he reflects on his motivations for this choice of occupation, he comes to the conclusion that the study of Buddhism is an anti-model for the activities of his father. As economic superlatives and the latent national hubris of the bubble years, mention is made of the purchase of samurai armor, a luxury object that is doubly loathsome to the young artist, as he takes a critical and antagonistic view of Japanese militarism, the authoritarian state, and the imperial family.

Gen'yū's monks appear to us as religious experts and at the same time as seekers, who themselves often have no ultimate answers to the questions of spiritual healing and salvation. Religion consists for them of numerous facets in an area of tension between day-to-day religious practice, text analysis, and mystic ambition. Even Occidental esoteric traditions are brought into the picture. For the non-Japanese reader,

Gen'yū's work thus offers the possibility of a differentiated understanding of Japanese religion, notably Zen Buddhism, which is usually associated with particular set images such as meditation (*zazen* 座禪) and enlightenment (*satori*). In "The Festival of Abraxas," there appears nothing on the order of a closed system containing a traditional doctrine, and the work likewise incorporates no typical 'Japanese spirituality'. Gen'yū Sōkyū's Zen Buddhism presents itself above all as monastic practice within a community as an enclave for 'difficult creatures'.

*Murakami Haruki: Demise of the World Through Occult Powers*

At first glance, Murakami Haruki (1949–), who has cult-author standing both in Japan and abroad, may seem to be hardly one intensely concerned with religious topics. He is, however, at the very least the literary doyen of the *iyashi* 癒し (healing)-boom. 'Healing' in a Murakami novel means that the lonely protagonist finds his or her soulmate and that through this spiritual union the world will finally be saved. In that regard, he is not so far from those Japanese 'spiritual intellectuals' who, since the 1980s, have been pursuing therapeutic ambitions and seeking to transmit new identity- and meaning-creating narratives to contemporary Japanese readers. In some of his novels, in fact, the protagonists likewise seem to be acting with esoteric goals in mind. Like Yoshimoto Banana (1964–), Murakami has as one of his themes the Japanese version of New Age, whereby in his allusions to the *seishin sekai* he is not so much affirming its reality as he is once again taking up the topic of an ideological struggle in the guise of the literary-fantastic. With his Aum documentation *Andāguraundo* アンダーグラウンド (Underground, 1997), in which the author interviewed victims of the sarin attacks, he executed a turnabout from the detached and sophisticatedly argumentative author to a commentator of actual events. He even serves as a therapist who offers care to the victims. One may call this an ethical turn, as he tries with *Underground* to face the reality of contemporary Japanese. Murakami, so it seems, may hope to join Ōe Kenzaburō in being 'his country's conscience' since he obviously felt an obligation to help Japanese people to cure themselves from the Aum shock and to find some ethical position.

In 1Q84, we see an intensification of Murakami's focus on the occult and of his ambition to be a critic of ideologies. The novel is published in three volumes totaling over 1600 pages and tells of the machinations of a neo-religious organization and of its leader, Fukada. Fukada represents

the typical and (by conservative critics) oft-disparaged manner of Japanese intellectuals who turns from political engagement to religiously based agrarian utopianism and ultimately to occultism. The one-time alternative thinker, as described by Murakami, gains supernatural powers through occult exercises and is in contact with a mysterious force capable of influencing the flow of time. This power manifests itself on earth in the form of enigmatic "Little People." These are tiny beings that crawl out of the mouth of a dead goat and seek to cast their spell on the fate of humankind. In the world into which the "Little People" have forced their way, two moons hang in the night sky. The "Little People" reveal themselves through their dubious characters, along with an ability to fold their bodies outward. They also have the talent to weave webs from strands of air. In this way they create a kind of cocoon, containing such threatening entities as a barren *doppelgänger*.

The novel's two heroes, who go to battle against the occult conspiracy, are Tengo and Aomame. Tengo comes across as a typical Murakami man, someone who has a certain degree of talent but is not driven by any sense of ambition. While he feels content in weary mediocrity as a math teacher (though he is admittedly also attempting to become a writer), Aomame, a trained martial-arts expert and fitness instructor, works as a wrecker of vengeance for a distinguished lady, disposing of the husbands of mistreated women. In connection with her feminist campaign of revenge, Aomame meets the already tarnished Fukada, who, the old lady alleges, is having sex with under-aged girls. Aomame is supposed to have Fukada provided with a special masseuse. In conversation with converts to the occult, she learns, however, that Fukada is not in any way involved with real ten-year-olds but rather with a occult-produced double. The "Little People" expect from this double, whose father is Fukada himself, an even greater influence on the world. Fukada, suffering from occult afflictions, is in terrible pain. He knows about Aomame's mission and even desires that she kill him. She carries out an artistic execution and escapes the guards of the religious group. At the end of the novel, which is clearly geared toward a sequel, the reader does not yet know whether humanity can be liberated from the grip of the "Little People." Murakami hints that Fukada is Tengo's real father; his apparent father (a former collection agent for the television network NHK), who brought him up and to whom Tengo is not very close, was betrayed and abandoned by the mother. Aomame's parents belong to a Christian neo-religious community and have taken their child, who loathes the joyless life of her family, with them on missionary visits to the residents of their neighborhood.



The work suggests that it is love that can save humanity from the apocalypse. Tengen and Aomame must find each other and forgive their parents, from whom they have very early on disassociated themselves. To that extent Murakami gives voice to conservative values, urging his readers not to allow their courage to sink even in bleak times, to seize the initiative, and to fight against 'evil'—a message which, though critical of religion, echoes the rather paternalistic admonitions of the religious leaders to take responsibility for one's life.

*For and Against the Religious*

It is striking that both in the writings of the spiritual intellectuals and in literary discussions of religion and the religious, 'religion' is, as already pointed out above, typically described as something lacking in present-day Japan. It is understood thereby as a vital human need, something required to give a sense of meaning beyond the realm of the material. The notion of the religious is connected to concepts such as sense, fulfilment, healing, wholeness, conviviality and happiness. Primarily, the term is to be understood here as part of an anti-civilization rhetoric and describes an enclave of meaning-creation within a driven, traumatized society that is dominated by an ideology of capitalism. Modern Japan, according to most of the texts, suffers from a lack of spiritual direction and must return to her Asian roots in order to encounter once again truly lived religion. Both Endō Shūsaku and Gen'yū Sōkyū, as well as Yokoo Tadanori and Nakazawa Shin'ichi, argue that in Japan's relentless economic catch-up race she has lost her spiritual dimension. Exhausted by Occidental modernity and a society obsessed with achievement and consumerism, the Japanese must come out from their lamentable vacuum of values and into the light of places that transmit the meaning of religiosity and spirituality.

'Old Asia' is a geographical landmark that leads back into what is posited by these writers as a more spiritual past. Thus, the Japanese seeker after meaning journeys to a primordial and pristine India or Tibet. This spiritual pilgrim is paradoxically quite like the Occidental Orient-visionaries evoked by the Beatles, David Bowie, or Ian Stevenson, and who in part serve as models for the Japanese traveller. It is also paradoxical that few of the Japanese appear eager to embrace Asian religions as lived traditions specific to socio-cultural contexts. Rather, these religions are encountered on a highly selective basis, through mysticism or as a conveniently amorphous spirituality. For many modern Japanese, with

their ongoing insistence on a non-religious point of view and a faith in science, those teachings that strongly emphasize ‘salvation’ are acceptable only in combination with an Occidental overlay, ranging from post-structuralism, to scientifically packaged theories about reincarnation, to occult self-mythologization.

Murakami Haruki’s *1Q84* basically rejects religion and the human desire for a spiritual-religious orientation. He paints a dark picture of the new religions, one also widely understood in Japan, colored as it is by elements of the frivolous, the demonic, and the deviant on the part of such groups, which are often regarded as ‘shady’ (*usankusai* 胡散臭い; Murakami 2009: 1:516). ‘Religion’ is seen here as indoctrination and finally as a subversive activity directed against society, one that focuses its inherent desires in a false direction. The occult, to which Murakami’s depiction of the religious movement gives special attention, is a metaphor for the individual lust for power as well as its misuse by a community with sinister intentions. In the person of Fukada Tamotsu—who may be seen as a conglomerate of real people such as the actor, politician, and member of the Sakigake Party (the same name of the religious group in the novel) Nakamura Atsuo, the spiritual intellectual Nakazawa Shin’ichi, and the founder of the Aum Shinrikyō, Asahara Shōkō—Murakami attempts in his novel to come up with a literary corrective to ideological indoctrination and claims to power on the part of religious leaders, claims that have manifested themselves since 1995 with tragic results. Murakami takes a look into the political power structure of contemporary Japan, whereby scholars and the old elites also take their place.

It is worth noting that in the case of both Murakami and Gen’yū, religious activity implies political statements. With Murakami, religious terror replaces leftwing engagement directed against the imperial state of Japan; with Gen’yū it is made clear that the protagonist Jōnen is primarily a priest, as he rejects both the authoritarian state with its freakish emphasis on control and the economic hubris that reigned in the high-flying bubble years of the 1980s when capitalist structures were seldom contested. Endō Shūsaku’s text may be understood as a coping with Japan’s imperialist past, while Nakazawa Shin’ichi’s writings, when scrutinized for ideological positions, produce misunderstandings to the effect that his visions of religious restoration can all too easily be confused with nationalistic endeavors. Viewed from a political angle, Yokoo’s and Ehara’s writings focus fully on the individual search for salvation and neglect sincere reflections on social justice or help for underprivileged peoples.

Murakami's work—in opposition to the cultish seducers he conjures up—describes an attempt at weakening religious narratives in favor of literary story-telling. Indeed, he ascribes to literature an enlightening effect when he has his female protagonist Eriko produce a novel whose text informs readers for the first time about life in the neo-religious community and about the dangerous, manipulative “Little People.” Murakami seeks to deny the podium to ideologues and occult fanatics concerning the matter of constructing spiritual and religious meaning, although he throws his activities into question to the extent that his work is perhaps too deliberately aimed at the consumer market. One could reproach the writer for behaving almost no differently than the representatives of spiritual messages such as Ehara Hiroyuki, even if Murakami has come close to replacing Ōe Kenzaburō (1935–) as the ‘conscience of his country’ and is rumored to be a candidate for Japan’s third Nobel Prize for literature. On the other hand, one can surmise that Murakami has, with his light intonation, attention-getting theme of apocalypse, and the comforting message of love, intentionally sought to compete with the religious promoters of meaning. He has proven with *1Q84* that literature can sell just as many copies as the writings of cult leaders and spiritual prophets.

Spiritual bestsellers can assume the role of catalysts. They can serve as a mass-culture medium that is able to stir the public to take on a more reflective association with ‘religion’, religious teachings and practices. Writing on religion can also provide direction to debates within the religious realm. In any case, these best-selling or widely discussed works related to religion and spirituality, together with materials generated by institutional religions, religious groups, and scholars, provide the researcher with useful insights into Japanese concepts of the religious. They are full of the possibilities, expectations, and fears that one links to the topic of religion in contemporary Japan. In the post-Fukushima-era that began with the tragic events of ‘3/11’ in March 2011, the question of Japan’s orientation beyond materialistic values and her pursuit of happiness will presumably gain even more importance, and many literary works will raise again the question of meaning and spiritual orientation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gen'yū Sōkyū became a member of the Reconstruction Council for Northeast Japan, established in April 2011.

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## CONTEMPORARY HOUSEHOLD ALTARS\*

JOHN NELSON

One of East Asia's most enduring social and religious traditions has been the commemoration of ancestral spirits. By the time Buddhism reached Japan via China and Korea in the early sixth century, it had developed methods and practices to accommodate this concern. Funerals and memorial rituals for the dead, a variety of graves, and new conceptions of the afterlife have all shaped Japanese Buddhist traditions in decisive ways. With the advent of the temple-parishioner system in the Edo period (1603–1868) known as *danka seido* 檀家制度, families were legally obliged to have formal membership with local temples, which further reinforced the emphasis on ancestral veneration.

In contemporary Japan, however, this centuries-old tradition is undergoing rapid change. The highly competitive market for household Buddhist altars is the source of innovative and sometimes radical concepts that represent a paradigm shift in how both families and individuals should interact with ancestral spirits. No longer catering to guidelines from mainstream Buddhist denominations about altar style and function, companies building and marketing contemporary altars (*gendai butsudan* 現代仏壇) present a highly-refined product that not only harmonizes with modern interior design but also emphasizes late-modern spirituality over religious tradition in how the altar is conceptualized and used. By looking at recent designs, new concepts, and changing consumer preferences that have little to do with established Buddhist denominations, the following discussion will reinforce ideas about the experimental nature of religious practice regarding the role and utility of household altars.

In most retail markets, supply and demand is determined by variables such as consumer confidence, advertising, product familiarity, government regulations, and so on. The market for household altars takes on additional, rather convoluted dynamics because it is also shaped in decisive ways through religious traditions, temple affiliations, contemporary

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news events, and individual beliefs. Increasingly, the sale of *butsudan* 仏壇 is influenced by aesthetic notions about style and interior design, by individualistic preferences and consumer psychology, and by the power of advertising to synthesize this diversity into a distinctive product.

As many writers have pointed out, there is a longstanding emphasis throughout East Asian Buddhism on venerating one's ancestors and petitioning their spirits (as well as those of familiar Buddhist bodhisattvas) for health, prosperity, and safety.<sup>1</sup> This practice is usually rendered in English as 'ancestor worship', yet is so culturally varied and religiously diffuse that the term's convenient use obscures far more than it reveals. Just who qualifies as an ancestor, and what kind of agency (if any) can they exert in the world of the living?<sup>2</sup> Is it really an act of 'worship' or would other nouns (such as veneration, reverence, devotion, respect) imply less western and more local conceptions of how living individuals interact with spirits of the departed? Since an entire book could be devoted to this single concept, here I will cut to the chase and replace 'worship' with 'veneration', a term less burdened by religious connotations and cultural expectations. Evoking a more ambiguous range of attitudes and practices towards the spirits of the dead makes more anthropological sense because it stays closer to the wide variations and ever-shifting contours of actual belief and practice.

It is a rather daunting challenge to keep pace with the speed of social and religious changes in East Asia today, many of which have been accelerated by the globalizing forces mentioned in the introduction to this book. In the last century of Japanese Buddhism, religious customs once outlawed (such as clerical marriage) have become mainstream, beliefs once universally held (the emperor as a protector of the *dharma*) are now largely discredited, and practices once condemned (funerals, memorials, and graves for animals) are today not only condoned but also profitable. Until recently, the relationship between a household and a Buddhist temple was characterized by a formalized relationship that endured from generation to generation. Most families were registered members of a

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<sup>1</sup> The following authors represent a variety of perspectives on commemorating the spirits of the dead within Japanese society and culture: Yanagita (1946), Smith (1975), Sasaki (1996), Umehara (1997), Bokhoven (2005).

<sup>2</sup> In a 2003 study, I argue that Japan's controversial Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社—sanctuary for the spirits of the military dead—is a syncretic mix of shamanic, ancestral, and Shintō notions concerning the agency of spirits. See my article titled, "Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine" (Nelson 2003).

local temple and paid yearly dues to procure the services of the priest for memorial rituals. Household membership in a temple also incurred certain obligations to maintain the buildings and grounds, to support financially the priest and his family, and the right to use the temple as a kind of community center where social activities dovetailed with religious ones.

However, in the highly urbanized and increasingly impersonal communities of today's rapidly changing Japan, there is great latitude in the extent to which these traditional relationships are maintained. Dramatic demographic shifts from the countryside to urban centers, or from one city to another, has undermined these relationships and thus affected the economic stability of many temples. But when someone falls seriously ill, or is near death or actually dying, many families will still employ a Buddhist priest to conduct a funeral, although today the event itself is frequently staged by a professional undertaker (*sōgisha* 葬儀社). If following this route, family members are compelled to undergo a crash course in the culture and costs of funerals, mortuary rituals, burial practices and options (some of which we will investigate later), and periodic commemorations that focus on the salvation of the deceased person's spirit.<sup>3</sup>

The following discussion introduces the marketing strategies and concepts behind one of Japan's most innovative producers and distributors of contemporary household altars. With fifty-four franchise outlets throughout the country, eight showrooms in major urban centers, and a catalog of over 150 different styles (at the time of this writing), the Yagiken corporation epitomizes evolving notions of religious practice that complement rather than hold sway over emerging lifestyle choices. Their catalogs, website pages, and salespeople educate consumers about the memorialization of ancestors and relatives in ways that depart from established religious practice and progress towards a more individualized, expressive, and eclectic spirituality. In fact, though the company uses the generic term *butsudan* to describe what they sell, we will see how the concept takes on new and surprising referents. Similar to telephones, bicycles, or homes, the correspondence between the word and what it actually signifies may not be readily apparent at first glance.

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<sup>3</sup> Itami Juzō's 1987 film, *The Funeral*, is a good example of a modern family forced into the stressful, expensive, and uneasy religious culture of funerals. To compensate for their ignorance, they read reference books, watch instructional videos, and defer to the advice and guidance of a professional mortuary specialist.

*Household Altars and Modernity*

Ignorance of or indifference to a family's religious affiliation is a very recent development, as is the relative freedom of individual choice regarding religion in highly-industrialized societies. Until the early 1970s in Japan, the male head of a household (who had survived the war) would have been a person educated in a neo-Confucian ethos of familial loyalty directed towards one's ancestors as well as the Emperor. These bonds, and the emotions that accompanied them, were nurtured in the prewar years through the educational system and popular culture (songs, art, novels, public and religious holidays, weekly magazines, newspapers) as well as through local Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines. Largely orchestrated and enforced by the state via the educational system, feelings of fidelity towards one's ancestors was part of an ideology that served to modernize and militarize Japanese society, and justified colonial expansion abroad.

Most families of sufficient economic means at this time had not one but two altars in their homes: the first, called a *kamidana* 神棚, was for those beneficial but ambiguous deities known as *kami* 神 which were associated with pre-Buddhist animism and, beginning around 1870, a reconfiguration of Shintō sponsored by the state.<sup>4</sup> The other altar was the family's *butsudan* that served as both a stage for interacting ritually with one's ancestors and as an extension of the family's membership in a local Buddhist temple. It is important to emphasize great regional variation in how these two altars complemented each other. Rather than think of them representing two different religions, a more accurate perspective sees them drawing upon shared, culturally significant religious resources—shaped by local as well as regional history. Their mutual purpose is to ensure benefits (*goriyaku* 御利益) for this life and to create favorable conditions for exerting control on the spiritual condition of a family's ancestral spirits.<sup>5</sup>

Because the expectation is to receive benefits in exchange for periodic rituals and ongoing veneration, the altar becomes a sacred portal between the worlds of the living and the dead. It is interactive and user friendly: one's fears, longings, and aspirations can be transferred to the care and

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<sup>4</sup> A brief overview of *kamidana* history and significance can be found in *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, s.v. "Kamidana."

<sup>5</sup> For detailed discussions on how Japanese mortuary traditions have been changed and shaped by modernity, see Satsuki Kawano's chapter on new interment practices for humans, and Barbara Ambros' discussion of the options available for pets, both in this volume.



intercession of priestly-mediated Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and, of course, the ancestors of one's family. If all goes well and the many variables of veneration are balanced appropriately, a family's ancestral spirits became allies in every endeavor undertaken by members of the household. Alternately, if neglected, ignored, or disrespected, spirits were believed to cause illness, barrenness, inclement weather, impotence, business or agricultural disasters, and untimely death (to name only a few possible afflictions).

At first glance, most altars appear to be similar in appearance and function, but a closer examination reveals significant differences between Japan's major Buddhist denominations in layout, decoration, ornamentation, architecture, colors, iconography, and so on. A standard sales tactic directs potential customers to the altar approved by the family's denomination, even to the point of hinting that divine retribution (*bachii* 罰, *tatari* 祟り) has been reported for those deviating from the norms. Thus, a family affiliated with a Shingon temple would be pressured to buy an altar in that style even if they preferred for aesthetic or economic reasons the less ostentatious design of a Rinzai Zen altar. Keep in mind that while the altar is primarily for the family, it also serves as a stage for periodic memorial rituals performed by a priest. Should a Shingon priest come to a family's altar and find a design not sanctioned by the denomination, you can be sure that he will mention this and may even feel uneasy about conducting services in front of what he and the sect consider to be an inappropriate venue. The family would then be concerned that, because of the priest's feelings, their ancestral spirits are being ritually shortchanged, or, even worse, that the spirits feel neglected or insulted by a decision that privileged aesthetics or money over their spiritual well-being.

### *Strategies and Marketing*

Given the weight of traditional associations, fears, anxieties, and taboos that accompany sect-specific altars, the Yagiken corporation decided to emphasize fresh paradigms for both the design and function of *butsudan*. As illustrated by the accompanying photos, entirely new styles came into being that harmonized not with Japan's established Buddhist sects but with the cosmopolitan and increasingly western-style interiors of modern apartments, condominiums, and homes in Japan. So important was this theme that every catalogue's cover from 1997 to 2004 carried the phrase *gendai butsudan no aru ribingu* 現代仏壇のあるリビング (Living with

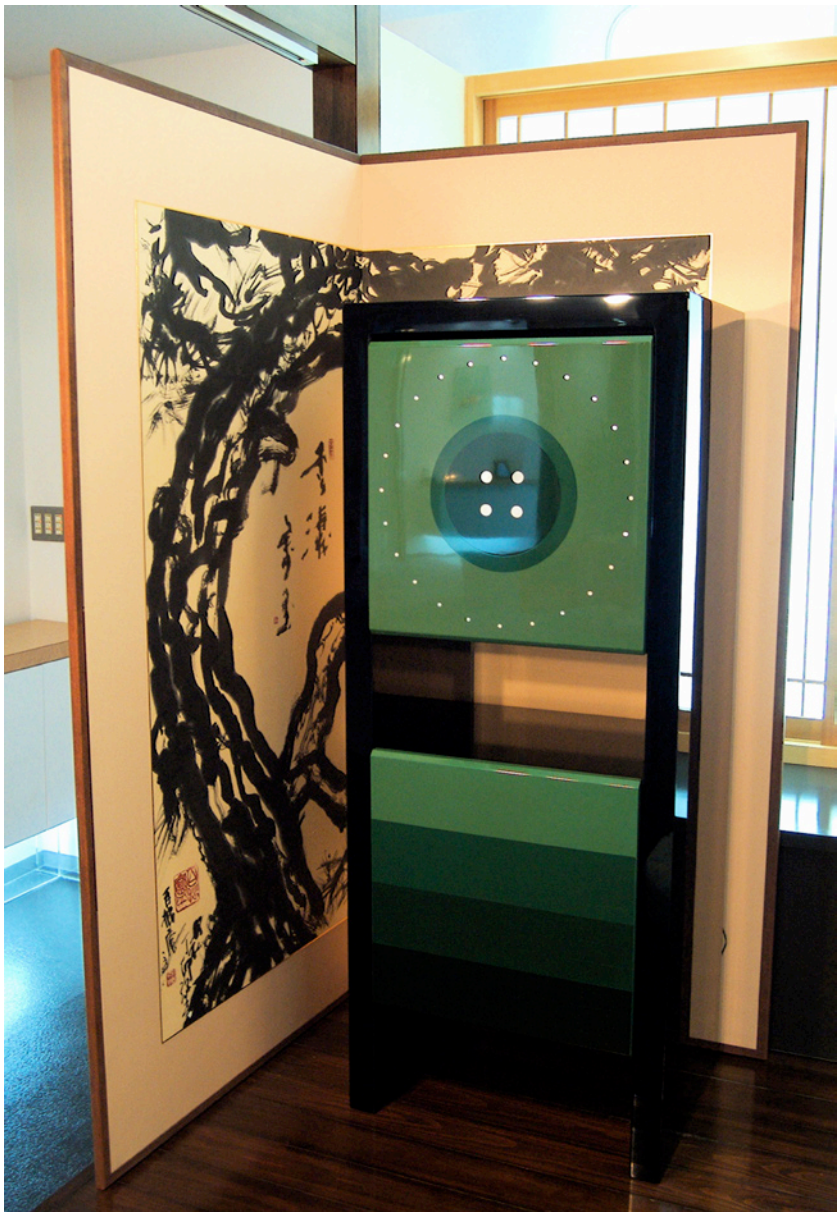


Figure 1. Yagiken's *gendai butsudan*, "Katsura" series (Photograph by the author)



Figure 2. The "Viaggio" model from Yagiken's Italian series  
(Photograph by the author)



Figure 3. The model "Idun," noted for its highly-distinctive base, made in Denmark (Photograph by the author)

Contemporary Buddhist Altars).<sup>6</sup> There was also an transnational dynamic at work, as subcontractors in Denmark and Italy produced altars advertised as representing the excellence of furniture from those countries. For the Danish altar, teak was the featured wood whereas Italian-built models were made distinctive through their use of parquetry, a type of wood inlay. Since so many Japanese have traveled to or regard Europe as the wellspring of fashion and style, these product lines could evoke an element of nostalgia for the authenticity, reputation, and quality of European craftsmanship, now on display in a Yagiken household altar.<sup>7</sup>

Just as their designs departed from the traditional and staid, so too have Yagiken marketing concepts charted new territory regarding the meaning of a memorial altar for the contemporary home. Executives experimented with a number of terms that would help distinguish their products from standard Buddhist altars because, in their opinion, the Yagiken altar *transcended* not only established Buddhist denominations but all organized religion. They believed that the veneration of family ancestors (*senzo sūhai* 先祖崇拝) was fundamental to Japanese culture and society, existing long before the foreign religion of Buddhism made its appearance in 538 CE. They referenced data from a survey of people visiting cemeteries to clean and maintain family graves (*haka mairi* 墓参り) which indicated between 70 to 80% did not have strong ties to any Buddhist tradition.

The company searched for a term that could dislodge cultural associations about the forboding aspects of family altars and convey a more affirmative relationship with ancestral spirits. An early contender was the

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, the word 'living' rendered into katakana evokes a double meaning. The first and dominant one refers in Japanese to the part of a house commonly known as a 'living room', while the second meaning is a direct importation of the English word as an intransitive verb. For the Yagiken slogan, *gendai butsudan no aru ribingu*, both meanings are present and complementary. One's living room is the proper place to display an altar, and one incorporates within their daily life the presence and activities associated with an altar.

<sup>7</sup> Yagiken is fairly unique among sellers of altars nationwide for its unabashed promotion of products made overseas, in Italy and Denmark. A current controversy among traditional *butsudan* retailers are how altars made in and imported from China are hurting the traditional craft in Japan. One nationwide organization has created labels that identify which altars are made in Japan and which are produced overseas (see <http://www.zenshukyo.or.jp/news.html>). One of Kyoto's largest and oldest producers and retailers, Kobori *butsudan*, has a Chinese-made altar in their workshop in Yamashina so that their craftspeople and visitors can see the variations in quality. From several paces away, there is little difference to the untrained eye. On closer inspection, the excellence of workmanship, level of attention to detail, and meticulous application of lacquer and gold-leaf ornamentation shows the Japanese product is superior.

word *tamashii* 魂 or ‘soul/spirit’, as discussed in Yanagita Kunio’s 1947 classic *Senzo no hanashi* 先祖の話. On the positive side, the concept of *tamashii* conveyed a sense of ancestral spirits that predated organized religion’s appropriation of these practices and beliefs, an important point Yagiken wanted to emphasize. But the term was considered to be heavily burdened by the potentially dangerous side of the spirit world. What the Yagiken altar needed was an association with characteristics that were positive and empowering rather than fear-inducing and threatening.

An early example of an attempt to shift the dominant paradigm about altars and spirits came in a Yagiken television commercial aired in 1997. Two elderly male and two female ‘ghosts’ float around the stylish interior of a contemporary home. These are not the fearsome ghosts of Japanese popular culture (*obake* お化け, *yūrei* 幽霊) but angelic ones, complete with white robes and golden haloes. As the four ghosts observe a cute little girl sitting respectfully with hands folded together (*gasshō* 合掌) in front of a Yagiken altar, a silver-haired male ghost begins to act proudly. With its contemporary design, craftsmanship, and quality, the altar glows brighter than other pieces of furniture. The little girl then speaks to the photo on the altar, “Aren’t you happy, Grandpa?” (*Yokatta ne, ojūchan?* よかったねお祖父ちゃん). As the beaming grandfather ghost swells with pride, an older female ghost sighs wistfully, “Ah, I’m envious!” (*Urayamashiwa!* うらやましいわ!).

The commercial lasted only fifteen seconds, but it conveyed enough information and touched several basic emotions (longing, pride, devotion, envy) that it generated attention from the public and attracted new customers. It also presented the household altar in a benign, empowering, and user-friendly light (even a child can interact with it!). Shortly after this creative commercial began showing, several weekly magazines distributed nationwide profiled Yagiken and its new line of *butsudan*. These brief articles provided, at no cost to the company, additional exposure that resulted in an overnight jump in Yagiken’s market share.

Wanting to capitalize on a higher profile gained after the successful television commercial, a new marketing strategy came into play. Beginning in 2001, the concept of *kuyō* 供養 entered the spotlight. For Yagiken marketing executives, *kuyō* evoked just the right combination of the old and the new. They would still use the catch-phrase ‘contemporary Buddhist altars’ (*gendai butsudan*) on the cover of their yearly catalogues and in advertisements, but inside their catalogues was a growing emphasis on interacting with ancestral spirits via a beautiful piece of furniture that, judging from appearance alone, was most definitely not your standard

Buddhist altar. In fact, as I was told by a ‘sales consultant’ at the Yagiken showroom in Kobe, the word *butsudan* is rarely used. The altar is a special place where, regardless of religious affiliation, a conversation could be held with a departed loved one (*ohanashi dekiru basho* お話できる場所) or where you could put your hands together (*te o awaseru basho* 手をあわせる場所) in a gesture that may be interpreted as either prayer or respect. Essays within the product catalogue, most of which were written by Mr. Ueda Yoshitaka, Yagiken’s chief strategist for the past eight years and director of public relations (sometimes with his own name and other times using pseudonyms), attempt to educate the potential customer about this reconceptualization of the importance of *kuyō*. In his view, the word *butsudan* is too static and fails to evoke a variety of activities central to the interaction between ancestors and descendants.

From 2001 to 2006, the progression of ideas that leads to key theme of *kuyō* can be traced in the product catalogues. Like the hub of a wheel that supports many spokes, *kuyō* helps center and unify references to freedom of choice, a changing society, Japanese cultural identity, and the redemptive power of memory. In the 2001 catalogue, readers learn about “The Wonderful Randomness of Japan’s (Religious) Perspectives” (*Eekagensa ga subarashiki waga Nihon* ええかげんさがすばらしき我が日本) where one has the freedom in this polytheistic society to choose religious beliefs from a wide array of deities, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. Buddhism is described by Mr. Ueda as a ‘strange’ religion because it is full of contradictions: one can undergo austerities and practice meditation to gain enlightenment and become a Buddha, but one can also pay money to a priest upon the death of a relative and receive a posthumous name that guarantees the deceased will become a Buddha. The essay concludes with another paradox: even though people may not believe in Buddhism, they still follow standard Buddhist protocol for the disposal of the deceased. They take the body of their loved one to a crematorium then, whether a priest is present or not, the survivors put their hands together, rattle prayer beads, and bow their heads. After the body is cremated, they receive an urn with bones and ashes, as well as a generic spirit tablet (*ihai* 位牌). And then what? Ueda asserts that a non-religious family faces a problem because they do not know what to do with their loved one’s spirit tablet and ashes, usually storing them in some inappropriate place and without proper respect.

In another essay, readers are asked rhetorically, “Have Japanese people changed?” (*Nihonjin wa kawatta ka* 日本人は変わったか). The answer is affirmative and focuses on the emergence of a keen aesthetic sense

(*biishiki* 美意識) that enables a reexamination of the place of a *butsudan* within the home. Anyone looking for an altar who has a refined appreciation for interior design, harmonious colors, and quality craftsmanship will make a Yagiken *gendai butsudan* their obvious choice. In 2002, readers are instructed that despite an abundance of material wealth, today's Japanese have forgotten something important: how to live with a *butsudan*. Having served as a central focus of the home for generations, the altar should not be neglected because it is essential to the formation of the family in Japan. An article in the same issue titled, "Disciplining Children in Front of the Butsudan" (*Butsudan no mae de kodomo o shitsukeru to iu koto* 仏壇の前で子供をしつけるという事) supports this theme by asserting that some of Japan's current social problems are due to a lack of moral discipline. The essay resonates with tradition by stressing the importance of ancestral intervention as a way to keep children in line. *Kuyō* practices take on a new relevance for both the family and Japanese society as a whole.

Swinging often between essentialized concepts of Japanese culture and contemporary society, the catalogue's essays often promote an easily grasped synthesis of the two. In the 2003 catalogue, a discussion of *matsuri* 祀り turned readers' attention to the original concept of *matsuru* 祀る (to worship) but without any of the social, historical, or political contexts in which the term was embedded. Instead of adhering to the rules and regulations of a religious sect in the veneration of ancestral spirits, readers were encouraged to be guided by their own feelings. In this sense, an individualized and subjective sense of *kuyō*, ordered upon one's personal preferences, becomes a consumer choice that resists the domineering 'brand loyalty' of mainstream Buddhist denominations.

*Kuyō* took on a more international dimension beginning in the 2004 catalogue. The company refurbished its showrooms nationwide and so created a new look and logo to call attention to the concept of "Gallery Memoria: *Gendai Butsudan*." Drawing upon the perception of modern art galleries as well-lit, airy, and tastefully designed spaces, the remodeled Yagiken showrooms—predominantly white interiors with stainless steel or wood accents—mirrored these features in promoting the artistic quality and excellence of their products. Highlighted on the cover of the same issue was a photograph of smiling employees of Yagiken's subcontractor in Denmark. Inside, a new product line emphasizing Danish craftsmanship and design was introduced with phrases like *kyakusenbi* 脚線美. As if evoking loose Scandinavian morality in sexual matters, a comparison is made between the distinctive wooden legs of a free-standing altar and



the ‘shapely legs’ of a woman. The Danish designs supplemented Italian-produced altars already for sale, as well as colorful altar accessories (*gogusoku* 五具足) of Italian glassworks mentioned earlier.

By 2005, the practice of *kuyō* centered on and enabled by the Yagiken altar is interpreted not as a *butsudan* but as a place where you can meet loved ones who have passed away (*shinda hitotachi ni aeru basho* 死んだ人たちに会える場所). In this sense, the altar becomes once again a threshold between the worlds of the living and dead. However, there is no mention of the dire spiritual and psychological hazards, the physical pollution, and the soul-threatening dangers associated traditionally with the other world (*anoyo* あの世). They have all been displaced and muted through the idea of reuniting with one’s ancestral spirits via a pleasant and presumably safe place. The same theme is revisited a year later in 2005 in the headline, “In Paradisium: Reclaiming Memories” (*kioku no saisei* 記憶の再生) which is followed by an essay that asserts, “Memories of precious people never fade away” (*taisetsu na hito no omoide wa zettai ni kienai* 大切な人の思い出は絶対に消えない). Implicit within the title and clearly spelled out in the essay is the predictable solution of a family altar to help preserve and protect the memories of one’s departed family members.

Up to this point, the meaning of *kuyō* as shaped by Yagiken product catalogues positions it not as a religious ritual or one dependent on religious interpretations but as a memorial practice conducted by individuals that is fundamental to Japanese cultural identity.<sup>8</sup> But why stop there? The 2006–2007 catalogue boldly elevated *kuyō* to global significance. It is described as a practice relevant to any person whose culture commemorates the loss of loved ones through some kind of material expression. Yagiken executives told me they believe the term *kuyō* will, in the future, have the same kind of international presence that *sushi*, *geisha*, or *sumō* commands today. If one only knows where to look there is a culture of commemorative practices and beliefs similar to *kuyō* already in evidence around the world. After all, he writes in “How the English Recall the Dead”

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<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Dorman (2006, and in this volume) has pointed out a parallel message in the thought of leading spirit medium, best-selling author, and media personality Hosoki Kazuko. She asserts that ancestor worship is not a religious practice because the historical Buddha and his disciples left no teachings on the subject. Rather, it was Confucius who promoted the veneration of one’s ancestors, a practice disseminated throughout China and East Asia generally in the succeeding centuries. Her fundamental position is that memorializing one’s ancestors is connected to what it means to be Japanese. Dorman cites several examples from her 2005 book, *Shiawase ni naru tame no senzo no matsurikata* 幸せになるための先祖の祀り方 (How to become happy thru ancestor worship).

(*Kojin o shinobu eikokujin no baai* 個人を忍ぶ英国人の場合), ancestral portraiture in England (and in Europe generally) resonates strongly with the way Japanese place photos of their ancestors within or next to the family altar. Additionally, what happened in New York City on September 11, 2001 is another cultural bridge that links human beings around the world through a ‘culture of memorialization’ (*kuyō bunka* 供養文化) in how they grieve, commemorate loss, and remember the departed.

Backing up this belief in an international culture of commemoration, Yagiken opened a salesroom and gallery in lower Manhattan in the fall of 2005. Although a reader might be skeptical of the market for altars in one of America’s most ethnically diverse cities, Mr. Ueda explained the company wanted to make a statement about their belief in the universality of *kuyō* and, given the timing, see if New Yorkers would respond to this initiative. Since it is unlikely that the sudden appearance of a store selling commemorative altars would attract much attention even in an eclectic place like lower Manhattan, half the interior is devoted to an art gallery. This is a fitting collaboration, as well as evidence of-truth in-advertising, since the name “Gallery Memoria” summons ideas of art and memory.

In the gallery’s inauguration held on December 8, 2005, the main event was preceded by welcoming speeches and a calligraphy demonstration. Then, a female caucasian dancer wearing a traditional kimono and Noh-style male *and* female masks ended her performance by presenting to the audience a banner that read “KUYO is LOVE.”<sup>9</sup> The Manhattan store’s opening was further discussed on an English-language website,<sup>10</sup> where the main theme was summarized clearly and directly in a large banner headline superimposed on images of Manhattan and Ground Zero: “KUYO IS LOVE. We believe KUYO is a form of love and is the key to world peace.” In smaller text but also on the home page, the reasoning was more apparent: “If many groups connected by KUYO love gather together, a larger group with an even stronger bond of love will be formed. KUYO is love, and if KUYO prevails, peace will prevail on Earth.”

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<sup>9</sup> When I mentioned this event and the phrase “KUYO is love” to three Buddhist priests (Nichiren, True Pure Land, Pure Land) interviewed separately for another project, their reaction was surprising. I expected disparaging comments about degrading the concept of *kuyō* or removing it from the expertise of the priest, but the response was quite positive. They expressed admiration for the clever way that English words were made to convey a very Japanese sentiment, and thought the phrase itself was a stroke of brilliance.

<sup>10</sup> Website, <http://www.memoria-kuyo.com/index.html>. Accessed 20/05/2008; site now discontinued.

Another web page displayed photos from the Strawberry Fields John Lennon memorial in Central Park, a Yagiken altar with photos of Princess Dianna and Dodi Al Fayed,<sup>11</sup> and visitors in front of a bleak-looking Ground Zero one year after the destruction of the World Trade Center towers. Although lacking captions, a viewer can easily link all three images and the events they symbolize. Like an electric shock, millions of people around the globe experienced a profound sense of grief and mourning for the tragic loss of these lives. To express their sentiments, an outpouring of flowers, impromptu memorials, and candlelight vigils marked the occasion both at the time and then on a yearly basis. One would hope that the sense of *kuyō* culture and community extolled on the website is not predicated on tragedies but on an awareness of the fragility of life and inevitability of death shared by people everywhere.

The Yagiken showroom in New York City turned out to be unsuccessful commercially, but then profit did not seem to be the main point of the endeavor. At the time of the interviews for this research, the showroom and gallery had been open for a little over one year but only two altars had been sold, both to Japanese living in the city (Pikul 2006). One Yagiken executive ascribed this fact to minimal or ineffective advertising on the part of the company, as well as a realization that it was still too soon for New Yorkers to be favorably disposed towards new cultural ways of honoring loved ones, whether lost in the 9/11 attacks or in the following years. Despite these disappointing results, the company's CEO kept the showroom and gallery going in order to continue education and awareness about *kuyō* culture.

### *Stressing Individualism over Buddhist Affiliations*

Yagiken's sophisticated advertisements appeal first to the visual and aesthetic sense of an older, well-educated, and urbanized Japanese. These individuals are able to appreciate beautifully-designed furniture that harmonizes with the uncluttered lines and neutral colors of contemporary interior design. Visual appeal is then wedded with and framed around vague ethical, spiritual, and religious associations about the product's multiple functions, none of which can be characterized as distinctively Buddhist. To summarize some of the main uses mentioned thus far, a

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<sup>11</sup> Princess Diana and her companion were killed in an automobile accident in Paris on August 31, 1997.

contemporary altar is first and foremost a physical place and beautifully designed object where one can . . .

- express love for one's family and ancestors;
- converse with the departed;
- find quiet and solace by putting one's hands together in prayer or contemplation;
- discipline the behavior of one's children and thus help make Japanese society a better place;
- help to preserve Japanese culture through the practice of *kuyō*;
- interact with religious rituals specific to one's faith, or, in the spirit of 'freedom of worship' (*jyū ni matsuru* 自由に祀る) create a more individualized commemorative practice;
- enter into a worldwide community of individuals whose commemorative practices in honor of their loved ones helps to create conditions that foster world peace.

Yagiken promotes the integrity of subjective preferences over and above those issuing from domestic Buddhist traditions. There is also an explicit resistance in the advertisement's text—wholly supportive of individual rather than institutional preferences—that would surely raise the eyebrows of any diligent priest.

Although there are many more fascinating 'catch phrases' accompanying product images and promoting new ways of conceptualizing *butsudan* in the catalogue, two closing commentaries help reinforce and expand key themes. An essay by Shina Makoto tells the charming story of how the birthday of his two year old daughter was held in front of the family altar (*Butsudan no mae no happi bāsudē* 仏壇の前のハッピーバースデー). The little girl wanted to include her recently deceased grandmother in the festivities, and, since candles could be seen on the altar regularly, she decided this was the appropriate location for the party. Her parents saw no reason to discourage her innocent plan, nor would Yagiken find anything objectionable about using an altar (described earlier as a "place for having a conversation") for this purpose.

Having the last word, Mr. Ueda notes how funeral and burial customs in Japan are changing dramatically, catering to individual preferences instead of sectarian or religious requirements. He cites first the purchase and preservation of forest groves in Akita prefecture (*jumoku-sō* 樹木葬) that now serve as repositories for cremated ashes and bone fragments.

Additionally, the newly popular custom of *temoto kuyō* 手元供養<sup>12</sup> dispenses with individual graves altogether and stores ashes on or within the family altar. A link is provided in the catalogue and on the Yagiken website to this same registered non-profit organization, indicating support and collaboration. The purchase of individual graves may be in slow decline, but there is no reason why an altar cannot house remains if that is what the consumer desires and the market supports.

Leaving aside changing mortuary practices in society at large, interviews conducted separately with Pure Land, True Pure Land, and Nichiren priests in the Kansai area confirmed there is a growing laxity regarding burial and memorial practices among *danka* 檀家 members. All three religious specialists noted how, during their monthly visitation to *danka* families for the express purpose of offering prayers for ancestral spirits (a practice called *tsukimairi* 月参り, common in the Kansai region), they occasionally perform the ritual in front of a photo and flowers rather than a *butsudan*. Whether due to economic reversals caused by the Hanshin earthquake in 1995 or changing attitudes about commemoration, priests in Kansai usually do not pressure a family to purchase a proper memorial altar. When shown photos from the Yagiken catalogue, each one said they would have no problem with a contemporary design if it would encourage more families to honor the memory (and in some cases, house the cremated remains) of their loved ones in a more appropriate and respectful manner. Conforming to the *butsudan* requirements of their specific traditions was deemed less important than the well-being of the individual spirits. By taking this position, the priests seem to confirm the Yagiken position that household altars can be domesticated in ways that privilege individual rather than religious predilections yet still honor one's deceased ancestors and relatives.

### Conclusion

In a world characterized by traumatic encounters with religion and violence in the public sphere, Yagiken is both riding and contributing to a wave of stylish and innovative concepts that reflect changing attitudes about religion, the afterlife, and individual agency. At the risk of

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<sup>12</sup> See Temoto kuyō's website in the bibliography, as well as Satsuki Kawano's chapter in this volume.

overgeneralizing based on the way religion has directly affected Japanese social and political events, people are increasingly insistent about following personal preferences instead of deferring to the time-honored practices of a particular Buddhist tradition. Advertising for contemporary household altars has been successful in discerning the beliefs of its target clientele, and, as we have seen in many of the catchphrases of their catalogues and website pages, is wholly conversant with the growing cultural distinction between the perceived burdens of religion and the beneficial flexibility of spirituality.

Don't want a religious organization telling you how to honor the departed spirits of your loved ones? That's fine with Yagiken: it promotes the pluralism of Japanese religiosity as well as the freedom of the individual to determine 'comfortable' ways of interacting with these traditions. No longer believe in the traditional power of spirits, but still want to pay respects to your parents and kinfolk for having made possible your existence? Yagiken's subcontractors in Denmark and Italy have designs that they believe transcend cultural and religious parochialism. Through these and other products, Yagiken's advertising leads one to believe that the practice of *kuyō* resonates with people around the globe wherever memorials are conducted for the spiritual repose of the deceased.

If we continue to use the phrase 'ancestor worship' in our thinking and teaching about the ritual and casual commemoration of deceased family members, we have to not only problematize the terminology but also propose alternative ways of approaching the array of practices that can be categorized as *kuyō*. Especially important is rectifying these practices with contemporary consumerism, which some see as replacing religion as the dominant belief system of our time. If current trends are any guide, Japan's religious traditions will find it difficult to escape not only the logic but also the gravitational pull of an increasingly insistent and intrusive market and the preferences of its sophisticated 'believers'. Commemorating ancestral spirits in ways that emphasize interior design and consumer preferences rather than established Buddhist traditions is on the cutting edge of altering religious practice and thought in Japan today.

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## RELIGION AND MANGA

MARK MACWILLIAMS

Anyone who has read Japanese *manga* 漫画 ('graphic novels' or 'comic books' also sometimes referred to by Japanese as *komikku* コミック) realizes that they often explicitly deal with the sacred. Manga often raise deeply spiritual questions about the world of suffering, evil and ignorance in which people live. Manga can also evoke a range of powerful sentiments in readers from a sense of nostalgia, to awe, horror, and laughter in response to the challenges of life. As a mass medium, manga provides a classic example of how today's popular culture has become a "matrix that counts for much of what counts as meaning" (Beaudoin 1998: 22).

Manga are often used by Japanese religious organizations for purposes of proselytization. Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 ('Sublime Truth' sect), for instance, the now notorious group who were responsible for the 1995 Tokyo nerve gas attack, had their own in-house production staff, and published manga to spread the doomsday beliefs of their charismatic founder Asahara Shōkō. Manga are also produced by popular presses specializing in religion, like *Suzuki Press*, which publishes a 108 volume series, entitled, *Bukkyō komikusu* 仏教コミックス (Buddhist Comics, 1989–1997), designed as a "comprehensive guide book in order to experience the Buddhism and Buddhist life" (Suzuki Publishing Co.).

But even in mass marketed commercial manga, one finds a rich bricolage of religious and occult motifs, supernatural beings, miracles, and famous Buddhist priests filling their pages. Classic examples include manga artist Mizuki Shigeru's award winning series *Gegege no Kitarō* ゲゲゲの鬼太郎 and 'the god of comics', Tezuka Osamu's famous works, such as *Budda* ブッダ (Buddha) and *Hi no tori* 火の鳥 (The Phoenix). *Gegege no Kitarō* is an extended ghost story (*kaidan* 怪談) that is richly populated by a large pantheon of specters, goblins, and apparitions who descend from traditional folkloric spiritual creatures dating to the Edo period (1600–1868). Tezuka's *Budda* is his own 'Japanese version' of the story of the Buddha, while his masterwork, *Hi no tori*, is a multi-volume story about the human quest for immortality combining Japanese historical period dramas (*jidaigeki* 時代劇) with science fiction, and linked together by its major characters' rebirths over the aeons. Although these

manga are commercially produced for entertainment, they also serve as sources for ‘imaginative consumption’ for their readers, who use manga ideas and symbols to construct their sense of the self, the world, and the sacred.

### *What are Manga?*

Manga have a long history that has been traced back to picture scrolls of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A key precursor, noted by many scholars, is the famous animal scrolls (*Chōjū giga* 鳥獸戯画) of Bishop Toba (Toba Sōjō, 1053–1140), who uses caricature to satirize the religious practices of his day (Repp 2006). There are also other picture scrolls (*emakimono* 絵巻物), which, interestingly, center on religious themes, such as the *Jigoku zōshi* 地獄草紙 (Hell Scroll) that are frequently cited as inspirational for contemporary manga artists (see MacWilliams 2008; Pandey 2008). Other, more recent precursors that bear mentioning are the amusing sketches and caricatures widely disseminated by woodblock printing in the Edo period (1600–1868). There were a great variety of graphic styles that became popular at that time, such as *ōtsue* 大津絵, *tobae* 鳥羽絵, *kibyōshi* 黄表紙, and *ukiyoe* 浮き世絵; these ran the gamut thematically, with amusing pictures of political satire, folktales, ghost stories, religious pictures, scenes of daily life, and so on. Indeed, it is Santō Kyōden (1761–1816), a well-known *kibyōshi* illustrator who in 1798 first coined the term *manga*, as well as the famous *ukiyoe* artist, Hokusai (1760–1849), who popularizes it in his sketches of everyday life and the supernatural, *Hokusai manga* (Ito K. 2008: 28–29; Kern 2006: 139–44).

What we refer to as manga today, however, is also influenced by Western caricatural art. This begins early on in the nineteenth century after Japan’s opening to the West with the arrival of foreign cartoonists like Charles Wirgman, who founded the Japanese version of *Punch* in 1862, and develops later in the twentieth century, when popular comic strips of American newspapers are introduced to Japan. With the rapid spread of modern print technologies, political cartoons, comic strips, and books soon became part of the new mix of Japan’s mass culture.

After Japan’s defeat and its occupation after World War II, American comic books brought by American GIs added yet another influence, further stimulating manga’s evolution into the longer, fast-paced stories synthesizing images, panels, and speech balloons that we know today. This storybook format became popularized by post-war manga artists, and

especially by the ‘god of comics’, Tezuka Osamu through his famous best-seller, *Shin Takarajima* 新宝島 (New Treasure Island), first published in 1947 (Schodt 1983: 28–67).

In Japan there are manga on almost any theme imaginable in magazines for boys (*shōnen manga* 少年漫画), girls (*shōjo manga* 少女漫画) and adults (*seinen manga* 青年漫画). While they cater primarily to niche audiences, they also have a large crossover readership. Now over sixty years later, manga are a dominant force in the Japanese marketplace as a cheap form of entertainment read by all ages and social classes. As Ian Reader has noted, manga “are simply too fascinating, colorful, and rich a literary medium to be left solely to children” (Reader 1990: 19).

Despite Western influences, manga are unique in several ways. They usually appear first in comic book magazines. These magazines are cheaply made, usually drawn in monochrome and printed on low quality paper. They are sold everywhere in Japan at bookstores, train station kiosks, and in vending machines. They are usually read in hair salons, on trains (read during the daily commute), coffee shops, manga Internet cafes (*manga kissa* 漫画喫茶) and the privacy of one’s room—places outside the work place or institution where they serve as easy sources of entertainment. While magazines with a variety of manga stories still remain popular today, manga books and book series (*tankōbon* 単行本) have increasingly garnered a larger share of market (54.6% versus 45.7%) (Zenkoku Shuppan Kyōkai 2010: 215). It should also be noted that manga have also entered the digital age, with content being delivered on mobile cell phones and laptop computers for popular consumption.

Manga are a big business in Japan, with major publishers like Kōdansha and Shogakukan and major production studios producing anime versions like GAINAX and Studio Ghibli among the industry leaders. Recent statistics point to manga’s huge influence as a leisure commodity. In 2009, manga had overall sales of 418.7 billion yen, and made up over 21.6% of book and magazine sales, a huge share of the Japanese publishing market that has remained remarkably consistent over time (*ibid.*).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, according to the Japan Book Publishers Association, for mid and large size publishing houses, manga as well as the magazines in which they often

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<sup>1</sup> This is despite nine years of declining sales in the print industry as a result of the economic downturn, the increasing popularity of video games, and new media like the Internet and mobile cell phones that are increasingly becoming major means of distributing manga.

appear, remain a mainstay for the industry (International Committee, Japan Book Publishers Association 2008).

What makes manga attractive as a specific form of visual culture? According to Aarnoud Rommens, it is the fusion of text with image that is key. Manga storytelling relies upon an ‘analytical montage’, that is, a vivid sequence of images scatters the narrative action over several frames through a flexible page layout rather than having a single picture plus text panel to narrate a particular story event. Moreover, by adopting a cinematic style—having different ‘camera angles’, fading in and out, and so on—the stories create a seamless visual continuum that turns the act of reading into a rapid scanning of images (Rommens 2000: 1–3).

A good example is found in Sakaguchi Hisashi’s classic work, *Akkanbe Ikkyū* あっかんべー休 (Rascal Ikkyū, 1995). Sakaguchi, one of Japan’s great manga artists of the post war period, was born in Arakawa ward, Tokyo in 1946, and joined Tezuka Osamu’s Mushi Productions studio at 17, where he worked on anime such as *Tetsuwan Atomu* 鉄腕アトム (Astro Boy), and *Janguru Taitei* ジャングル大帝 (Kimba the White Lion) until he left to become a full time independent manga artist in 1969. *Akkanbe Ikkyū* is Sakaguchi’s manga biography of the famous Rinzaï Zen monk Ikkyū (1394–1481), which was originally serialized in Kōdansha’s magazine *Afternoon* (*Afutanūn* アフタヌーン), but, since 1999, has been published in a two volume paperback edition. The comic won the Japanese Cartoonist Associations award for excellence in 1996, and many fans would agree with manga critic, Takatsuki Yoshiteru who calls it “one of the greatest comics I have ever read because it has realized the maximum possibilities which comics are able to have . . . , both in artistic pictures and meaningful stories.”

‘*Akkanbe*’ refers to an eccentric who refuses political power wealth and status. The key scene exemplifying this *akkanbe* character in the story is based on Ikkyū’s historical biography. It takes place in 1410 when Ikkyū, disgusted by the decadence surrounding him, leaves his old monastery Ankokuji 安国寺, with its monks obsessed by their family’s social status in order to become a disciple of Ken’ō Sōi (or Iken Sōi, d. 1414), a Zen master of the Ōtōkan 応燈関 school of Zen at Myōshinji 妙心寺 and Daitokuji 大徳寺, who himself had decided to live a simple eremitical life as an ‘unfranchised monk’.

In his manga, Sakaguchi uses analytical montage with a flexible page layout to visually dramatize Ikkyū’s key decision to become an ascetic. The sequence begins with him sitting under a bridge, literally betwixt and between his old life and the spiritual life that lies down the road. The road

(*dō* 道) and bridge are key Buddhist symbols marking the way of spiritual discipline and transcendence. In the sequence of frames, utilizing different camera angles—from distant panorama shots to close ups—Sakaguchi moves sequentially from the solitary image of Ikkyū on his journey, to a distant shot of the bridge, to a close up of him looking at another monk who has crossed it, to end with a two page cel sequence at a crossroads where Ikkyū finds himself.

This final set of images includes one of Ikkyū gazing at the bodhisattva Jizō 地藏. It uses a close-up to mark the dramatic nature of the moment, for Jizō, as a bodhisattva whose aspiration is to save all beings from suffering, serves a special role as a protector of travelers. It is customary to place Jizō statues at crossroads to guide as well as to guard people so that the correct way will be chosen. When Ikkyū sees Jizō, he realizes he is on the right path to enlightenment and spiritual liberation. Sakaguchi then shifts the perspective yet again using another camera angle, offering a distant above ground shot of the young monk as he resolutely walks onward to his new life. With its complex repertoire of creative page layouts, dynamic cel sequences and multiple camera angles, *Akkanbe Ikkyū* shows the iconic power of manga as a story-telling medium. By adding religious symbols and drawing on Ikkyū's rich hagiography, Sakaguchi constructs a compelling vision of a famous Zen Buddhist's personal spiritual quest. As a modern manga classic, *Akkanbe Ikkyū* reveals how drawing can draw many fans into the subject of religion.

### *Why Focus on Manga to Study Contemporary Japanese Religion?*

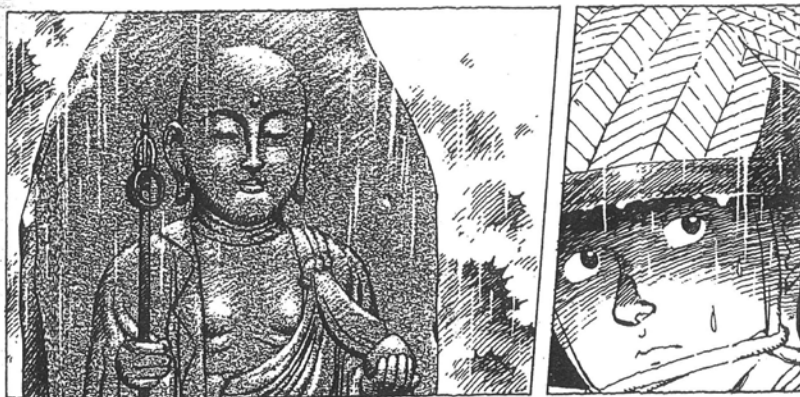
Studying religion, particularly in our time, means more than looking at religious institutions. It involves examining how religion and spirituality (by which I mean an individual seeker's personal quest for a personally meaningful and direct, experiential connection with the sacred) are "not limited to institutional forms of organized religion alone but . . . also appear in 'unexpected places' such as popular culture" (Healer 2003: 144).<sup>2</sup> Religion's place in popular media is critical for understanding how it functions in contemporary societies. Stuart Hoover and other media and religion theorists argue that various communications media like TV, video games, movies, and comics are where most people today consume

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<sup>2</sup> Healer is summarizing the argument made by Bruce Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan in their recent study, *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (2000).



Figures 1 and 2. Panel sequence of Ikkyū leaving Ankoku-ji. From *Akkanbe Ikkyū*, vol. 1, pp. 220–21. (Copyright Sakaguchi Hisashi, Kōdansha Manga Bunko)



か 地蔵菩薩



※地蔵菩薩＝釈尊のたのみを受け、その入滅後、弥勒仏が兜率天より人間界に下生（出現）するまでの間、無仏の世界に住して六道（地獄・餓鬼・畜生・修羅・人間・天上）の衆生を教化救済につとめる誓願を立て実行中の菩薩。

culture and, by extension, encounter religion (Morgan 2007: 21). As Hoover explains it:

Today, people tend to think of religious ideas as situated on the shelf of a religious marketplace from which the seeker is free to take them in acts of imaginative consumption. Rather than occupying a vertical relationship with a sacred tradition that descends over the ages to the present, the religious marketplace offers a supply of possibilities from which the consumer selects ideas and symbols for the construction of his or her identity. (2001: 152)

Whether this mass media “supply of possibilities” is bound closely to a moral or religious narrative vision (for example, the image of Christ in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*) may be either crucial or only incidental to the pleasure it affords consumers. But the pleasure such images offer, which is crucial to their commercial success, indicates that “escapism and relevance are not mutually exclusive” in modern popular culture (Clark 2007: 10). That is, as a leisure time activity, pop culture is often not only about the business of giving cheap thrills.

As part of its total entertainment package, mass media culture recycles a stock of religious symbols, ideas, and images. Its images of religion create a ‘mediascape’ that allows people to temporarily escape from the pressures of the real world. But it also allows reader/viewers to consume it according to their own unique personal interests and needs. As Arjun Appadurai has described it, this mediascape offers “new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” by creating a “staging ground for action and not only escape” (Appadurai 1996: 3, 7; see also Ito M. 2003: 31–34; Treat 1993: 365–66).

In the case of manga, religious images, symbols, and plots are both fun to read and powerful to ponder. In other words, the religious ‘image reservoir’ of manga becomes a resource for readers/consumers to construct meaning and to express their hopes, joys, and fears. These images, the plots of their stories, and the activity of consuming them as a part of a mass cultural/social practice can become central means for readers/consumers to discover what is religiously or spiritually meaningful for them.

This role of manga is suggested in recent survey data. While only a small number of the college students surveyed in the 2001 Religious Awareness Survey believed in a specific religion (9.3%), over 30.4% said they were interested in religion. What interested them was not joining religious organizations, but reading religious texts (43%), books about religion (34%), and non-fiction and fiction dealing with religion (29.1%) (21st Century Center for Excellence Program 2003: 26). In other words,



while contemporary Japanese may not be all that interested in shrines and temples, ecclesiastical hierarchies, or sectarian doctrines, many are still spiritually curious: reading is a critical means for them to access religious information. As important part of the reading matter on people's bookshelves, manga have the potential to reach a huge audience. Just like the religious iconography of an earlier age, within their imaginary worlds, manga can be a powerful mass medium for providing a powerful vision of the sacred for their audiences.

A provocative illustration of this is Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Yasukuniron* 靖国論 (2005, seventh edition in 2007). Kobayashi (1953–) is a notorious right wing political critic and bestselling manga artist whose works, such as *Gōmanism sengen* ゴーマニズム宣言 (My Arrogant Manifesto) and *Sensōron* 戦争論 (On War), are extremely popular among young people. The latter comic, selling over 650,000 copies to date, advocates a neo-nationalist revisionist history of the Second World War, which Kobayashi claims was a glorious war for the liberation of Asia from the racist white colonizers of the West (Shimazu 2003: 113–15).

In *Yasukuniron*, Kobayashi gives a spirited defense of the controversial Yasukuni shrine 靖国神社 in Tokyo. This Shintō shrine, first established by order of Emperor Meiji in 1869, commemorates those who died for the country, from the Boshun War (1868–1869), which led to creation of the Meiji imperial state, to the *kamikaze* pilots in World War II, to members of the Self-Defense forces today. It also includes fourteen Class A World War II war criminals enshrined there since 1978. While originally a state supported shrine under State Shintō, Yasukuni was forced to become an independent religious organization under the provisions of the post-war constitution, which strictly separated religion and state.<sup>3</sup> However, Yasukuni remains today a key symbol among right wing Japanese nationalists of Japan's martial spirit and valiant military past. It is also a symbol of controversy, especially among those who were the victims of Japan's aggressive militarism of the 1930s and 40s. This is revealed in the massive protests at home and abroad in China and Korea when Japanese Prime Ministers patronize the shrine. In *Yasukuniron*, Kobayashi offers a spirited defense about why Yasukuni shrine should continue to serve as a national memorial for pacifying the 'glorious spirits' (*eirei* 英霊) of those who selflessly gave their lives for Japan.

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<sup>3</sup> See both John Breen and Urs Matthias Zachmann's chapters in this volume for discussions of Yasukuni shrine.

In *Yasukuniron*, Kobayashi is harshly critical of those he finds less than fully patriotic. This includes, for example, former Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō whose annual visits to Yasukuni from 2001, sparked numerous protests both within and outside Japan, and particularly throughout Asia (Seaton 2008). In the manga, however, Kobayashi attacks Koizumi, ridiculing him as a weak and feckless politician. His caricatures depict Koizumi as a little man who, bowing to pressure from China, Korea, and 'the left wing media', reneged on his pledge to visit the shrine every August 15, a date fraught with meaning because it marks the anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II. The Prime Minister visited instead on 13 August in 2001, 21 April in 2002, 14 January in 2003, 1 January 2004, and 17 October 2005, until he finally fulfilled his promise in 2006 (Kobayashi 2005: 8–9). Kobayashi starkly contrasts the fearless Japanese soldiers of the war with the craven Koizumi, who is caricatured as a venal politician out for his own personal gain. This points to a key theme of Kobayashi: that post war Japanese have lost their spiritual-moral compass, having abandoned an ethic of self-sacrifice for the greater good for a obsessive self-centered materialism. This is a message that seems to resonate among his many young fans.

Kobayashi also lashes out those who criticize Yasukuni as an institution worshipping Japan's militarist and ultra-nationalist past. One of the most powerfully effective techniques he employs as an artist is to include himself as a character within the text. The manga version of Kobayashi shows a critic who freely displays his scorn against those who disparage Yasukuni. Such naked displays of raw anger and acid wit can shock Japanese readers, who may find such overt emotional displays refreshingly direct and even disturbing. Here, in fact, is exactly where manga's entertainment value lies—in its potential to satirize and incite strong emotions, which is why Kobayashi attracts such a wide readership. His savage caricatures and unvarnished ultranationalism, rarely permitted to air in mainstream print and electronic media, are made possible through manga.

The *Yasukuniron* illustrates the complex interactions possible between popular culture and religious institutions. Its opening pages offer a manga version, a primer if you will, of what it is like to worship at Yasukuni shrine. The two great *torii* 鳥居 gates that one walks through appear on the first two pages followed by a full two-page photograph of the worship hall at Yasukuni. The manga literally walks the reader through the grounds. The reader, courtesy of Kobayashi's manga *simulacra*, is able to vicariously experience the awe and mystery of praying before the glorified spirits at the shrine. It is no surprise then that the shrine's war museum,



Figure 3. Kobayashi Yoshinori enters Yasukuni shrine. From *Yasukuniron*, p. 48.  
(Copyright Kobayashi Yoshinori, Gentōsha)

the Yūshūkan 遊就館 sells Kobayashi's comics at its museum store, along with ash trays emblazoned with the picture of the Battleship Yamato, tea shirts with Zero fighter planes, and other war-related souvenirs commemorating Japan's militaristic past.

As the social historian Naoko Shimizu aptly notes, it is ironic that "although Kobayashi is critical of Japanese consumerism, what he does in this work is precisely to sell his politics as a well-packaged consumer product" (2003: 115). Like any commodity, Kobayashi's manga can be found wherever there is a market, in this case, both at Yasukuni's museum store or at amazon.jp.com. *Yasukuniron* is published by the commercial press, Gentōsha 幻冬舎, which also sells the monthly manga magazine *Comic Birz* コミックバーズ, Web comic magazines, and literary and business related publications. So, the *Yasukuniron* is an interesting example of how manga can offer a commercial pop cultural venue for religious experience and expression.<sup>4</sup>

### *Types of Religious Manga*

There are two major types of manga that deal with religion: Informational manga are published by religious organizations as well as individuals and commercial publishers to proselytize their specific doctrines, religious views, practices, and way of life, and commercially produced entertainment manga by artists who may have their own personal religious visions that get expressed in their stories. In what follows, we will briefly explore these two types.

#### 1. *Informational Religious Manga*

In the 1990s, at the height of manga's popularity, a new type of comic known as 'information comics' (*jōhō manga* 情報漫画) became increasingly fashionable on the publishing scene. These comics were designed to provide a range of information in an easily digestible format. Topics run the gamut from golf, cooking, biographies of famous people to more arcane topics like the Japanese economy and history (Kinsella 2000: 45, 70). While fun and easy to read, informational manga are different from

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Kobayashi's work is not the only picture book about Yasukuni shrine. The shrine also publishes its own "A [Child's] Guide to Yasukuni Shrine: Our Shrine" (*Yasukuni daihyakka: Watashitachi no Yasukuni Jinja*, 1992), that is available at the shrine gift shop. See Gardner 1999.

the typical commercial comics. The latter are best described as 'pure pleasure commodities' that meant to be quickly read at one's leisure, enjoyed, and then thrown away or recycled. Informational comics, by contrast, have a serious educational purpose. They are designed to teach people about something that they need to know. Japanese businesses, the government, and a host of other institutions commonly use informational comics as a tool in their public relations efforts.

For example, Japan's Ministry of Defense in 2004 began publishing a manga version of its official Defense White Paper, the government's densely written analysis of Japan's self-defense capabilities. Initially conducting a survey of youth, the agency was surprised to discover that most were uninterested and ill-informed about defense-related issues. As part of their campaign to promote patriotism, the agency decided to publish a comic that "was easily understandable for young people," by which they meant Japanese citizens between 20 and 30 years old (Fowler 2007). The most current version of this, entitled *Dandō misairu kara Nihon o mamoru* 弾道ミサイルから日本を守る (Protecting Japan from Ballistic Missiles) is a story sixty-four pages long.<sup>5</sup> For the Japanese Ministry of Defense, comics are no joke, but are a serious means of educating its citizenry and fostering patriotism.<sup>6</sup>

There are many informational manga being published about religious organizations, rituals, history, and so on. Of course, as we have seen, Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Yasukuniron* fits this category. But, in addition, many others offer a wide range of styles, themes, and topics. Most Buddhist denominations, for example, publish their own informational manga about their traditions, founders, texts, and so on. In the case of Japanese new religions and popular religious movements as well, manga can play an important role.

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<sup>5</sup> The cover features a young boy named Rikuto kicking a soccer ball and girl named Kaira, who "loves playing together with him." In the cover picture's background is a large navy cruiser and a missile that has just launched and is rocketing into the air. In the story, the kids meet a strange man named Mr. Gurōpi, a member of the Peace Preservation Patrol who normally lives in a Parallel World. Mr. Gurōpi's mission is to explain to Rikuto and Kaira in easy to understand terms why they need missile defense. For a downloadable version of this manga, see <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/library/comic/index.html> (accessed 11 October 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Informational comics like this suggest that manga have a different cultural location in Japan compared to comics in the United States, where they were originally relegated to the 'funny pages' or were treated as kid's fare, although today informational comics in the West have gained in popularity, the famous example being Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a biography of his father's travails during the Holocaust.

A good example comes from the growing popularity of pilgrimages (*junrei* 巡礼) to temples and shrines. Manga about such pilgrimages are produced by religious institutions, pilgrimage associations, and commercial publishers to teach people about how to do pilgrimages, to describe what they might experience, and to suggest what meaning it might have.

The famous Saikoku pilgrimage to the thirty-three temples enshrining miraculous images of the bodhisattva Kannon is a case in point. Various manga serve as guides or introductions for doing and understanding the religious value of the pilgrimage. The *Manga Saikoku sanjūsan fudasho Kannon junrei* 漫画西国三十三札所観音巡礼 (The Comic Thirty-Three Saikoku Kannon Pilgrimage Sites, 1992), for example, is a guide published by the Saikoku Pilgrimage Association. It is designed as an easy-to-read introduction to Kannon faith. In the comic, the hero is a late middle-aged man soon facing retirement. He shocks his family when he announces that he will take his two months of vacation, a reward after working thirty years for his company, “to do some soul searching” (*jibun no kokoro o mitsumeru tabi* 自分の心を見つめる旅) by going on the pilgrimage (Nagatani 1992: 7–10).

Another interesting Saikoku manga is the *Kannonsama no reijō* 観音様の霊場 (Sacred Places of the Bodhisattva Kannon, 1992). Published as part of *Bukkyō komikkusu* 仏教コミックス, a 108 volume series of Buddhist educational books by Suzuki Press, the guide is written and edited by Hiro Sachiya, perhaps one of the most widely known ‘religion critics’ (*shūkyō hyōronka* 宗教評論家) in Japan today. *Kannonsama no reijō* is carefully crafted story about two young people—Nakayama Ken’ichi and Kinoshita Rie—who end up falling in love after meeting at temple number eight, Hasedera 長谷寺, a temple famous as a site for flower viewing (*hanami* 花見) in spring.

In the story, the two lovers find each other after meeting at various stations along the Saikoku route. She is a tour guide and he is a schoolteacher who meet for the first time with their parents to explore an arranged marriage. Needless to say, the two are uncomfortable, and they do not hit it off; Rie ends up in tears back home wondering if she will ever find a good man. Only later, seemingly by accident (he runs into her while leading his students on a school outing while she is leading a group of seniors as their tour guide) do they meet again and really get to know each other at Kiyomizudera 清水寺, an important temple along the route. In the final scene, they tie the knot (*en-musubi* 縁結び) at Nachidera 那智寺, temple number one, pledging to marry each other and live happily ever after.

Their love, in other words, is closely bound together with Kannon's merciful role as a bodhisattva who, in this case, fulfills a vow of compassion by saving both of them from suffering a life of loneliness. The story strongly suggests that, after all, their union was less an accident than a fortuitous effect of good karma, made possible by the boundless stores of merit of Kannon, whose wonder-working powers secure their marital bliss. The moral of the story is that the beauty of these temples, as well as the power of Kannon to confer spiritual benefits (*goriyaku* 御利益), brings people happily together.

Not all informational manga are simple narratives. This is clearly evident in the work of Kuwata Jirō, another famous *mangaka* whose hit comic series include *Maboroshi tantei* まぼろし探偵 (Detective Maboroshi, 1957), *Gekkō kamen* 月光仮面 (Moonlight Mask, 1958), and *Eito エイトマン* (Eightman, 1963). According to his autobiography, despite professional success, Kuwata was deeply depressed, living a dissolute life and contemplating suicide. Things changed dramatically for him at 42, traditionally an unlucky year (*yakudoshi* 厄年) for men, after he had a profoundly mystical experience during meditation. From then on, Kuwata claims he entered the 'world of the spirit' (*seishin no sekai* 精神の世界) as he pursued a deep study of Buddhist scripture and meditation.

In terms of his artistic work, Kuwata's spiritual turn in life led him to compose 'manga essays' (now over 26 multi-volume works) on various spiritual topics. Examples include his *Kojiki no daireigaku* 古事記の大霊学 (The Great Spiritual Study of the *Kojiki*, 1989), which purports to unlock the secrets of the *Kojiki* myths through Kuwata's personal insights gleaned from meditation, the *Kannonkyō* 観音経 (The Kannon Sūtra, 1989, four volumes), and his *Manga de yomu Hannya shin-kyō* 漫画で読む般若心経 (Reading the *Heart Sūtra* through Manga, 1989 in two volumes). These latter are primers for understanding two key Buddhist scriptures.

*Manga de yomu Hannya shin-kyō* is a case study of how Kuwata makes Buddhism fascinating for his modern audience. He offers a commentarial approach, giving a line by line interpretation of the *Heart Sūtra*, one of the most widely known Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures in Japan. It takes Kuwata two volumes with over 603 pages of text and images to unlock the meaning of this short, one-page sutra. Cognizant that most chant the *Heart Sūtra*, without comprehending its meaning, Kuwata exploits caricature to make difficult Buddhist concepts easily comprehensible for his readers. Each page is filled with silly characters, humorous sketches, funny word plays, doodles and rebuses to grab his readers' attention.

For example, how does one make sense of the key line in the scripture stating that “form is emptiness and emptiness is form”? Kuwata creates what he calls a “Digression Corner” to explain this key Buddhist concept for the transient and ever-changing nature of reality. Kuwata does so by playing pictographically with the Chinese character for emptiness, *kū* 空. Through a series of doodles, he alters *kū* by making it a smiley face, a vexed face, a serious face, and so on. Even a Chinese character, seemingly fixed in its iconic form and number of strokes, can, through caricature, be transformed into anything at all! Thus, Kuwata’s caricatures reveal the true nature of every form is in fact ‘emptiness’. At the bottom of the page, several animated characters comment on Kuwata’s doodlings. One of them, called Iron Can, is a literalist, and yells, “Get serious!” A cockroach cautions, “My oh my, don’t strain yourself!” And another, Jinushi 痔主 (Lord Piles), shaped like a person’s fanny exclaims, “If you strain too much, you’ll get hemorrhoids!” (Kuwata 1989: 84). Manga scriptural commentaries like Kuwata’s *Manga de yomu Hannya shin-kyō* are an important type of informational spiritual manga.

## 2. *Informational Manga and New Religious Movements*

As many scholars have noted, modern Japanese religious groups have been quick to utilize modern mass media for their own purposes (Reader 1991: 194–233; Whelan 2007: 54–72; Baffelli 2007: 83–99). This is particularly true for the so-called new new religions (*shin shin shūkyō* 新新宗教), religious movements that arose in Japan from the 1970s. The growth of new new religions coincides with a resurgence of interest in religion among Japanese that occurred around that time, what cultural commentators and journalists alike describe as Japan’s contemporary ‘religion boom’ (*shūkyō būmu* 宗教ブーム). What makes the new religious movements (NRMs) distinctive, according to Erica Baffelli, is how much they have been shaped by the new information society. Religion scholar Inoue Nobutaka even goes further, arguing that the new religions have nothing that distinguishes them as a whole save for the fact that they “are strongly oriented to current facets of social change. The directions taken by social change in recent years can be characterized by such key words as ‘information revolution’, ‘visual presentation’, and ‘globalization’” (1991: 7). As such they have been described as ‘mass media religions’ (*media shūkyō* メデア宗教), an apt term given the extent they have taken advantage of modern mass communication media—from advertising, satellite



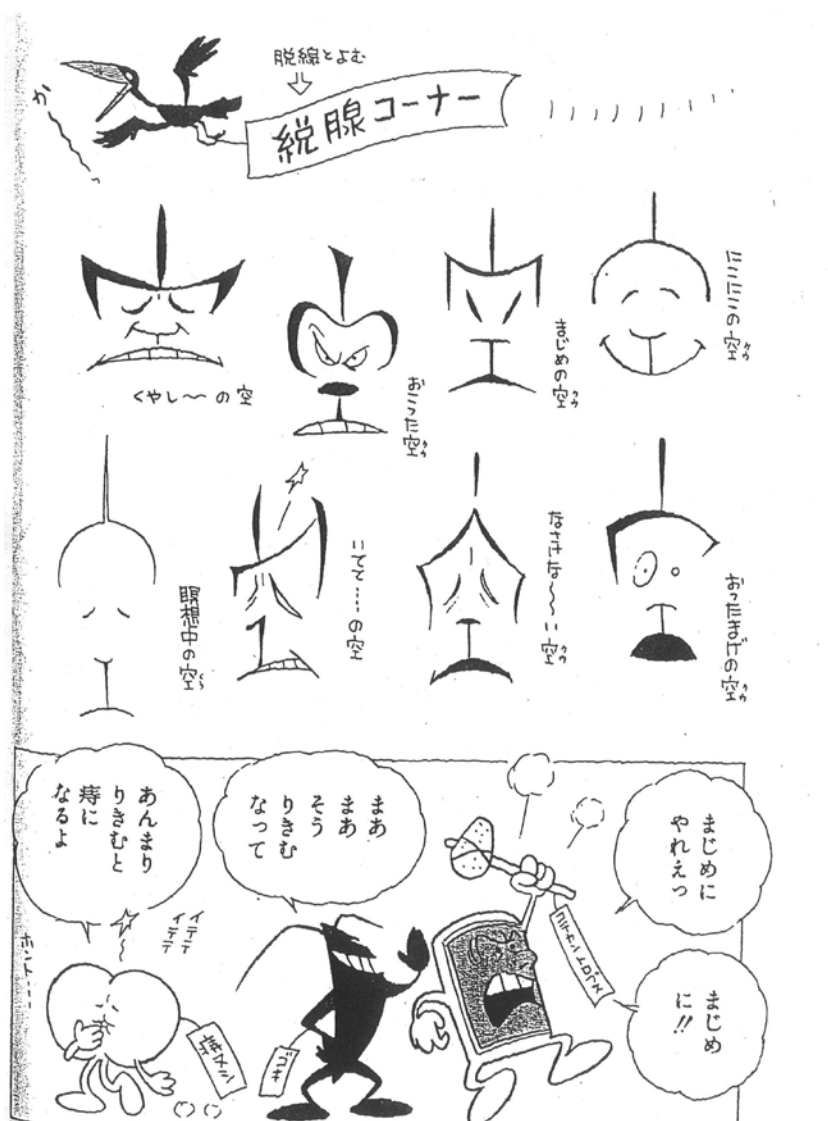


Figure 4. Kuwata's use of caricature to show that 'form is emptiness'. From *Manga de yomu Hannya shin-kyō*, vol. 1, p. 84. (Copyright Kuwata Jirō, Kōsaidō)

television broadcasts, to mass leafleting, video and film, music, books, and now the Internet (Baffelli 2007: 84).

As might be expected, many new new religions, whose extensive use of mass media for proselytization is legion, have published *jōhō manga* to introduce their spiritual doctrines, practices, and way of life to the public at large (Inoue 1991: 6).<sup>7</sup> These manga are perfect examples of what sociologist Eileen Barker calls ‘secondary constructions’. Secondary constructions are depictions of a new religious movement, “that are offered in the public arena by sociologists and others, including the movement itself, *about* the movement” (Barker 1995: 289). There are many different types of secondary constructions of NRMs—by the government, psychiatrists, the secular mass media, and even the scholars who describe new religious movements, each having a unique angle based upon their institutional location, vocational demands, and value orientation. Not surprisingly, NRMs also produce their own information about themselves, secondary constructions the group has created to project their own idealized image of themselves to the outside world.

A Japanese new new religion that extensively uses *jōhō manga* for proselytization is Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 (The Institute for Research in Human Happiness, also known as ‘Happy Science’). This movement, founded by Ōkawa Ryūhō, arose in the late 1980s and quickly grew in popularity. It has published a large number of manga to convey its religious message. Robert Kisala has noted that Kōfuku no Kagaku “is perhaps the clearest example of the emphasis—seen broadly in contemporary religious movements—placed on the spread of religious ideas through popular publications” (2001: 73).

Ōkawa’s own biography reveals the importance of books in his own life. He was a voracious reader from childhood who takes considerable pride in the fact that he had read over four thousand tomes by the time

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, not all Japanese new religions favor manga. Sekai Shindōkyō 世界心道教, a sub-sect of Tenrikyō 天理教 founded in 1945 by Aida Hide (1898–1973) and headquartered in Suwa, Toyokawa, in Aichi prefecture, for example, has never published cartoon books or artwork for proselytization purposes. The chief executive officer of the group, explains the reason why: “We think the best way to increase our membership is not by relying on advertisements but by conveying our doctrines directly and correctly from person to person. And, similarly, for us the most important thing for gaining trust from society is not by fervently or humorously explaining our teachings, but by continuing to show actual results over the years through carrying out social service activities and helping people. . . . We have our doubts that manga would really be appropriate for correctly conveying our message, and fear that people might misunderstand our true intentions and claims by looking at caricatures” (personal communication, 18 February 2002).

he was 29 (Astley 1995: 346).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, key for the movement, as well as emblematic of Ōkawa's personal spiritual power, is his astonishing productivity as a best-selling author. He has written over four hundred books on the science of happiness, distributing hundreds of thousands of copies through his own independent publishing company, Kōfuku no Kagaku (IRH) Press. His texts are not only a major source of revenue for the group, but also are the key conduit for spreading Ōkawa's message in Japan and now abroad.

IRH Press publishes a large number of manga with Ōkawa Ryūhō noted as either the 'original author' (*genchō* 原著鶴) or the 'supervisor' (*kanshū* 監修). While not considered sacred writings, these texts, which were drawn by manga artists who are members, are rooted in Ōkawa's spiritual vision of 'the sun of Buddha's truth'. They are best understood as distillations of the founder's revelations containing seeds of enlightenment for those who peruse their pages. As one Kōfuku no Kagaku official has explained, they are 'skillful means' (*upāya*) for spreading the founder's teaching; *upāya* is the Mahāyāna Buddhist idea that the Buddha devises a variety of expedient ways to make spiritual truths more easily comprehensible for the salvation of all. As easy to read texts with gripping illustrations, they are a powerful means for attracting converts and leading them to the deeper revelations found in Ōkawa's sacred texts. IRH's marketing campaigns have aggressively promoted these manga. One key way of doing so has been the 'Ōkawa Ryūhō Corners', which, until recently, could be found in local bookstores.

Among IRH's manga one can find a wide variety of genres for every conceivable audience. There are boy's manga for the younger set, such as *Kureta-kun* くれた君 (Herr Kureta, 2002), part of a series entitled *Komikku enzeruzu* コミックエンゼルズ (Comic Angels). There are girls manga, such as the four volume *Herumesu ai wa kaze no gotoku* ヘルメス愛は風の如く (*Hermes Love is Like the Wind*, 1997), which has also been issued as an *anime*. There are also adult manga, such as *Kibō no kakumei* 希望の革命 (*The Revolution of Hope*, 1995), a comic book devoted to attacking the publication house Kōdansha for its sins in the so-called "Friday Affair." Written by 'the victims', that is, Kōfuku no Kagaku members who were deeply offended by the scurrilous attacks made by tabloid magazines against Ōkawa. The manga is a blow by blow account of how the scandal

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<sup>8</sup> The founder's childhood story has also been made into a manga that is privately circulated among members only: Ōkawa 2003.

magazine *Friday* was defamatory, not only as a result of corporate but also cosmic evil, especially the dark deceit of Lucifer himself.

These texts have been an important part of the Kōfuku no Kagaku's mission strategy.<sup>9</sup> All have gone through multiple printings and have occasionally been revised into new editions. For example, one such text, *Tengoku no kado* 天国の門 (*The Gate of Heaven*) was first published in 1992, and by 1994 had gone through 32 printings. This indicates that many people are reading these manga. If, as Robert Kisala has argued, Kōfuku no Kagaku is exemplary of a Japanese new new religion that emphasizes 'salvation by the book', it is important to ask what role manga play in this effort.

### *Entertainment Manga with Religious Themes*

The second major manga type dealing with religion is entertainment manga. Jean Marie Bouissou has recently argued that, as a pop culture commodity, manga are fascinating because of their "aesthetic of excess, conflict, imbalance, and overt sensuality." They are a "pure pleasure commodity," an inexpensive form of entertainment primarily meant for enjoyment (Bouissou 2006: 149–55). While this is true, it is important to note that one of the key pleasures of these texts is that they are often funny. The large role humor plays in manga is indicated by original meaning of the characters in Chinese, 'light-hearted jokes' (*man* 漫) expressed in 'pictures' (*ga* 画). Moreover, the fact that manga can provide pleasure by being funny does not mean they are devoid of religious power. Humor, like other modes of human self-expression, can convey profound religious ideas and sentiments. The pleasure manga can provide through gripping stories and gags can serve as a powerful vehicle for religious and spiritual expression and reflection.

The most famous example of this is Tezuka Osamu's well-known story manga, *Budda*. *Budda* appeared in serialization over a twelve-year period

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<sup>9</sup> More recently, IRH Shuppan has moved toward publishing a series of informational manga about inspiring historical figures, targeting a youth audience. The series, called *Manga ijinden* 漫画偉人伝 (Manga Biographies of Great Figures), resembles other such publications published by secular presses. The difference, however, is that Kōfuku no Kagaku's new manga series is designed specifically for religious education of member's children, and not for general audiences. The first volume of this series, *Nihon ni shuken kokka o uchitateta Shōtoku Taishi* 日本に集権国家を打ち立てた聖徳太子, for example, emphasizes how Shōtoku Taishi's story is not just of historical interest, but contains a "message for future bodhisattvas from a great man of the past."

from August 1972 until 1983 had twenty-two printings selling over nine million copies from 1993 to 1995, making it the most widely read version of the life of the Buddha in Japan. Written originally as a boy's manga, *Budda* is an adventure tale filled with battles and acts of heroism and tragedy. Over its many (2986!) pages, Tezuka's primary goal was to entertain rather than faithfully retell the Buddhist scriptures. If he felt original stories were too boring, he had no reservations about adding new characters and scenes to liven up the story. Tezuka's Buddha is fully human. The young Siddhartha is an earnest young man struggling over the great matters of life and death. In this respect, *Budda* is much more than a simple adventure tale because it dwells on serious 'adult' themes—particularly the quest for truth, goodness, and the need to find meaning in a seemingly meaningless, violent, and capricious world.

In *Budda*, Tezuka adds a humorous twist that is especially enjoyable. For example, scenes from the young Siddhartha's life parody that of his young readers. One scene, for example, that any high school student would easily recognize is a science class. The elderly teacher looks like he is leading a sex education class, behind him is a slide on the screen picturing, it seems, how sperm fertilize an egg. In fact, however, the teacher is the god Barafuman (Brahma), who is lecturing Siddhartha about the facts of life—not practical biology, in this case, but rather about the cosmic unity of all life. Like Kuwata, Tezuka uses his visual gags not only to get laughs but also to convey a serious message.

Religion, like any other topic, can also appear in commercial 'gag manga' (*gyagu manga* ギャグ漫画). This type of comics is typically structured into short episodes "filled with ridiculous situations and silly characters, word plays, and jokes designed less for deep reflection than to get a quick laugh" (Tchiei). A recent bestselling example of this, which owes much to Tezuka's influence, is Nakamura Hikaru's *Seinto oniisan* セイントお兄さん (*Saint Young Men*). Originally serialized in Kōdansha's monthly magazine *Morning 2* since 2006, it has recently come out in book format, with six volumes published to date.

*Saint Young Men* is a situation comedy exploring what would happen if Buddha and Jesus has suddenly gone on vacation from heaven and decided to live as twenty-somethings living in Tachikawa, an ordinary suburb about forty kilometers to the west of Tokyo. As one fan playfully puts it, it is a funny story about young guys (*seinen* 聖年) who are also saintly (*seinen* 聖年) (Anon. 2008). This is made clear on the cover of volume one, in which Nakamura's two heroes, Buddha and Jesus, are depicted as Gen Yers dressed in jeans, sneakers, and plain white T-shirts, the young



Figure 5. The Indian deity Brahman explaining the facts of life. From *Budda*, vol. 6, p. 107. (Copyright Tezuka Productions)

Buddha's T-shirt emblazoned with 'Namu san' (an abbreviation for 'Namu sanbō' 南無三宝, "I call upon the three treasures, Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha"). The comic describes itself as a "light hearted [nukunuku ぬくぬく] comedy. Even laughs can save the world! Saints in Tachikawa 立川. You've never seen this kind of manga before!!"

The humor involves sight gags, word plays, humorous incongruities, and so on. The first two pages of episode four in volume one of *Saint Young Men*, "Debut," is a case in point: The first page has a picture of heaven above with the captions, "As portrayed in many paintings, Buddha and Jesus's have gentle hands. They never refuse the many hands of people seeking salvation." This frame shows people's hands raised toward the sky. Here Nakamura inserts the humorous incongruity. In the next frame Buddha is being grabbed by a hand from below, and Buddha's annoyed response, "Hey, it's really a hassle, ok!" The next page reveals the joke. Rather than suffering multitudes reaching out for salvation, it is street side hucksters hustling their wares who are grabbing them yelling, "It's cheap, shockingly cheap, so take a look, just take a look." The saints are in Tachikawa's shopping district and the banner across the street says, "Super Savings Festival." Nakamura caustically adds, "It's also necessary to shake those hands off."

In this sequence of cels, Nakamura juxtaposes the high aspirations of sacred doctrine with the profane realities of daily life. Yes, Jesus and Buddha



Figure 6. The Buddha and Jesus as heavenly beings with their worshippers' hands raised toward them. From *Seinto onisan*, vol. 1, p. 44. (Copyright Nakamura Hikaru, Kōdansha)

are both incarnations of divine compassion. The first panels where they are ethereal presences in the heavens looking down at the hands reaching for salvation below is an iconographical staple, conventional religious imagery associated with both of them as transcendent beings. However, Nakamura's manga brings them down to earth. They are living the everyday life that everyone can experience in modern urban Japan of today. Nakamura's joke here is to juxtapose ideals with reality. The saints here end up being accosted by the same pushy sales people ordinary Japanese run into all the time. It is hard to feel much compassion when you feel victimized by sales pitches. Wouldn't anyone, even a divinity, get sick of people trying to get something from you?

The joke raises some profound questions. In real life, 'salvation' often means making a quick buck to make a living. But is that all there is to life? What are people really after all? It looks like money, rather than heaven. Would Jesus and Buddha really be so sanctimonious if they lived life like we do? When we look at them as 'young saints' rather than gods, do Jesus and Buddha offer any vision for young people of how to live life in a meaningful, authentic, and spiritually powerful way?

### *Saint Young Men and Imaginative Consumption*

In *Saint Young Men*, it is clear that the sacred objects, persons, and places present a 'culturally significant form' beyond any explicit role they play within traditional religious institutions. Popular culture and religion theorist Gordon Lynch has argued that when 'the sacred' appears in popular culture, it evokes a sense of 'grounded awareness' in people. They feel drawn toward something away from the quotidian, from the profane plane of daily life where things are experienced with a 'flattened sensitivity'. Sacred objects, even as part of popular culture, are still able to exert "a gravitational pull on the feelings, motivations, and behavior" of those who consume them (Lynch 2007: 138).

However, Lynch points to other examples where the sacred in popular media loses its 'stickiness'. Can anyone argue, that Jesus in the American cartoon series *South Park* has lost his 'gravitational pull'? In the show, he hosts a low rated talk show on a local Colorado public access cable TV show, *Jesus and Pals*. *South Park* episodes turn him into a pathetic savior figure. In the episode, "Red Sleigh Down," for example, Jesus ends up being killed by an Iraqi soldier after trying to save Santa whose sleigh has been shot down in Baghdad during the Iraq war. Indeed, it is *South Park*





Figure 7. The Buddha and Jesus down to earth with street vendors in Tachikawa grabbing them. From *Seinto oniisan*, vol. 1, p. 45. (Copyright Nakamura Hikaru, Kōdansha)

playfully sardonic wit that reduces venerable cultural icons into risible objects of laughter.<sup>10</sup>

Is Nakamura's treatment of Jesus and Buddha in *Saint Young Men* the same as *South Park's*? Or, is humor in *Saint Young Men*, alternatively, a means of religious expression rather than ridicule? Are irony and humor, etched in caricatures, a major source of manga's attraction, necessarily corrosive spiritually? To explore this further, it is key to study people's reactions to what they consume. Such an approach reveals the processes of 'imaginative consumption' of manga fans, who may draw upon the ideas, symbols, and plots of manga to construct their own sense of self, world, and the sacred.

A key resource for doing this kind of research is the Internet. Fans regularly discuss their views of *Saint Young Men* with other obsessed fans (*mania dokusha* マニア読者). There is a huge amount of fan comment about the manga on on-line blogs, fanzines, Facebook fan club pages, social networking sites, bookstore online reviews and the like. Online discussion groups and other website-based areas provide a virtual community where fans can publicly comment about how the manga affects their own lives. What we learn from online fan posts, is that *Saint Young Men* offers an affirmative this-worldly vision of Jesus and Buddha that is not only funny, but can be spiritually powerful and transformative.

For many readers, *Saint Young Men's* 'gravitational pull' is not what Lynch would expect. The manga clearly situates the sacred within the quotidian, within this world rather than without. Jesus and Buddha are not remote transcendent sacred beings who are 'wholly other', what Rudolf Otto classically described as the *numen*. Rather than supernatural beings struggling to free humans from sin and suffering, they are, at the very least, as an amazon.jp reviewer noted, like foreign (*gaijin* 外人) spending their time as tourists in Japan, strangers in a strange land who are more like Borat than anything else (Kesu0220 2008). By taking Jesus and Buddha from their ethereal pedestals down to earth, Nakamura

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<sup>10</sup> On *South Park*, see Groening (2008). Many episodes of this series have been devoted to savagely attacking religion in all of its varieties, from mainline Catholicism to Scientology. Examples of such episodes include (Christianity) episode 57, "Do the Handicapped Go to Hell?" (19 June 2000), episode 96, "Red Sleigh Down" (11 December 2002), episode 114, "The Passion of the Jew" (31 March 2004), and Islam, episode 68 "Super Best Friends" (4 July 2001), which featured an image of the Prophet Muhammad (which was aired but now no longer streamed from the *South Park* Studios website given death threats from some Islamic organizations. *South Park's* religious satires have often been attacked by religious groups for their harsh caricatures.

creates gags that are funny for her readers. Fans relate to Buddha and Jesus because they are intimate and local—sharing the same frustrations, the same problems, and the same joys as their fans. In other words, in *Saint Young Men*, humor does not reduce the sacred to a pathetic caricature, but makes Jesus and Buddha, as Gen Yers living in modern day Japan, easily relatable.

The major appeal for fans is that Buddha and Christ live lives that are very familiar to their own. The saints are both 20 somethings you would not be surprised to meet on any Tokyo city street. Although the Son of God and an enlightened being respectively, they very much fit in the twenty-first century. Jesus is an *otaku* type, who loves PC games, blogs on Mixi ミクシイ, one of the largest social networking sites in Japan with over ten million users, does impulse buying, and compares himself to Johnny Depp. Buddha, the frugal one, likes to keep coupons for shopping, does silk screening, and is a bit fussy; he loves tidying up the apartment in his spare time. Although a wimp about trying new things, he is quite the stud at the municipal swimming pool in his swimming cap and goggles while Jesus, who has been known to walk on water as well as turning it into wine, is reluctant to dip his head under water. They do normal fun things like going to Asakusa Kannon in Tokyo to shop in the outdoor market, travel on the crowded downtown subway system, deal gingerly with their nosey landlord, spend all night reading manga and playing video games at one of the ubiquitous manga libraries and coffee shops (*manga kissa* 漫画喫茶), go to Tokyo Disneyland, and so on. As one fan comments: “The more that I read, the more that I think that Jesus and Buddha are a comedic duo [*manzai combi* 漫オ コンビ]. They’re not here as idiots, but rather Gods who are experiencing the life that we live. They’re hilarious together...” (Khursten 2008).

Fans are deeply attracted to the saints’ essential humanity.<sup>11</sup> They describe them as “extremely human like” (*hijōni ningenteki* 非常に人間的), “like ordinary people” (*ippan hittopoi* 一般人っぽい), and “common people like gods” (*shominteki kamisama* 庶民の神様). This makes these saints, who struggle with their passions much like anyone else, extremely fascinating. Fans relate to both their struggles as well as their

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<sup>11</sup> Fans find how the saints handle their earthly existence fascinating: “Does Jesus take his thorns off when he goes to bed? (I like his Prince-style moustache. I hope he doesn’t get sued by the diminutive purple person though)” (Lee 2008). “This is a minor point, but I took it seriously when Buddha, who is the thrifty guy, goes shopping at the supermarket, and goes ahead using an ‘eco-bag’” (Setsugetsutsuka 2008).

triumphs.<sup>12</sup> A thirty-year old female fan, for example, who started the comic after finishing Tezuka's *Budda* remarks, "[n]o matter how many times I read it, I end up laughing. You end up feeling sympathy for the situations Buddha and Jesus find themselves in, struggling with their worldly passions and so on. It's good—both of them being so human-like [*nin-gen rashikute* 人間らしくて]" (Ieda 2009). Another blogger comments: "Is this a religious parody? Pious believers probably won't be able to accept them, but I think that if gods who are quite human [*nin-gen kusai* 人間臭い] are cool, so what?" (Sumigorufu 2008).

As 'young saints' rather than gods, Jesus and Buddha offer readers a meaningful vision of how to live. Many fans comment that they are a guide for an alternative way of living. As the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger has argued, laughter can be redemptive; it can not only question but also replace our standard view of life with a new "finite province of meaning" that is spiritually significant, giving a new definition of self, society, and individual life practice (Berger 1997: 13). Such a view is typical for many of *Saint Young Men's* fans. In one online essay, "Happiness lying down in a tatami mat room," for example, a fan reflects on the comic's inside cover's image of the saints resting in their small apartment in Tachikawa:

When you turn to the first page, what jumps out at you is the image of two people lying down in a small six-mat room. Not saying anything, with laundry hanging out to dry, a notebook for updating a blog, and a manga being read, lying there in the warm sunlight. Two who have seen every possible form of human happiness and unhappiness and have gone beyond it, and now seeking a vacation in this world—this is too precious for words. Absolutely without using their power, and with no desire to be adored by anyone—just there feeling what it means to be happy by living an ordinary human life. You could call it 'worldly', yet perhaps you could also use different words and say that it represents the happiness that humans are most familiar with. Eating lots of caviar and expensive taro is good, but eating plain eggs in rice is good too. Boy, it's delicious. No matter how many times I look I cannot help finding it interesting even when these two are just standing in a line. In any case, I feel some real peace of mind in feeling that somehow the best pleasure is living an ordinary human life. It's not even because they like each other a lot or their compassion for each other.

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<sup>12</sup> For other fans, this leaves something to be desired. For some, Nakamura's manga about Buddha and Jesus in Tachikawa is blithely superficial. DPOEX, a reviewer on amazon.jp, for example, compares *Saint Young Men* to Bon Curry, the first heat and serve plastic pocket curry ever marketed in Japan, like the curry, which is made so bland that anybody can eat it, *Saint Young Men* is made for mass consumption. By being as inoffensive as possible, you can get a lot more people to buy your manga.

It's more the feeling of "Hey, it feels good to be by your side. It's good even if there is nothing special." (Makaroni-san 2008)

This fan has found in the comic a spiritual path that is not focused on the transcendent, but the immanent. This spiritual quest for peace here and now in what the Japanese historian of religion, Ama Toshimaro has called 'everyday happiness' (2005: 51). Fan accounts like that above offer ample proof that *Saint Young Men* offers a template for constructing their lives and identity.

However, beyond its redemptive vision of human life, the manga's power to make us laugh also bears scrutiny. Laughter can be spiritually liberating for fans. One fan describes it "as a gag manga with daring subject matter. . . . Its subject could only be raised in Japan—Nowhere is there anyone who's going to say, 'That's bad!'. . . . There's nothing at all in it that's harsh, risky or dangerous. It can make us giggle, and make us smile inside" (Pokoapokoa 2008). Or another, "[a]lthough the Christian fundamentalists who are scratching their heads are perhaps angry, if holy men were really so warm and comforting as this [*honwakashita* ほんわかした], I'd be happy" (Shuuru 2008). The typical words they use are 'really cool' (*hamatta* 嵌った), 'heart warming' (*honobono* 仄々), 'warm and fuzzy' (*howan to atataikai* ほわんと暖かい), 'gentle and light' (*yurukute karui* 緩くて軽い), and 'having a laid back feeling' (*mattarikan* まったい感). As Peter Berger has argued, humor like numinous experience has the power to disrupt 'the paramount reality' of ordinary life through the intrusion of another reality. That is "why saints and fools have often had an uncomfortable similarity" (1997: 65).

Many fans describe reading *Saint Young Men* as 'very healing' (*totemo iyasaremasu* ととても癒されます), offering 'healing laughter' (*iyasareru warai* 癒される笑い). *Saint Young Men's* humor is not parodic or sardonic. The manga is a light-hearted situation comedy. Like Tezuka's humor in *Budda*, it is generally benign, entertaining without being satirically demeaning and dismissive. Rather than a caustic attack on the absurdity of religion, *Saint Young Men* laughs at the silliness of modern life. Each of its episodes puts the saints in another amusing situation, be it running into foreigners at Asakusa Kannon to enjoying a nice day at Tokyo Disneyworld.<sup>13</sup> One reader comments, "[e]ven though it's a gag manga, it

<sup>13</sup> Japanese humor scholar Jessica Milner Davis notes that harsh satire tends to be avoided in a society that discourages overt displays of emotion and privileges (no matter how staged) a public veneer of harmony. This preference toward *huumoa* (フウモア),

was the best, yet, oddly enough, when I think of it, it feels like it heals me [*iyasu yōna kimochi* 癒すような気持ち]” (JWGI 2008). By ‘healing’, they mean that Buddha and Jesus’s silliness can liberate them from their everyday problems and anxieties. Its humorous episodes give readers an outlet to laugh out loud at it all. Consider the following comments:

One dull afternoon on my day off I picked it up casually and read it over and over again giggling. When it gets more popular, I wonder whether people may object to it, saying, “It’s indiscreet.” At least, I was saved by the quite human-like Buddha and Jesus in this comic book. (Tri-peaks 2008)

Before you say sacrilege—since the two [saints] are really good people, sweet and also funny, aren’t Buddha and Jesus saints just the same? While seeing their mutual consideration for each other is heartwarming... it can still make you laugh. Yes, that both care for each other is cool. I think that’s got to be a foundation of religion. Still, anyhow, while being heartwarming and sweet, [you get] great laughs. When I finished reading, I began to smile. (Inoue 2008)

It is a gag manga that’s very healing. This is probably a spiritual benefit that comes from Buddha and Jesus too... It’s a manga that makes you feel warm and fuzzy [*howan to atatakaku naru* ほわんと暖かくなる] with no depictions of extreme violence or sex. It’s a good story that is filled with a downtown kind of atmosphere, and it depicts ordinary everyday [life]... It helps me recover from the daily grind. (pommier, pomme 2008)

Here the notion of healing has several associations for Japanese fans. The term *iyashita* 癒した for miraculous healings appears in Japanese translations of the Bible, and, in the 1980s, in the popular works of cultural anthropologist Ueda Noriyuki for the ritual practices in traditional societies that restore people holistically within a ‘spiritual network’. More recently, it is tied to the *iyashi būmu* 癒しブーム of popular interest in the New Age human potential movement, including aroma therapy, reflexology, herbal and homeopathic medicine and Reiki. *Iyashi* and *iyashigakari* 癒しがかり are also terms associated with popular entertainers (*geinōjin* 芸能人) who can put their audiences into a relaxed and pleasant state of mind free from personal cares. Jesus and Buddha are just such sacred entertainers, if you will, who are reminiscent of Orikuchi Shinobu’s 折口信夫 classic *marebito* figures (稀人・客人). They too are divine travellers who revitalize human life through the power of laughter and good entertainment. That power is healing humor.

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which connotes gentle, kindly laughter, inverts the Western comic style, a fixture since classical times that places more critical and aggressive satirical humor at the top of the comedic hierarchy (Davis 2006: 7–8).

### Conclusion

This short essay adumbrates a vast topic. Walk into any manga bookstore and you will find thousands of books upon the shelves, a bewildering variety of genres and styles to suit every taste. At this point, while much work has been done by critics examining the nature of the manga as a visual media, the field of religious studies is just now beginning to take this major form of Japanese pop culture seriously. Why is such research important?

Manga remains a key form of mass media entertainment in Japan. Many religious organizations in Japan use the manga medium to disseminate their religious doctrines and messages to general audiences. But, as we have seen, beyond these cases of institutional religious propagandizing, commercial manga also often explicitly deal with religion and spirituality. Manga is important to study because it is pervasive. It remains a critical part of Japanese pop culture, along with its 'media mix' of TV series, anime, video games, and character goods, creates "a highly distributed and pervasive imaginary" which people use for entertainment and as a mode for spiritual reflection and expression (Ito M. 2003). Even in commercial manga, religious themes, images, stories, and figures occupy a significant place within that 'imaginary'. When Japanese read such *manga*, and discuss and reflect fundamentally about themselves, their world, and how to live, as the manga fans of Tezuka's *Budda* and Nakamura's *Saint Young Men* typically do, they engage in a popular religious and spiritual practice.

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