

REVIEW ARTICLE

## Shut Up, Zen Priest

### A Review of Minami Jikisai's *The Zen Priest Speaks* and Other Works

KUMAMOTO Einin 熊本英人

MINAMI Jikisai 南直哉. *Kataru zensō* 語る禅僧 [The Zen priest speaks]. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1998. ¥1,600 paper, ISBN 4-022-57218-3.

AOYAMA Shundō 青山俊董. *Michi haruka nari tomo* 道はるかなりとも [However far the path]. Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppansha, 1998. ¥1400 paper, ISBN 4-333-01871-4.

JOSEI TO BUKKYŌ KANTŌ-TŌKAI NETTOWĀKU 女性と仏教関東・東海ネットワーク, ed. *Bukkyō to jendā: Onna tachi no nyoze gamon* 仏教とジェンダ—「わたちの如是我聞」 [Buddhism and gender: “Thus have we women heard”]. Toki Shobō, 1999. ¥1,600 paper, ISBN 4-886-02175-1.

Kumamoto Einin is an associate professor in the Department of Buddhist Studies at Komazawa University, and an ordained Sōtō Zen priest.

Translated by Micah Auerback.

[EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION] This review article by Kumamoto Einin approaches the question of Buddhist identity in contemporary Japan from the critical perspective of gender. In his examination of the works under review, Kumamoto brings to bear his extensive knowledge of Buddhist and Gender Studies as well as his personal perspective as a Sōtō Zen priest to provide an at times scathing review of contemporary Japanese Buddhist institutions and their relationship to the issue of temple families, or *jizoku* 寺族. The first section is an introduction written especially for this issue by the author about his original review of these works and their reception in Japan.

### *Introduction*

This review was originally an article that appeared in issue 13 of the *Sōtōshū shūgakukenkyū kiyō* 曹洞宗宗学研究紀要 (*Bulletin of Sōtō Zen Studies*) of the Research Center for Sōtō Zen Buddhism, published in March 2000. As the word “review” suggests, it takes the form of an introduction to and review of three books: Minami Jikisai's *Kataru zensō*, Aoyama Shundō's *Michi haruka nari tomo*, and the collection edited by the Tōkai/Kantō Network for Women and Buddhism, *Bukkyō to jendā: Onnatachi no nyoze gamon*. However, the main topic of this article is not in fact a review of these books.

This article is an effort at theorizing about contemporary Zen priests. That is to say, it is a consideration of what contemporary Zen priests are trying to assert and of how they should link their own traditions and organizations to contemporary society. It also offers a perspective on the ideals and realities of the Zen sect as a religion in the contemporary period.

Without letting the cat out of the bag, I believe that my intent got through to most of my readers. However, after reading my article many Zen priests have been critical of my stance, and supportive of Master Minami's discourse, which I criticized. I was surprised to hear that Master Minami sent a letter of protest to the Research Center for Sōtō Zen Buddhism, taking it to task for carrying a one-sided critique of his book and demanding that they either apologize or allow him to publish a rebuttal in the *Bulletin of Sōtō Zen Studies*. He then had a similar exchange with me. One would think it only natural that when a book is published, it can be reviewed anywhere and in any fashion, but it seems that Master Minami does not agree. I think that Zen Master Minami's reaction indicates how far removed Zen priests' common sense and feelings of self-importance are from those of society at large. On a related note, I have heard absolutely no reaction from Aoyama Shundō, the female Zen priest whose text I criticized. In any case, I am convinced that Master Minami's reaction and the critical attitudes of the

other Zen priests toward me only serve to prove the accuracy of my analysis of Zen priests' writings.

One of the points of debate in this article is the “problem of *jizoku*.” The term *jizoku* is unique to the Buddhist community. In a word, *jizoku* are “the families of monastics, who live in temples” (however, this does not apply in the case of sects in the Jōdo Shinshū lineage). In concrete terms, it principally means the spouse of the temple abbot. This is a newly-coined term from the Meiji period, when monastics' marriage generally was permitted.<sup>1</sup>

In 1872, the new Meiji government issued an edict declaring, “Priests may do as they wish with regard to eating meat and taking wives.” It is not as though priests came forward and started to marry immediately upon the issuance of this edict. Upper levels in the various Buddhist organizations and priests who were in positions of leadership taught that this edict ought not to be obeyed and that the precepts should be kept, and they protested to the government in the same way. However, it is a fact that the history of Buddhism is also one of an intimate relationship with State power, and with this edict, the taking of wives by male priests increased at an accelerated pace. At the same time, it was only natural that temple succession should become a matter of heredity. Buddhist organizations persisted in the pretense that renunciation (or the observance of the precepts) was the highest ideal, but by the end of the Meiji period, the situation was such that even the organizations themselves had to acquiesce. This action was not based on any Buddhist doctrine.

This disconnect also manifests in the fact that the reason why female priests remain celibate even to this day has little to do with their individual faith. In 1873, female priests were permitted by the State the “forging of karmic ties” (marriage), just like male priests. Certainly, one reason female priests did not choose that direction may be found in their conviction that the precepts should be obeyed, but the image of nuns held by male priests and a male-centered society had an even greater effect. Therefore, the more nuns tried to be “good” nuns, the more pronounced the two-sided nature of emphasizing faith and reproducing gender became.

On the other hand, from the late Meiji through the Taisho periods, the existence of spouses for male priests came out in the open, and the protection of the *jizoku* started to be publicly debated within Buddhist organizations. However, neither the organizations nor the temples ever publicly recognized the spouses

1. The term *jizoku* literally means the “family of the temple priest.” In particular, it often refers to the spouse (wife) of male head priests, assistant priests, or former head priests. When I do not specify otherwise, the term as I use it here will refer to the spouse of a male priest. See my article “Sōtō-shū ni okeru ‘jizoku’ no go ni tsuite” 曹洞宗における「寺族」の語について in *Shūkyō kenkyū* (March 1995, vol. 37), and my article “Kindai Bukkyō kyōdan to josei 1: Sōtō-shū ni okeru ‘jizoku mondai’” 近代仏教教団と女性1—曹洞宗における「寺族問題」 in *Komazawa daigaku Zen kenkyūjo nenpō* (December 2002, vols. 13–14).

of priests. Even today, Buddhist organizations have not discarded the pretense of valuing renunciation and celibacy above all.

The *shūken* 宗憲, which currently functions as the Constitution for the Sōtō sect, was amended in 1995 to include the article, “We deem those who uphold the doctrines of our sect, and who live in the temple but are not priests to be *jizoku*.” Until that point, the *jizoku* were absent from the *shūken* and were instead relegated to the lower-order regulations titled “Provisions for Sōtōshū *jizoku*,” “Provisions for the pensions of Sōtōshū *jizoku*,” and so on. The actual spouses of male monastics were invisible within the Sōtōshū organization.

Furthermore, in this definition of *jizoku*, neither the words “spouse” nor “family” are used. Of course, this is in part because it includes temple residents who are not the spouses of abbots. However, whether it is a matter of spouses or children, this article specifies nothing about the nature of the relationship between the priest and the *jizoku*, his family. Further, there is no regulation, or interpretation, of the priest’s marriage, which naturally violates the precepts and is the cause for the existence of the *jizoku* in the first place.

The Buddhist community at large, and not just the Sōtō sect, has frequently discussed this “problem of the *jizoku*.” However, what has been problematized is not the invisibility of the *jizoku*, or the oppression based on that invisibility. What organizations problematized were only issues related to the management of the temple by the male monastic: the qualifications of the *jizoku*, the issue of inheritance, the problem of pensions, and so on.

There are still more serious problems at this point. One is the existence of “colonialist” ideologues who act as though they intend to restructure Buddhist organizations through a discussion of the *jizoku* problem.<sup>2</sup> Another is that with the problematizing of *jizoku* the “haves” among the *jizoku* have in every respect been given priority over the “have-nots.” As a result, the guarantee of the rights of the “haves” has been treated as the essence of the *jizoku* problem. Here there are definitely two aspects: the grab for rights and interests under the name of the “inheritance of the Buddha-dharma,” and the re-constitution of the hierarchy of priests among *jizoku*.<sup>3</sup> These are not problems limited to the *jizoku*, but

2. See the article I wrote with Kawahashi Noriko, “Jakusha no kuchi o karate nani o kataru no ka: Bukkyō-kai no josei no kenri no katari o megutte” 弱者の口をからて何にを語るのか——仏教界の女性の権利の語りをめぐる, in *Gendai shisō* (June 1998, vol. 26, no. 7).

The topic here concerns the true motive for discussions of the structure of sexism. There are some researchers who define the *jizoku* as victims of patriarchy who are “the weak,” and then advocate the liberation of “the weak” as their self-appointed representatives. However, these researchers, both men and women, are not themselves *jizoku*, and have no consideration for the priorities of those who are actually affected as *jizoku*. They shut the *jizoku* up into a realm of “liberation” based on their own political intent, which is not necessarily in accord with the subject positions and values of “the weak,” and thus obliterate those very subject positions. As a result, we are forced to conclude that they merely use the structures of discrimination to advocate the legitimacy of their own ideologies. See Kawahashi Noriko, “Feminist Buddhism as praxis: Women in traditional Buddhism,” *JJRS* 30/3–4 (2003).

have something in common with the position in which nuns and female lay believers are placed. These issues are also directly linked with the problems confronting women in society at large.

From this standpoint, the significance of the gaps between the assertions of Zen priests and the assertions of *jizoku* women that I took up in “Shut Up, Zen Priest,” or between the reactions to the article by Zen priests and those by the general readership, which were positive, should become clearer. In other words, what is at stake in discussions of contemporary Zen priests is the identity of male priests, brimming with a groundless self-confidence and unhesitatingly maintaining the pretext of valuing celibacy, as well as the identity of female priests, who reproduce a gender bias based on that pretext.

My discussion of contemporary Zen priests has indeed taken up only aspects of Zen priests that should be criticized. That is not all there is to Zen priests. It is easy to defend the position of Zen priests, and I, the author, do not disavow Zen priests or Zen Buddhist organizations wholesale. However, these assertions by Zen priests will never be acceptable to society at large. This is why—and it was no mere rhetorical flourish—I said, “Zen priest, shut up.”

I would like to add a little more about later developments involving Master Minami Jikisai. Master Minami, who clearly stated his opinions about Zen priests and *jizoku*, and who has been considered a fundamentalist Zen priest, recently married the daughter of the abbot of a certain Sōtō-shū temple. I have no intention of criticizing that. Of course, in his *The Zen Priest Speaks* and his other writings, Master Minami neither directly affirmed nor disavowed monastic marriage. However, this news has created something of a stir, so we await Master Minami’s new discussions of celibacy and of *jizoku*. At roughly the same time, Master Minami is striving to create a new sangha at a new practice *dōjō* in the Tokyo area, sponsored by a Sōtō temple. Master Minami is instructing priests in the question of “what kind of lifestyle does a priest lead?” and at the same time is continuing to talk about Zen and renunciation.

3. See my article “Tenkanki no jizoku mondai: Atarashii tera wa doko ni aru no ka” 転換期の寺族問題—新しい寺はどこにあるのか in the newspaper *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報 (April 17, 2001).

Since the latter half of the 1990s, the problem of Buddhism and women, including the *jizoku* issue, has increasingly been taken up by those very people involved—in other words, by women themselves, starting with the *jizoku*. We can find representative examples in the two books *Bukkyō to jendā* and *Jendā ikōru na Bukkyō o mezashite* ジェンダーイコールな仏教をめざして [Toward a gender-equal Buddhism] (Toki Shobō, 2004), which were edited and published by a group of *jizoku* and *bōmori* (the wives of chief temple priests in Jōdō Shinshū), nuns, female lay Buddhists, and female scholars of Buddhism. On the other hand, voices have been raised in opposition to the discourse of women themselves, by other women who are just as involved as they are. In other words, *jizoku* who wish to uphold the status quo consider the women who have subjectivity to be selfish and anti-Buddhist. However, the status quo that they wish to preserve is only for temples that are powerful or economically well-off. This is an effort to directly apply the hierarchy of male priests to that of the *jizoku*, and results in an unselfconscious cover-up of their oppressed position as *jizoku*.

Along the lines I have noted, for some Zen priests, the current Master Minami is their ideologue, and they will not discuss his earlier image. This too makes clear the contradictions that I have pursued in Master Minami's discourse. Finally, I would like to point out that this "groundless self-confidence" of Zen priests has something in common with contemporary Japan's "groundless self-justifications," for instance, the political movement toward the right demonstrated in arguments to revise the Constitution, or criticisms of the "masochistic view of history."<sup>4</sup>

*Minami Jikisai: Kataru zensō*

As he himself and others freely admit, Minami Jikisai was previously a polemicist for Eihei-ji. His work *Kataru zensō* was published in February 1998 by the Asahi Shinbun Press. As he writes in the "Postscript," this book is composed of essays carried in the Asahi Shinbun's monthly magazine *Ronza* 論座 from December 1994 to July 1997, along with some newly written material. *Ronza* is known as a journal of opinions (Minami himself accepts this): it has a somewhat dubious reputation as a publication read by people who wag their tongues

4. Debates about the interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, which mandates Japan's renunciation of war and forbids it from maintaining the means for war, have been reiterated since the promulgation of the Constitution. Debates took a more concrete turn after the establishment of the actual means for war (a military force) in the form of the Self-Defense Forces and their activities, and this has been one reason for the repeated efforts to revise the Constitution. There is no cause to attack the existence of such debates themselves.

However, particularly since the 1990s, criticism of Japan's history education and peace education as "masochistic" has intensified. For instance, it is held that to regard Japan as having invaded other countries in Asia in World War II, and as having committed atrocities there gives rise to a negative grasp of Japanese history, and that this is a form of state masochism and a negation of patriotism. Even textbooks based on this assertion have been published for use in the schools. Again, I am surely not the only one to reckon that the overseas dispatches of the Self-Defense Forces, from the 1992 Law Concerning Cooperation for United Nations Peace-Keeping and Other Operations, to the 2003 Law Concerning the Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq, have certainly not been exclusively for the sake of world peace and international cooperation. To deny the factuality of histories that are detrimental to the state, and to deny the authority of the "Constitution that was forced upon us" to forbid the state from maintaining the military capacity for self-defense (an army), cannot be considered apart from one another.

Further, arguments for the revision of the Constitution to allow Japan to maintain an army, and the tendency to criticize a "masochistic" view of history, have affected not only the traditional conservative strata of society, but also the youth, who up to this point have been uninterested in politics. This has given rise to a new kind of nationalism.

This phenomenon may be considered a "backlash against history," a backlash that has ignored all the contradictions created by the sudden shift after World War II from statism/ultra-nationalism to democracy. It is also a reaction to the rapid modernization and Westernization of Japan since the Meiji period. Further, the sudden Buddhist shift at the time of the Meiji Restoration from adherence to the precepts to a central focus on lay life has coincided with this backlash and has meant that various conflicts up to the present day have been ignored. In other words, we may analyze this issue not as a search for the identity of the State or the individual, but rather as an effort to compensate for the loss of identity altogether. This is the "groundless confidence" of which I speak.

with a certain sense of superiority, claiming to be “opinion leaders,” or who assert that they are qualified to be opinion leaders.

For a “Zen priest” like Minami, who is conscious of himself as a “principled” priest from the head temple, to speak to the worldview of the “Zen priest” in contemporary times is, in a sense, a matter of the “right person in the right place.” What could we expect of this Zen priest, and what did he say?

I would like to start by examining the contents of a letter Minami recently had published in *Chūgai nippo*. The “Reader’s Forum” column of the 30 October 1999 issue of the newspaper carried a letter by Minami, titled “Why we don’t need the category of ‘*jizoku*’: The problem of *jizoku* is not one of sexual discrimination.” Arguing that “raising [*jizoku*] to a status equal to that of priests would invalidate the meaning of practice in the temple,” he outlined the problem, defined what constitutes *jizoku*, and offered a solution, stating “I would oppose the idea of institutionally elevating the status of *jizoku* to one that is equal to priests.”

First, Minami says “the existence of priests’ marriage and spouses of priests is not a problem of doctrinal affirmation or condemnation, but a problem of acceptance from the standpoint of historical, social, and cultural circumstances.” He says, “I have no inclination to affirm the marriage of priests. Nor do I feel the need to condemn it. I simply tolerate it.” Even at this point, Minami already evinces an intention to distance “doctrine” from “historical, social, and cultural circumstances.” This is consistent with his “principled statement,” which he takes as his basic position.

Further, Minami has joked that “as long as there are women priests, there ought to be ‘husbands and sons’ (in the *jizoku* workshops), but I’ve never seen any.” This very statement presupposes that it is natural for women priests to uphold the precept mandating celibacy, and shows that when Minami speaks of “the spouses of priests” or “the marriage of priests,” he is not thinking about female priests. Is he even aware that he has succumbed to the stereotype that would in effect deny the possibility of “male *jizoku*”?

By creating a three-tiered system of ordination, with “renunciant” (*shukke* 出家), *jizoku*, and laity, and by then transposing onto those categories additional hierarchies based on blood ties, Minami presents “a proposal that is strongly ‘discriminatory.’” Taking “*jizoku*” as a “category,” Minami objects to “a proposal that gives them unconditional institutional guarantees.”

When I previously discussed the “*jizoku* issue” at the Sōtō Sect Research Group for Contemporary Doctrinal Studies, I touched on the issue of the rights of the *jizoku*. I held that it would be necessary to guarantee the *jizoku*’s “right to choose” a position equal to that of the priest, and that in the event of such a choice, it would be necessary to create a structure in the monastic training centers that would accommodate that situation institutionally. This is not the unconditional equality nor a form of renunciation (*shukke*) that he has described.

Minami says “[if after the death of a temple’s head priest,] the *jizoku* absolutely has to remain in the temple, then the spouse should be ordained as a precept-observing priest and become the successor head priest—nothing more, and nothing less.” I have shown that this is a problem of qualifications in one’s official position. In other words, I have highlighted the need to establish an environment and system whereby *jizoku* could realistically become priests, and also the need to clarify the position of the *jizoku* in the activities of the temple.

The following section, which seems to be the primary focus of Minami’s attention, also includes a serious problem, so I will quote it here.

The “*jizoku* problem” appears in a still more radical form in the case of the treatment of the “*jizoku*,” or temple spouse, when the head priest suffers a sudden death before a successor is ready. In the event that we were to allow the privileges of the head priest to be passed on intact to the *jizoku*, in recognition of the *jizoku*’s “contributions and service” to the operation of the temple, then the meaning of practice in the temple under the current sectarian structure would, in effect, vanish. Realistically, it would destroy the basis for the existence of female priests. I find this unpalatable. In our sect, it would mean a rupture in principle with the “teachings of Master Dōgen.” (p. 6)

We can safely say that this section epitomizes the issues at hand. First, Minami implicitly accepts the principle of succession for temple head priests (to put it in his terms, he neither accepts nor rejects it, as described below). If this is the case, then is he aware that the *jizoku* are therefore indispensable as the “sex that gives birth”? Second, Minami supposes that the *jizoku* would unconditionally be allowed to become priests or head priests, and holds that this would destroy the meaning of training in the temple. But is the significance of training to be set not by those who train, but by those who do not?

A further problem is that Minami treats the “invalidation of the meaning of training in the temple” as synonymous with the “destruction of the basis for the existence of female priests.” This shows that Minami does not view male and female priests equally. Why is it only the “basis for the existence of female priests” that would be destroyed by “making *jizoku* into priests” or “invalidating the meaning of training in the temple”? Of course, there should be no discrepancy between males and females in the “significance of training in the monastery.” So why is it that only female priests should be controlled by the practice of other precept-observing priests? Even if we take this to mean that there would simply be two kinds of priest among women—those who have gone through training, and those who have not—the gap between the significance attached to female precept-observing priests and to male precept-observing priests fails to be resolved.

Next we have his statement concerning a “rupture in principle with the ‘teachings of Master Dōgen.’” By “principle,” does Minami mean the elevation



of celibacy above all else? Master Dōgen has, at times, been said to have advocated this elevation during his later years, and in his *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 and monastery rulebooks, he laid out detailed rules for life in the monastery and their significance. However, what Dōgen meant by “renunciant” (*shukke*) was probably not limited to those who strictly observed those rules. Despite this, for Minami to further stress a “rupture in principle” at this point is to do nothing more than express and emphasize his own “principles.”

Minami concludes: “I believe that the category of *jizoku* is superfluous. The spouse of a priest would suffer no inconvenience from being ordained as a precept-observing priest, a lay practitioner, or as a general householder.” However, the *jizoku* problem is not a problem of “category” or “rank” as Minami suggests. It is a problem of how temples and people are actually working.

Minami shows awareness of his own “principled statement,” but is his argument distinct from “historical, social, and cultural circumstances”? Why is he able to separate the “inadequacies of the institution” in the *jizoku* problem from “the problem of sexual discrimination”? Why is he able to draw a line, saying that “if we were to suppose the existence of ‘sexual discrimination,’ then it would be in the relationship between ‘a man and a woman’ that happened to take place in the temple, and most certainly not between a priest and the *jizoku*”? The basis for these conclusions is completely unclear.

I am not saying that Minami discriminates against women or *jizoku*, or that he condones such discrimination. The problem is that while at first glance he appears to be extending a helping hand, in truth he lacks adequate consideration for the realistic and concrete aspects of the problem, and his position ends in a detached, indifferent critical analysis.<sup>5</sup>

To press the point: even though he speaks of the protection of human rights, Minami is actually doing nothing more than protecting his own rights. In reply to the publication of his aforementioned letter, several counter-arguments were published, and Minami in turn issued responses. Some readers might have already seen the exchanges. Leaving aside the particulars, I would like to return to the positions Minami takes in *Kataru zensō*.

First, in the section, “1. The Origins of My Renunciation,” which was newly written for his book, Minami speaks not of the “reasons” for his renunciation, but rather of its “origins.” The narrative begins with his encounter with a young foreign man, via a letter from Slovenia. The young man wrote him a letter to the effect that, “I would like to be a Zen priest, and will be coming to your *dōjō*, so take me in.” Minami was primarily in charge of dealing with foreigners in what he refers to as “our *dōjō* [the head temple for the Sōtō sect, Eihei-ji].” The author of that letter arrived right on schedule, on the date that he had specified

5. With regard to this point, the reader is referred to the article I wrote with Kawahashi Noriko detailed in footnote 2.

in the letter. In response to the youth's plea—"I want to be a Zen priest; I want to learn the proper way to live"—Minami simply declared that it would be impossible to accommodate him institutionally. At the same time, he reminisced, "Here was a person who ought to renounce the world. Here we had someone who had been exposed to the keen harshness of life, who had personally experienced the 'impermanence' [Jpn. *mujō* 無常, Skt. *anitya*] of the world and the 'ignorance' [Jpn. *mumyō* 無明, Skt. *avidyā*] of people. Perhaps he doesn't know those words yet, but that's exactly what he's talking about. He is a person who ought to become a renunciant" (p. 11).

Minami has harshly criticized the "renunciation" of "those who wish to be renunciants" as actually meaning "evasion" and "dilettantism."

Renunciation, as when a person who has experienced the keen harshness of life, in a true way that would be incomprehensible to any others, acts to cut off something that is most difficult to cut off from oneself. This is what I have come to believe is meant by the renunciation of Shakyamuni and the patriarchs of the sect. (p. 14)

Minami recalls that although he sympathized with the Slovenian youth, who had felt the keen harshness of living, "I was unable to find the confidence to take on his feelings." As a result, he effectively tricked him out of his "renunciation," and from this Minami relates the "origins of his (own) renunciation." He narrates in a frank manner the problems in his life that led to his renunciation, and the anguish over the difficulty of living he felt as a young man. There is no reason to nitpick about half of Minami's life, though it includes some slightly shocking stories (or at least, stories he presumably told with the intent to shock). However, as we read on, we often feel a vague sense of unease. Why is this?

For Minami, renunciation appears to be an expression of the difficulty of living. He writes, "I had no idea what kind of person was meant by the word 'friend,'" but that, "when I entered the training *dōjō* and found other people who were my comrades, sharing the suffering with me, for the first time I had a true sense of the meaning of that word" (p. 36). What is meant by this isolation and solidarity? What was Minami able to gain from entering the training *dōjō*? Let's look at a few passages, in connection with the previously mentioned *jizoku* problem. For instance, Minami says the following about "human rights."

I cannot understand the words "human rights." "Human rights" seems to be a keyword at the moment. Leaving aside surface appearances, upon what do the people who argue so vociferously for human rights base their argument? If we consider the basis for the term "human rights" to be stated as "all people are born free, and with equal rights," then at this point even a child could see that that is nothing more than sheer fantasy. In order to make such an irresponsible claim, advocates of human rights have no choice but to say such

things as “God made people like that.”... I follow the teaching of the “impermanence of all things” [Jpn. *shogyō mujō* 諸行無常], so I can’t advance any idea that includes the notion of “God.” However, I am not trying to deny looking at things through the lens of “human rights” altogether.... Therefore, what I intend is not to reject the existence of the problem, but to see if we couldn’t approach this problem without the notion of “God.” Why would I think so? As I have stated above, if we take the concept of “human rights” as an absolute good, to be pursued to the bitter end, then human society will be destroyed. This is certainly the case. If one argues that God made human beings “free and equal from birth,” then anything that restricts that freedom after birth would fundamentally be nothing more than an evil impediment. If these are removed, and the whole of humanity, which is on its way to reaching ten billion in the not-so-distant future, pursues “freedom and equality” to its heart’s content, then something as preposterous as the destruction of the earth could occur. So I would like to try changing the terms used for thinking about the problem. What if we were to say “position” rather than “human rights”? “Respect for human rights” is “to esteem the positions of others,” or “to help them save face.” Thus, “a violation of human rights” would be to drive someone into a situation in which they “have no position,” and “to make them lose face irrevocably.”... “Position” is the standing determined by one’s relationships with other people. As this is the case, those relationships are supported for legitimate reasons and make sense, and, therefore, above all must be based on mutual satisfaction among their members. I designate that “morality.” What supersedes “freedom” is this “morality.” (pp. 150–52)

If this is so, then in the case of the *jizoku* that we have been discussing, the lack of a “position” or of “face” would be the problem, and that would be a violation of human rights. How far is Minami telling us to pursue “position” and “face”?

Where on earth is Minami when he talks about the words “human rights”? In all aspects, Minami places himself outside of the picture, and conducts his analysis as though he were looking down on the lower world from the realm of the gods and Buddhas on high. This view is apparent in the following passage as well.

If so-called traditional Buddhism claims to be trying to return to reality, I believe that a necessary and crucial factor for this is consciousness of the monastic precepts. Before the problem of whether a priest is single or married, there is the problem of whether a priest has the consciousness to lead an outstanding lifestyle, the sort that makes others say, “It’s no wonder that person’s a priest.” (p. 99)

This pronouncement must stem from Minami’s confidence that he has already reached such a level. In any case, despite having such confidence, why in his relations with others does he search for his own priestly identity? Might he not simply be intoxicated with his self-image as a reformer or savior?

Although I have given Minami a critical reading up to this point, I do not intend to deny all of his pronouncements. Even in the sections I have quoted up to now, there are many points with which I can agree. Minami offers incisive readings of the present situation, and gives clear answers. What could be the source of such confidence? But there are contradictions lurking there. What are the impressions that one feels, not only from Minami, but from other Zen priests, as well? Something tells us that it is the sense of ease carried by Zen priests who have been in the lineage since birth—a sense that their Buddhism is correct, that people have an obligation to feel gratitude toward them, and that their parishioners have no choice but to rely on them. Or is it the sense of ease carried by Zen priests who, like Minami, have had the experience of giving rise to the desire for enlightenment, leaving lay life and entering the Buddhist path? (They think that their Buddhism is ultimately correct and that even if they are criticized by others, they know true Buddhism. They also have a feeling of superiority that comes from having experience as a Buddhist.) In any case, we may surmise that it is a sense of ease without foundations.

However, this “Buddhism” does not transcend the realm of the experience and knowledge of the Zen priests spoken of here. Through this “confidence without foundation,” the priests’ lack of subjectivity is skillfully concealed, perhaps even without the priests noticing it themselves. They never ask what Buddhism means to themselves. Even if they do ask, as Minami does, their answers satisfy and pacify no one but themselves, and lack both the universality of religion and any consideration for others. The “Buddhism” of which they preach is nothing but what they have experienced, and can be expressed in no form other than in comparison with others. What is being asked for here is, in fact, Minami’s identity.

Our existence is in our relationships. Therefore, fulfillment of our existence is the fulfillment of our relationships. And the fulfillment of our relationships lies in seeking out the greatest possible parity and diversity (but not the greatest quantity!) in our connections with others. If this is so, then a rich and fulfilling life for us is actually predicated on the differences in our relationships. I believe that it is therefore a matter of being able to differ, to accept those differences in one another, and in the end to enjoy life together. (p. 69)

*Aoyama Shundō: Michi haruka nari tomo*

At this point, I would like to touch on the autobiography of another Zen priest. Aoyama Shundō’s book, which is the revised edition of her 1987 book *Ima ni inochi moyashite* 今にいのち燃やして [Burning with life, now]. There is no particular need for me to introduce Aoyama, beyond noting that today she is a nun who is able to speak not only for the Sōtō sect, but also for the whole of Japanese Bud-

dhism. I have no intention whatsoever to criticize Aoyama's activities here. The half-a-lifetime described in her book is the true life of a Zen priest, pious and lacking in any point to criticize. However, I worry that her account gives expression to some values that are occasionally concealed, and which seem to contradict the "Buddhism" of which she speaks. Those values emerge in a section having to do with Aoyama's actions.

For countless generations [my family] has planted and cultivated the seeds of Buddhism, and my uncle, aunt, cousin, and niece have all without exception continued to cultivate karmic relationships with precept-observing priests. I cannot avoid the feeling that I have come into this world to be overwhelmed and protected by the power of their Dharma, and to take their virtue, their hopes, and their prayers as my own. With no striving on my part, I have easily been able to enter the Buddha-gate; and with no striving on my part, I have come this far with no trouble. This is not my virtue. I have merely walked, led by the invisible merit accumulated by my ancestors over countless generations. I think only of walking in a way that will avoid doing anything irreverent, or that would damage that virtue. A large number of people wishing to renounce the world come to my temple and convent, but I am used to seeing them unable to go through with it. On the other hand, I am also used to seeing people who were born and raised in temples, steeped in the Buddha-dharma, but who leave those temples unable to rejoice in Buddhism, or who are forced against their will to become successors and take on responsibility for those temples. In either case, I think the results are karmic recompense for the deeds of the ancestors. (p. 15)

Here Aoyama preaches about karmic connections from previous lives. Again, she writes:

The Buddha is the truth in heaven and earth. In obedience to the commands of the Buddha and the truth of heaven and earth, I must not do anything incongruent with that Path, no matter how much I want to. This one point is a clear rule. I am always asking the questions: What does the Buddha say? What is the Path? The standards for everything in my life are exhaustively determined in this way. (p. 28)

Here she preaches of the will of Heaven (the Buddha), and of discarding the self to live in accordance with the commands of the Buddha.

But are this thoroughgoing modesty and this model of discarding the self, really the proper mode of life of the Buddha? This may be something about which Aoyama is absolutely clear, and is supported by the Buddhist Path. It is probably a conclusion she is able to offer only because of her Buddhist practice. But what effect will this have on those of us who are not solidly confirmed in our wishes for the Path, and who are "deluded humans"? The "Buddha-

dharma” that Aoyama preaches winds up concealed on the level of “karmic connections” as they are generally understood, or of “gratitude” and “piety.” Even if this is just an expedient means, and Aoyama is really trying to say something else, this is how her words will likely reverberate in the world.

And then there are the nun’s problems as a woman.

The student nuns around me one by one succeeded in their love affairs and disappeared, leaving me alone. They bragged: “Rather than go it alone, we’re going to work together in our training and bring our missionary work to fruition,” or “I’m going to blaze a new field for nuns who do not shave their heads.” And what about me, when I saw off these friends? I put on a sympathetic show, and offered them examples of worthy people who in the past had balanced the paths of marriage and faith: “Martin Luther married the nun Katherina von Bora, and working together they were able to reform a corrupt religion,” or, “Even while continuing his married life with Eshin-ni, Saint Shinran deepened his faith, and proselytized.” Turning on my masters, I offered the going-away present of encouragement to the two who left the convent gate among glares of reproach. But one day, I examined the bottom of the hearts of my friends who had married and returned to lay life making such boasts and my own heart—I who had only been able to see them away, playing the sympathizer, and finding all kinds of splendid things to tell them that would rationalize their actions. Then I noticed that something entirely different was at work. Although I had said high-sounding things to cover myself, what made me say those things was nothing more than the deluded desires of a simple woman, or man. I was finally able to understand that even when I said things that sounded wonderful, it was my longing to be a normal woman, a wife, and a mother—my instinctual cravings—that had made me say those words. Perhaps you could say that, having reached adolescence, I was again questioning my own faith in the path to renunciation.... I agonized over the matter as best I could, and it took an awfully long time for me to come to the conclusion that the two paths of marriage and practice were not compatible, and that I was seeking a world attainable only by abandoning everything.

(p. 66)

For starters, what do those “glares of reproach” mean? Are they really in response to someone’s breaking the Buddhist precepts and falling off the Buddhist path? The circumstances of life as a nun are affected not only by the Buddhadharma, but clearly also by the historical perception of nuns in society at large.<sup>6</sup> This is not the Buddha’s power; it is a trap set by gender.

But even setting aside terms like “gender,” Aoyama must recognize the structures in question. It is precisely because Aoyama knows that her own situation

6. See my article “Sōtō-shū ni okeru josei-shi kenkyū” 曹洞宗における女性史研究 in *Shūkyō kenkyū* (March 1999, vol. 41).

has no connection with gender that she is able to speak of her Buddhist community without raising herself above it. However, we must admit that at this point, at least on the level of discourse, for “deluded human beings” gender makes its appearance in a way wholly unrelated to Buddhism (though this fact goes unnoticed). The “Buddha’s path” and “renunciation” for Aoyama ought not to be any such thing.

Religion is, if in nothing else, epitomized in the point of “abandonment.” When someone asked Saint Ippen, “teach me the most important piece of religious wisdom,” he is said to have replied, “Only when you abandon.” It is a realm that even someone as great as the Buddha Shakyamuni could attain only when he abandoned his concubine and his son Rāhula and risked his life in practice. How is it that deluded people like us could perfect this path, with a wife, children, property, reputation, and even our secular work, on our hands? One of the phrases for the time of renunciation and ordination is “To cut one’s hair is to cut off the root of lust.” When one cuts off all deluded thoughts, symbolized by the root of lust, and makes a 180-degree turn in values by turning away from the fulfillment of that lust—that is the time of renunciation and ordination. Because people are entirely unable even to make the first step, even after their ordination their desires continue along profane lines. It is then only natural that the Buddha-dharma be used for the satisfaction of those desires, dispensed in measured doses. The temple, which ought to be a place for parishioners to participate in zazen and hear the Dharma, a place of practice for priests, and a space for proselytization, has now changed into a residence for the head priest and his family. Someone who has a family, ensconced in a private castle of delusions, is no renunciant but rather a householder. A disciple of the Dharma cannot set a foot inside that enclosure. Thus it is only natural if places for the cultivation of Buddha-disciples disappear, leaving only secular desires to be cultivated in a secular lifestyle. And it is only natural if temple management is prioritized for the sake of taking care of the wife and children. A head priest is not a head priest simply because he lives in a temple. He is so because he dwells in the Dharma and upholds the Dharma. He takes his very own body and devotes it to redirect the karmic merit of the ocean of the Dharma-vow; and he uses this very body as a tool to support the Dharma. This is the practice of limitless abandonment. This practice is zazen, *nenbutsu*, or prayer. It is only when it develops to become the basis for the whole of one’s life that one’s actions will be without error. At least in the case of Catholicism, priests and nuns are chaste for their entire lives, and continue communal living. Shakyamuni, too, made the abandonment of one’s wife, children, reputation, and property the precondition for renunciation, at the same time showing that one who has renounced these things must always be together with his or her comrades. A weak person will slide when alone. It is only when people on the same path

support one another that practice of the path is possible. This very thing is what we call a sangha (*sōgya* 僧伽), or Buddhist community. The term *sō* 僧 is by nature a plural term, and in the case of just one individual is not used. Now, however, priests take wives, temples are mistaken for the residences of families, and thus is born the misunderstanding that temples are private property. Rightfully speaking, what the disciple inherits from the master ought to be the treasure of Dharma, but at some point this Dharma-inheritance was transformed into the physical inheritance of the temple property. It is clear that this warped form of Buddhism in today's Japan is neither the Buddha-dharma that will be the salvation of tomorrow's world, nor is it Zen. This is something that both those who transmit Buddhism and those who receive it must pay attention to. (pp. 228–30)

This is a severe criticism of the current situation of Buddhism, and of the way of life of male priests. Particularly with regard to her comments on temples, I hold exactly the same idealistic feelings.

However, even if we accept Aoyama's own problems as such, who exactly is she addressing with these comments? Is she speaking to contemporary male priests? Is she recommending renunciation to regular people? Or, is she urging nuns to raise their self-esteem? Further, for those known as *jizoku*, or for the minority of male and female priests who are racking their brains for ways to apply the Buddha-dharma to the current situation, what meaning can her call to abandon everything have? On the level of general understanding of the term "abandonment," her argument will only further entrench society's stereotypes about nuns.

*Josei to Bukkyō Kantō-Tōkai Nettowāku, ed.:*  
*Bukkyō to jendā: Onna tachi no nyoze gamon*

While we have this kind of discourse from the Zen community, we also have a set of books produced by networks of women who are trying to find subjective modes of engagement with Buddhism. One such book is *Bukkyō to jendā: Onna tachi no nyoze gamon*. As Imai Masaharu 今井正晴 writes in his preface to this book, "For the Rebirth of Buddhism" (p. 3): "Contemporary women have heard and understood Buddhism thus. We would like to relate this understanding for the sake of the rebirth of Buddhism." This is a collection narrated principally by women within Buddhist organizations.

[The Kantō/Tōkai Network for Women and Buddhism] was launched in the spring of 1996 as the Tōkai Network for Women and Buddhism, primarily composed of women from the Nichiren sect, the Ōtani and Honganji branches of the Jōdo Shin sect, and the Sōtō sect in the prefectures of Aichi and Mie in the Tōkai region. One of our initial goals in our monthly meetings was to gain an awareness of the existence of sexual discrimination throughout



the Buddhist community, regardless of sect, and to analyze the current situation through the exchange of information between groups. In other words, female Buddhists who had until then been separated and scattered in different places were trying to forge links to learn from one another's struggles, and act and speak publicly together. In response to this development, Buddhist women in the Kantō area, who had been sporadically holding "study meetings" for the past several years, started the Kantō Network for Women and Buddhism in the spring of 1997. At the present time, we have set up a close relationship between the two networks, and are continuing our activities.

(p. 14)

This book is not what I would call a collection of research studies. The writers include (female) priests, the wives and children of temple head priests, and lay Buddhist believers. They discuss issues of women and contemporary Buddhism from standpoints as varied as those of researcher, temple activity coordinator (if we were to venture to apply a different term to "jizoku," it would be something like this), missionary-proselytizer (in the same sense as the previous term), and believer (of course, some individuals occupy more than one of these positions at the same time).

Kawahashi Noriko's 川橋範子 "Purorogu: Bukkyō to gendai josei: Shūha o koeta taiwa kara" プロローグ — 仏教と現代女性 — 宗派を超えた対話から explains their intention thus:

What we attempt in this book is to uncover concrete facts telling us what contemporary women connected to Buddhism are feeling, what they are thinking, and how they are acting. As previously mentioned, we are not searching for just one site for the surgery that will heal contemporary Buddhism of its sexist character. Although each of us has overlapping experiences, our experiences also differ. As is made clear in this book, women carry out a variety of activities in temples. Even as we maintain our links to society, we are trying to find our *raison d'être* in the temple, and we believe that this mode of living must be a matter of deliberate choice for those women at local temples.

(p. 20)

At the same time, this is connected with the following critique: "Within Buddhist organizations, the problem of discrimination against women has almost always been discussed either by male priests, or by researchers from outside those organizations. Ironically, the question of what improvements we may expect under the current situation has been discussed in a way that ignores the subjectivity of women" (p. 21).

This book was not intended to present any particular uniform scheme, but for the sake of convenience, we may divide it along two broad lines. First, there is a theoretical discussion that seeks to raise questions concerning scholarly analysis and contemporary society from the standpoints of Buddhists and Buddhist

scholars. This approach characterizes the first and second sections, and the first half of the third. [Editor's Note: The second part of the book presents the experiences and practices of women living within Buddhist institutions and their discussions of discrimination and hopes for reform. These will be dealt with below.]

First, there is a consideration of the history of doctrine since Shakyamuni by Nagata Mizu 永田瑞 and Tsuruoka Ei 鶴岡瑛. Nagata's article, "Shakuson no joseikan o kangaeru: 'Umare o touna, kōi o toe'" 釈尊の女性観を考える——「生まれを問うな、行為を問え」 bases its perspective in the teaching of *Suttanipāta* 462. Pointing out the opposition between "Ask not their birth, but their actions" as a standard for the value judgments of Shakyamuni and later views within Buddhism, Nagata urges contemporary women to awaken and raise their voices.

Tsuruoka's article, "Mappōshikan to josei sabetsu ni tsuite" 末法史観と女性差別について adduces as a decisive factor in Buddhist discrimination against women the "teaching that a woman's body is not a vessel for the Dharma (*nyoshin hi-hōki setsu* 女身非法器説)." Tsuruoka hypothesizes that the Tathagata's "mark of having a penis retractable like a horse's (*onmezō sōkan* 陰馬蔵相観)" is really only his "possession of one of the thirty-two auspicious signs that he has gained enlightenment and become a Buddha." Further, according to her interpretation, this mark was generated from the ascetic necessity of male priests, and because it in fact denotes the absence of a penis, it was a mechanism by which the road to Buddhahood could be reopened to women.

These articles have the drawback of not always using the methodology of Indo-Buddhist studies, but are important for pointing out the existence of problems.

Next, there is the socio-historical consideration of perspectives on women in Japanese Buddhism by Mori Ichiu 森一雨, Toba Itsuko 鳥羽隼子, and Sugawara Ikuko 菅原征子. Mori's article, "Nichiren no joseikan" 日蓮の女性観 [Nichiren's view of Women], shows that Nichiren's perspective on women was not discriminatory in his original writings, but that it was later interpreted that way by male priests.<sup>7</sup> She proposes a project to grasp the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra and the letters of Nichiren. Toba's article, "Shinshū no joseikan o kangaeru: *Myōkōninden ni miru josei no 'teisō'*" 真宗の女性観を考える『妙好人伝』に見る女性の「貞操」, illustrates and analyzes discrimination against women in the *Myōkōninden* of the Jōdo Shin sect. Sugawara's "Shinkō to josei no kegare: *ketsubonkyō shinkō ni miru josei no jikoshuchō*" 信仰と女性の穢れ——血盆経信仰にみる女性の自己主張, analyzes from the point of view of the followers of its cult the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, which is offered as an exemplar of a discriminatory perspective against women. Sugawara then attempts to re-evaluate the text from the perspective of its social functions.

The working hypothesis of this piece by Sugawara will likely incur criticism from the perspective that the phenomenon of discrimination is the phenomenon

7. This article was translated by Benjamin Dorman and appears in the *JJRS* 30/3-4 (2003).

of discrimination, no matter what interpretation is made of it, and should be roundly censured. However, as I will mention later, in the analysis of the phenomenon of discrimination, not only is third person objectivity important, but so, too, is the position of the party involved. This is wholly distinct from denying the importance of the work of re-investigating the phenomenon of discrimination.

Part of the structure that oppresses women in Buddhism (or Buddhist organizations) that has been discussed here has already been talked about. What is fresh about this work is that it does not treat Buddhism merely as an object of study or criticism, but rather promotes the revival and better functioning of Buddhism. Certain readers may find it apologetic; what is argued here is not perfect, but it should be taken as asking anew what is right and what is wrong, and of offering a subjective support for Buddhist faith. This is not a kind of Buddhist fundamentalism, disconnected from reality, of the sort that stresses a return to Shakyamuni or the sectarian patriarchs. Rather, it is a painstaking analysis of elements that have been misread in a male-centered history, and an attempt to recreate (male) priests and Buddhist organizations that have been male-centered and have rationalized discrimination against women. One of the points indicated by Sugawara, in particular, deserves our attention as a perspective for contemporary research not limited to the problem of interpreting gender, but for the entire study of modern and contemporary Buddhist history:

As much as possible, one must investigate the truths of the past with reference to the perspectives and values of the people of society at that time. However, I am struck by the feeling that we are so eager to condemn the past for its actual state of discrimination from contemporary perspectives and values that we not only fail to learn from the efforts of our predecessors, but also unintentionally encourage the elision or suppression of historical events. (p. 106)

This could be taken as a criticism that might also be applied to the promoters of the self-styled “liberal perspective on history” (*jiyū shugi shikan* 自由主義史観) nowadays. [Editor’s note: See footnote 4 on “masochistic” history].

The two essays in section three, “Kyōdan, seido no naka no josei” 教団、制度の中の女性 [Women in Buddhist organizations and institutions], have a deep connection with the *jizoku* problem discussed earlier, so here I would like to discuss them in some depth.

Watanabe Noriko’s 渡辺典子 article, “Joseisōryo no tanjō: Nishihonganji ni okeru sono rekishi” 女性僧侶の誕生—西本願寺におけるその歴史, focuses on the emergence of female priests in the Nishi-Honganji subsect of the Jōdo Shin sect in 1931. It also discusses trends within the sect since the Meiji period, the significance of the birth of female priests, and topics for the future. In the Shin sect organization, which includes priests’ wives (*bōmori* 坊守), the wives have been asked only to have a sense of their roles as female proselytizers. This more or less means their assignment in the sexual division of labor. At the beginning,

the possibility of female priests, or female head priests of temples, was so unthinkable that it wasn't even proscribed. Here we can see that the schema shared by both established Buddhist organizations and modern Buddhists was one of "men (who would educate and lead) versus women (who would be educated)," and that women were not positioned outside of this role even by leading Buddhists at the start of the modern period, such as Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 or Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之.

On the other hand, in opposition to the modern (male) Buddhists, who were against women's liberation, female priests were finally ordained. This came in conjunction with the women's liberation movements of Buddhist women's associations after the Meiji period, and the movement for women's civil rights by those associations in the Taisho and early Showa periods. However, institutionally these women were treated in a discriminatory manner when compared with male priests. Moreover, even after females were permitted to become chief priests after postwar democratization, discriminatory tendencies continued. Watanabe ends her piece by saying: "I would like to express my sincere hopes for the future creation of a new 'history of men's and women's participation in the organization' by the next generation of clerics, who will act from the standpoint of liberation from 'sexual discrimination.'"

Ukō Kikuko's 烏向貴久子 article, "Tera ni ikiru onna no ibasho to seido: Shinran no tsuma to musume wa nan to miru" 寺に生きれ女の居場所と制度 — 親鸞の妻と娘は何と見る, clearly demonstrates the discriminatory nature of the positioning of *bōmori* in the Ōtani sect of the True Pure Land movement. She clarifies the doctrinal tradition that regards women as inferior and the history that has forced women into a position of subservience. She then indicates paths of liberation from these. She shows that there has been a rejection of the possibility of "male *bōmori*," and that now there have been movements that could strengthen the sexual division of labor. In the case of the Ōtani branch, as in the previous case of the Honganji branch, in 1942 women were allowed to become priests, but this was an emergency measure in response to the wartime shortage of male priests, and discrimination with regard to women's certifications was strict. In response to mounting opposition to discrimination against women (there was also external pressure), in 1991, women were allowed to become temple head priests. However, there is a great sense of concern that on the contrary, this is leading to a situation that promotes discriminatory attitudes about *bōmori* and women in general, in the interest of preserving the vested interests of the organization and the (male) clergy.

This is precisely the same as the situation in the Sōtō sect, as Minami has repeated in his public statements. Ukō makes the following comment about the development of *bōmori* issues in the Ōtani branch of the Jōdo Shin sect:

Reading the explanation for the intent of the proposal [to change *bōmori*

from position to designation and, with regard to the term itself, to make the spouse of the head priest a *bōmori*, but to extend temporarily the period in which this will not apply to the spouse of a female head priest],<sup>8</sup> we see that although the organization repents of the sexual discrimination that it has enforced, and regrets the old character of its sect organization (*shūmon* 宗門), since women are equal to men in terms of the sect's bylaws, all who wish to be active are encouraged to come forward and apply for qualifications. While the *bōmori* today are an inconveniently visible form of sexual discrimination, male priests who do not wish to give up their vested interests seem to be telling women that they need not remain content with the inferior position of *bōmori*, but rather that they should be licensed as priests and assert their rights on par with men. They have not noticed that their thinking is limited by latent sexual discrimination and the sexual division of labor. I would like to take a close look at “sexual difference,” “gender roles,” and the real situations in which we are placed, and to create temples and institutions that accommodate both men and women. (p. 144)

As Ukō says, “Even if we wish to change the discriminatory situation against women in the organization, the male head priests who hold the right to vote in the sectarian assembly barely move at all on the issue. So, in order at least to have the right to vote in the Ōtani branch, I became a priest and obtained my teaching license” (p. 128). She is therefore able to be involved in a variety of activities to stop discrimination against women. More than anything else, she worries that “although in recent years there has been a striking increase in women standing up to demand their independence, haven't there also been some who pursue liberation in the wrong direction?” (p. 143). “Liberation” is not closed or limited merely to one-sided units like the individual, the Buddhist organization, or women. Rather, “the movement of ‘Thus We Women Heard’ takes the standpoint of gender, and will certainly free not just women but also men as well, and will shake temples and Buddhist organizations out of their complacency” (p. 144). This expression of a strong will and desire for the re-birth of Buddhism suggests a truly momentous turning point in modern Buddhism.

The articles following these take up the second category, namely that of the experiences and practices of women who live within Buddhist organizations, and women who have met each other in Buddhist faith. They show how contemporary Buddhism (Buddhist organizations) is discriminatory, point out ideals, and propose efforts toward the rebirth of the tradition. The frank stories of these women clearly reveal the conflicts in contemporary Buddhism, and are the very essence of this book. The facts related here not only make the case for their ideals, but also are themselves historical materials valuable for the study of the current state of modern and contemporary Buddhism.

8. Explanatory note added by author.

It is not possible to discuss all of these pieces in depth. Unrin Zuihō's 雲輪瑞法 article, "Nisō yori mita gendai Bukkyō hihan" 尼僧より見た現代仏教批判, argues that criticism of Buddhism is a test of oneself. Seno Misa's 瀬野美佐 article, "Aru zendera no kazoku no shōzō" ある禅寺の家族の肖像, takes up the instance of the Sōtō sect temple in which she was born and raised, and describes the history and problems of priests' families in temples from the time of World War II to the present. Kagamishima Mariko's 鏡島真里子 article, "Jiin ni okeru josei no kūkan" 寺院における女性の空間, gives a detailed case study of the reality and ideals—conflicts included—of the practice of religious activities by women who were born in temples, or who married into them. Akita Nami's 秋田奈美 article, "Josei no ikiyasui otera o: Jisedai no joseitachi e" 女性の行きやすいお寺を—次世代の女性たちへ—, and Obata Junko's 尾畑潤子 "Shinshū no joseikan' kara no kaihō: Tasha to no kakawari no naka de" 「真宗の女性観」からの解放—他者との関わりの中で show their own engagement with the reality of gender roles in the Sōtō sect and the Ōtani branch of the Jōdo Shin sect respectively.

Sakakibara Naoko's 榊原奈央子 essay, "Watashi no kare wa obōsan" 私の彼はお坊さん [My boyfriend is a priest], relates the problems surrounding a woman who is considering marriage with a male priest, about to enter a temple. This work of fiction, which depicts the problems of a young couple in the Sōtō sect, uses cases of third-party criticism and analysis to depict the gaps in consciousness between the (women of) society at large and male priests, and between researchers and the authorities in the sectarian organization. This is similar to the critique leveled by Sugawara.

Next, Majima Jōkei's 馬島浄圭 article "Gendaiban nisō no kokuhaku" 現代版尼僧の告白 not only describes her religious activities in the face of daily reality, but also articulates a perspective on nuns that has been regulated by gender and created based on social and cultural demands. This has elements in common with the sense of dissonance that I felt when reading Aoyama's book.

In her article, "Zazen shūgyō kara mita Bukkyō" 坐禅修行から見た仏教, Yamada Keiko 山田恵子 interrogates the qualifications of priests as leaders based on her experiences sitting zazen, and points out in her roundtable discussion: "The [problem in the] Buddhist world is not so much one of gender opposition between women and men, as the sense that, viewed from the outside, Buddhism as a whole, for both women and men, is no longer any good, which is to say that the temple system itself has broken down" (p. 230). This is not a mere criticism of the present, but a summary of the contradictions that have emerged in the modernization of Buddhism since the Meiji period. Further, although this criticism seems to resemble the earlier analysis by Minami, it is completely different in the sense that Minami stressed not the contemporary position of Buddhists but of "male priests."

Studies of early modern and modern Buddhism have all, more or less, been

conducted to oppose the notion of Buddhist decadence. Recent critiques of Buddhism from the perspective of Women's Studies have in part been nothing more than a revival of these theories of Buddhist decline. This book, meanwhile, has taken the position of Buddhism and gender, and has shown the possibilities for new action and thought that will lead from the present to the future. At the same time, it questions whether such a future will be born from detached, scholarly criticism.

The trans-sectarian network of these women has framed the problem of gender discrimination in the Buddhist world structurally, and by creating a shared consciousness as female Buddhists, has led to an effort to restructure Buddhism itself. The contributors differ in their standpoints, consciousness of the problems, and methodologies. The fact that Imai, the author of the preface, is the only male writer in this book makes us think of a group of women, united among themselves, raising their voices in protest. On the other hand, we may expect that some will deride the book for suggesting that the assertions of women even require the seal of approval of a male researcher. As we have seen, however, it is clear that this book does not envision men and women in an antagonistic relationship, but rather offers a new and constructive proposal for religion and feminism that wholly dismisses such opinions.

We will have to take seriously the following call by Kawahashi: "We are critical of the contemporary Buddhist community, which has rationalized discrimination against women, but we also believe that a Buddhism that has been re-evaluated from the point of view of women could send a strong message to redress contemporary gender discrimination in society, culture, and politics" (p. 22).

In this essay I have contrasted the accounts of Zen priests and the women writing for the volume edited by the Kantō-Tōkai Network for Women and Buddhism. "Buddhism" is clearly not the same for the two groups. Of course, I do not intend to define all people in each group using these accounts. However, it is certain that the existence of each group, both within the Buddhist community and in society at large, is becoming more and more visible through the positions taken by those in power and by efforts to get the word out through various activities.

Given this state of affairs, who then is a "Buddhist"? How should Buddhists act?

Zen priests who live for the Buddhist path, and regulate their lives by the rules of the monastery, have considerable influence, particularly through their writings. Morality and gender are actually just conventions constrained by society and the times. We need not judge which is correct, but I would like to see people demonstrate what is in accordance with the Buddha-Dharma. I have no intension whatsoever to condemn everything about Zen priests who haughtily preach liberation from common sense, and who ever so effortlessly explain that Buddhism must be thus. But I will say this: Shut up, Zen priests. Where are you? I can't see you.