

The Religious Consciousness and Activities of Contemporary Japanese Women

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The role of women in religion continues to be laden with contradictions. Although it is often women who maintain religious practices in the family and are most zealous in proselytization, organizational structures are overwhelmingly male-dominated. This paper examines the results of a survey of religious consciousness and practice among women in two Japanese religious groups, Risshō Kōseikai and the Episcopal Church of Japan, focusing on the issues of individual faith, family practice, and traditional concerns relating to ancestral rites. The analysis indicates the degree and direction of change in the attitudes and practices of these women, and the reasons why male dominance has never been challenged by them.

IT IS A HISTORICAL FACT that religion in both the Eastern and the Western worlds has repressed and discriminated against women. Yet, although such repression is by no means a thing of the past, it is also true that religion has served as a liberating force for women. In modern Japan, for example, it has provided them a means to transcend the social limitations forced upon them, as with the many women who have founded New Religions. Yet even the New Religions, once established, tend not to give their ordinary rank-and-file women adherents the opportunity for the same gender-transcending self-fulfilment that their founders experienced. Instead, the women faithful have maintained the traditional image of women, shouldering the responsibility for family ancestral rituals. Although women are zealous in discipline and proselytization and generous with their time in building their organizations, overall leadership has been dominated by men (and the larger the group the more this has tended to be true).

Why is it, one wonders, that religious groups continue to attract large numbers of women despite this male control? Is it a desire for

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salvation on the part of women brainwashed into believing the Hindu and Buddhist teaching on the “five impediments” or the Confucian teaching on the “three obediences”?¹ Is it a type of “strategy of weakness,” in which authority and influence are paradoxically acquired by putting one’s husband on a pedestal (HARDACRE 1984, pp. 208–21)? Or could it be that the housewives who make up the majority of the women adherents in these groups just cannot find another niche outside the home where they can carry on social activities?

Religious Groups and Their Women Members

SURVEY GOALS AND SUBJECTS SURVEYED

In this essay I hope to clarify the directions in which the religious consciousness of today’s women is moving, basing my conclusions on a 1993 survey of the thought and activities of contemporary rank-and-file women believers. I chose as the subjects of my survey members of the Episcopal Church of Japan located in Tokyo; members of congregations of the Buddhist-related New Religion, known as Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, located in Tokyo and in northern Kantō; and students attending a seminary run by Risshō Kōseikai. I also surveyed a number of ordinary students at two universities (a women’s university and a coeducational university, neither of which is religiously orientated) in order to compare responses with those of the younger members of the religious groups. The survey, employing a multiple-choice questionnaire on which the respondents did not write their names, could only be carried out with the cooperation of the religious groups, so that a random sampling was impossible. Part of the questionnaire was the same for everyone surveyed, and part was altered to fit the respective groups. Essentially it was a survey of women from the two religious groups, but for the sake of comparison a small number of males was included as well. The ordinary university students I surveyed included an almost equal number of males and females.

Christian religious bodies such as the Episcopal Church are generally considered “established religions,” while Risshō Kōseikai is generally regarded as a “New Religion.” The Episcopal Church of Japan had its beginnings in 1887; in 1941 a portion of the church merged with the United Church of Christ in Japan; after the war (1945) it reestablished

¹ The teaching of the five impediments holds that there are five obstacles preventing women from attaining Nirvana. The teaching of the three obediences says that women must be obedient to men all their lives: to their fathers in childhood, to their husbands in maturity, and to their sons in old age.

itself. Risshō Kōseikai was founded in 1938 after breaking off from Reiyūkai 霊友会, a Nichiren-affiliated group founded in 1930. Both traditions are, of course, expressions of world religions, Christianity and Buddhism, respectively. The former, though established in Japan, traces its lineage through the American and Canadian Episcopalian Church to the Church of England born in 1534 during the Reformation; the latter is one of the numerous New Religion offshoots of the Nichiren sect (established 1253), a school of what could be called the indigenized Buddhism of the Kamakura period. The former has a history going back a little over a century; the latter, a little over half a century. The former, with its worldwide (though principally American- and English-based) organization and its clerical hierarchy, forms a stark contrast with the latter, a form of Buddhist laicism. Both share a common characteristic, however: though the majority of believers are women, few women occupy positions of leadership in the groups' decision-making organs.²

Since Risshō Kōseikai is now involved in international religious cooperation with Christianity and other religions, I felt that a comparison between it and the Episcopal church would be meaningful. I do not regard these two religious bodies as examples of the old and the new; if there is any difference to be seen, it is between indigenous product and foreign import, or between a tradition that showed dramatic post-WWII growth and one that did not. My aim in surveying mainly women was to discern general differences between the two religious traditions (and within the same religious tradition depending on age or region); my purpose in including some males was to clarify which aspects of religious consciousness are related to gender and which are not. Let me now attempt to shed some light on the religious activities and views of women believers in present-day society.

FAMILY RELIGION AND PERSONAL RELIGION

It is a well-known fact that when one adds together the membership figures for the various religious groups in Japan the total comes to

² Both Christianity and Buddhism have a long history of discrimination and repression with regard to women. During the second wave of feminism starting in the late 1960s movements arose in the various Christian denominations to allow the ordination of women. The stance of the Catholic Church on this matter has been completely negative, but in 1992 the Anglicans called on the various national churches to make their own decisions; women have since been ordained in some of them, though not yet in the Episcopal Church of Japan. Most of the Buddhist traditions, established sects as well as New Religions, are lagging in the area of reform due to notions of female impurity and the above-mentioned doctrine of the five impediments. Even the *Lotus Sūtra*, a sūtra renowned for preaching salvation for women, continues notions of male superiority through its teaching that women must be reborn as men before they can attain Nirvana.

about 210,000,000, or nearly twice the population of the entire country (see, for example, AGENCY FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS 1993, pp. 30-31). According to these figures, supplied by the groups themselves, Shinto has approximately 100,000,000 adherents and Buddhism about 90,000,000. These statistics come about because of the multilayered belief system in Japan, with Shinto defining itself as a community-based religion incorporating everyone in the nation and Buddhism defining itself as a household-based religion comprising everyone in families registered with Buddhist temples as *danka* (parishioners). The figures considered most reliable in these statistics are for the Christian churches, since these churches count their followers on an individual basis. The figures for the New Religions also reflect a certain stress on the individual, but even here some groups retain a strong tendency to count adherents on a family basis, so that many of their "believers" are listed in the Shinto and Buddhist categories as well.

A further point to keep in mind is that in surveys of people's religious beliefs conducted by the mass media, approximately one-fourth of those interviewed respond that they have no religion (NHK YORON-CHŌSA-BU 1991, pp. 87-97). When we narrow the focus to the younger generation the proportion rises to nearly two-thirds. At the university where I teach, the number of students claiming a religious affiliation in the regular annual surveys comes to around 15-20%.

We are talking here of the individual's sense of personal faith. In my 1993 survey, of those claiming a religious affiliation 50% were Christian at the women's university and 30% were Christian at the coeducational university. The figure was 40% for Buddhism at both universities, and 10% for the New Religions. No one indicated that he or she was Shinto. When asked about their family's religion about half of the respondents said the family had a religion and about half said it did not. Approximately 70% of the respondents who answered in the affirmative gave Buddhism as the family religion; Shinto, Christianity, and the New Religions each accounted for a little over 10%. What this indicates is that those whose families are Christians or followers of one of the New Religions often identify their family religion as their personal religion, whereas those whose families are associated with established Buddhist sects or Shinto frequently do not.

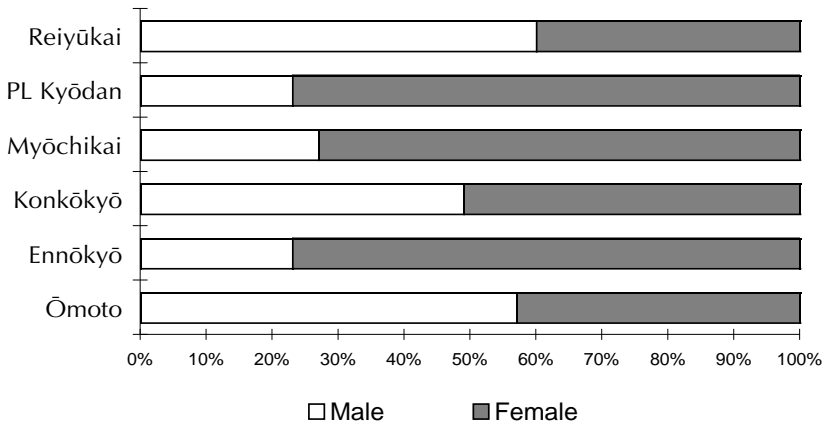
Another point that should be stressed is that approximately 60% of the young respondents who are unaffiliated with any particular religious sect or group indicate that they nevertheless believe in the existence of kami, spirits, and a world after death. This appears to be a belief based on feelings rather than upon firm convictions. There thus appears to be a notable tendency in the younger generation, or

even in the Japanese populace as a whole, to remain aloof from religious groups and yet still maintain religious sentiments or worldviews. Those lacking any religious affiliation and showing no interest in religious matters whatsoever represent only one-third of the population, even among the young. University students appear quite reluctant to commit themselves to a particular religion, perhaps because of the recent conflict and fanaticism linked to fundamentalism in various religions. When one looks at gender differences, one finds that, on the whole, women are from 10 to 20 percent more positive towards religion than men are.

WOMEN ADHERENTS

Now let us see the proportion of women adherents in several religious groups and their positions within those groups. The statistics released by the Agency for Cultural Affairs list separate figures for the male and female religious leaders in the respective religious groups, except for Rishō Kōseikai, where only combined totals appear. It often happens that a religious group will reveal the total membership figures but will refuse to give a breakdown for males and females. The Episcopal Church of Japan, one of the two groups targeted for my survey, identifies the proportion of male to female adherents as approximately 1 to 3 (in a total of 57,052 members) (AGENCY FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS, 1993, pp. 78–79), while Rishō Kōseikai (6.5 million members) would not provide me with statistics regarding the gender distribution of their religious leaders or adherents as a whole.

Figure 1 shows the ratio between male and female instructors in some of those New Religions that do make public such figures. Those in which the percentage of women instructors is high are Ennōkyō 円心教, PL Kyōdan, and Myōchikai 妙智会, in that order; in Konkōkyō 金光教 the percentages are roughly the same; in Ōmoto and Reiyūkai less than 50% of the instructors are women. No correlation exists between these figures and the genders of the founders. One cannot engage in facile discussions of the place of women in religious groups until one has carefully investigated such factors as how the male-female ratio among instructors relates to the male-female ratio among general adherents and clarified the conditions for instructorship or ordination in the respective religious groups. Interesting though these topics are, in the absence of solid data they will have to be left for a future study. What we can say at this point is that most religious organizations in Japan still calculate their membership in terms of households, or that they either find it unnecessary to compile gender-based breakdowns or do not wish to make such figures public.

Figure 1. Ratio of Male/Female Instructors in New Religion Groups

Let us next look at the age makeup of female adherents. The data from respondents in the northern Kantō Rishshō Kōseikai (hereafter Kantō) congregation and the seminary are not relevant here, since the former members were artificially divided into age groups of ten women each, while the latter were, of course, of similar age. However, the data for the Rishshō Kōseikai congregation in Tokyo and the Episcopal Church of Japan show a close-to-natural distribution. The Episcopal Church has a wide range of ages, from the teens to the eighties, with the largest groups comprised of women in their fifties (33%) and sixties (27%). In Rishshō Kōseikai the range is from the twenties to the sixties, with the largest groups in their forties (40%) and fifties (34%). The tendency toward fewer younger members may be related to the move away from organized religion seen among youth in general. Hence it seems accurate to say that most of the women seriously involved in religious activities are middle-aged housewives whose child-rearing days have ended and who thus have leisure time available.

When we compare the educational backgrounds of the members of the two groups we find some conspicuous differences. Adherents of the Episcopal Church show an even three-way split between graduates of universities, junior colleges/technical colleges, and high schools; this gives this group a higher average level of education than that of the average Tokyoite. In Rishshō Kōseikai we see more variety: in the Tokyo congregation 2% are university graduates, 48% are high school graduates, and 46% are middle school graduates, while in the Kantō congregation 16% are junior college graduates, 62% are high school graduates, and 20% are middle school graduates. The high levels of education seen in Episcopal Church members may have been influenced by the church's location in the Yamanote, or uptown, section of

Tokyo, and by its connection with Christian schools that pioneered higher education for women. The Tokyo congregation of Risshō Kōseikai, on the other hand, is in a lower-class neighborhood. The higher educational levels seen in the Kantō congregation may be related to what I suspect was the participation of leader-level members of the congregation in filling out the survey questionnaires.

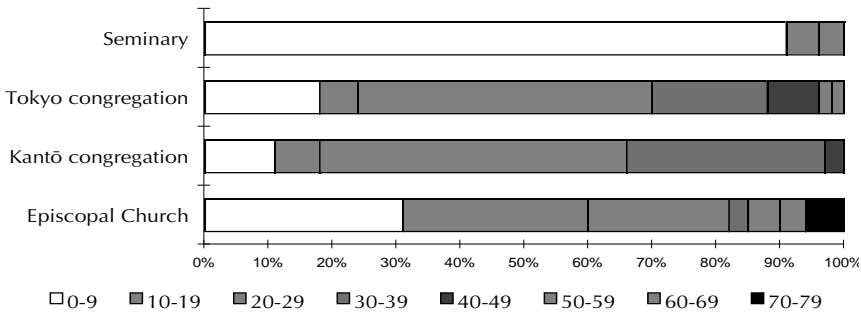
The occupation most commonly claimed by women adherents in all groups is “housewife,” with 85% identifying themselves as such in the Kantō Risshō Kōseikai group, 74% in the Tokyo Risshō Kōseikai group, and 63% in the Episcopal Church group. These figures increase by 3–4% if those who identify themselves as “housekeeping helpers” are included. Given that the majority of women nowadays are employed (whether full-time or part-time), the figures for Risshō Kōseikai are quite high. According to a survey carried out by Risshō Kōseikai in February 1991,³ 75% of its female adherents in the 20–40 age bracket living in the Tokyo metropolitan area categorized themselves as “unemployed,” a finding basically similar to mine. In the Risshō Kōseikai survey the percentage of permanently employed was a low 2%, while in mine it was slightly over 10%; the reason for the difference is, I believe, that Risshō Kōseikai restricted its survey to women of an age still occupied with child-raising. Finally, “teacher/instructor” was claimed as an occupation by nearly 30% of those with higher educations (students at Risshō Kōseikai seminary and members of the Episcopal Church, though in the former case this almost exclusively meant instructors in Kōseikai, while in the latter case it meant teachers in ordinary schools).

The Religious Consciousness and Religious Activities of Women Adherents

JOINING A RELIGION: MOTIVES, THE PROCESS, CHANGES

When asked their reasons for membership in their respective religious groups, 30% to 40% of the respondents replied, “Because it is my family religion.” It was particularly those in their twenties and thirties who gained a new awareness of their family religion as their own religion; almost all the students at the Risshō Kōseikai seminary were young second-generation or third-generation members of this type. Among first-generation female converts, 60% of the Episcopalians joined before they were twenty, while 46% of the Risshō Kōseikai members

³ See page 5 of “Fujinsō no raifusutairu ni kansuru ishiki chōsa” [Survey of housewives’ attitudes regarding lifestyle], an unpublished document compiled in 1991 by the Fukyō Kaihatsu-ka [Propagation development section] of Risshō Kōseikai.

Figure 2. Age of Joining the Religious Group

joined in their twenties and 23% in their thirties (figure 2). The age difference can be explained by the fact that women tended to join the Episcopal Church while they were students in the Christian middle schools, high schools, and universities, whereas most converts to Risshō Kōseikai entered the group after marrying and settling down as housewives. Converts in their seventies, however, are found only in the Episcopal Church; most such women appear to be seeking a faith of their own after being parted from their husbands by death.

It is family members—particularly mothers, mothers-in-law, and older sisters—that are most active in pressing people to join a religious group. This is true in both of the groups surveyed and for children of both sexes. It is generally the mother of a family who joins first, then urges the children to become members. This finding supports the widely held opinion that it is women who are the main proselytizing force in any religious group. In the Episcopal Church the main reasons given for joining were the exhortations of the mother (27%) and those of friends (20%), the latter figure pointing to the connection between conversion and school education. In Risshō Kōseikai what stands out are the exhortations of the mother (29%) and those of neighbors (15%), the latter figure suggesting the extent to which the group's proselytization activities are rooted in the neighborhood.

Reasons for joining differ among the groups surveyed, and are quite varied. In general the motives of the Episcopalians tend to be doctrinal and social in nature, those of the Risshō Kōseikai seminarians rather individualistic, and those of the Tokyo and Kantō Risshō Kōseikai members more family-oriented (table 1). These dissimilarities are probably due to such factors as the differences in the various groups' teachings and in the educational backgrounds of the adherents, as well as to generational differences. When asked what prompted them to join the Episcopal Church, members mentioned such things as "the services," "the sermons," "the teachings of the Bible," "parti-

| Table 1. Motives for Joining Religious Group (Top 5 out of 12 Items) | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Episcopal Church | | Risshō Kōseikai | |
| | | Seminary | Tokyo/Kantō congregations |
| 1 | Preaching | Founder's (Head's) teaching | To pray for ancestors |
| 2 | Spirit of service | Beauty of the dharma | Sickness (own or in family) |
| 3 | The doctrine | Psychological worries | Beauty of the dharma |
| 4 | Volunteer activities | Human relations | Founder's (Head's) teaching |
| 5 | Sickness (own or in family) | To pray for ancestors | Volunteer activities/ Family discord |

pation in church functions,” and “what the catechist said,” in that order. Among the younger generation in both the Episcopal Church and the Risshō Kōseikai the overwhelming factor was “participation in group functions”; the many second- and third-generation adherents appear to deepen their identification with their groups through participation in religious events. In the Tokyo and Kantō congregations of Risshō Kōseikai the most common factor was “what the *michibikioya* 導き親 (spiritual guide) said,” cited twice as often as “participation in group functions.” This clearly shows that, for housewives, personal interaction with the spiritual guide is a stronger motive force for joining the religion than participation in religious events.

This interest in personal interactions is symptomatic of a change in Risshō Kōseikai. During the group's earlier years the cofounder, Nagamura Myōkō 長沼妙俊 (1889–1957), had a huge impact on women adherents because of her strong spiritual powers, but as the number of people who knew her decreases the group has been shifting towards an emphasis on doctrine.⁴ What the members are seeking is a teaching (*hō* 法) taught through interaction and human warmth, such as that offered by Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬, the other founder. It is also clear that people have a greater liking for the face-to-face talks with the *michibikioya* than for the *hōza* 法座, the traditional group counseling.

This emphasis on interaction with the people who teach and act out the teachings seems to outweigh interest even in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the central text of Risshō Kōseikai. Indeed, new adherents generally have no knowledge of the sūtra's teachings at the time they join the group. This is perhaps not as curious as it may seem at first glance. Although

⁴ In the group's survey (see n. 3 above) there is no mention of spiritual experiences or spiritual powers.

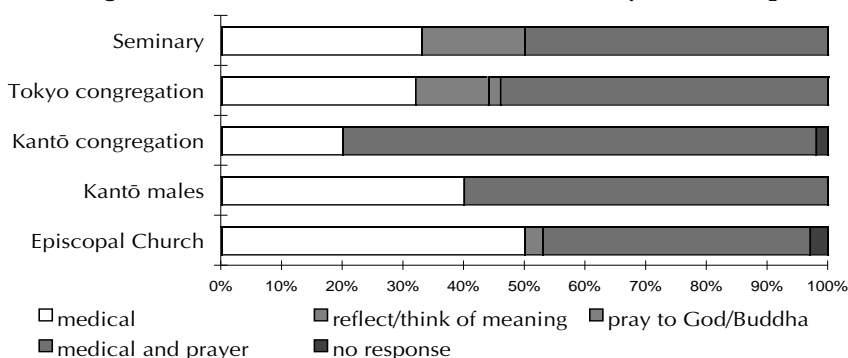
the *Lotus Sūtra* is the most popular of the many Buddhist scriptures, it is rarely read for content—those who read it during ceremonies generally just chant the words. In contrast, the Bible is found in nearly half of all Japanese households and is read even by people who are not Christians. Thus it is hardly surprising that members of the Episcopal Church would cite “divine services” and “the Bible” as factors that motivated them to join. There is thus a clear difference between the two religions in the function of their sacred scriptures.

“Sickness” is given as a reason for joining by followers of every religion, though with differences of degree. It is, indeed, natural for people facing physical or mental crises to seek help from religion as well as from medical treatment. Still, those who rely *only* on faith and prayer are exceptions in any of the religious groups. Reliance on medical treatment during sickness is highest among the Episcopalians, while the tendency to see a divine intention in sickness and draw a message from it is most frequent among the young people attending the Kōseikai religious college (figure 3).

FAMILYISM AND UNIVERSALISM

Both Episcopalians and Risshō Kōseikai followers displayed the same patterns of response when questioned as to how they had changed after joining their respective groups. About 13% of the young people failed to answer, indicating perhaps that those who remain in a “family religion” do not experience a clear change of heart or mind. Most believers (over 60%) commented that the greatest change they had experienced had been in their “basic attitude.” Although this response might seem characteristic of the Japanese religions, which tend to be introspective in nature, it should be noted that the same result was obtained for the Christians. The next most frequently mentioned change was in the believer’s “way of living” (approximately 50%). What is conspicuous in the replies of the Episcopalians is the number who said there was a change in “the criteria of what is good and bad” (42%), followed by “growing interest in the world” (27%); among adherents of Risshō Kōseikai such responses were superseded by “changes in character” (40%), “satisfaction in life” (30%), and “family relations” (30%). It would appear that the latter group tends to be less oriented towards a universal morality and the accompanying interest in society and the world.

A similar tendency is seen in the topics discussed in the *hōza*. From 70% to 80% of the matters discussed among the Kōseikai women (most of whom, it will be remembered, are housewives) concern personal or family problems; this is hardly surprising, given the limited

Figure 3. Sickness, Medical Treatment, and Prayers for Help

social experiences of women and the confessional nature of the *hōza*. Here the men differ considerably from the women, since over half of the topics in their discussions relate to the workplace, to the community, and to political, economic, or international problems. With men the *hōza* are not so much occasions for discussing faith experiences as social chats; perhaps the self-consciousness of males prevents them from baring their selves to others.

Among the students at the Risshō Kōseikai college, 15% did not respond to the question on *hōza*. Few young people attend *hōza*, and among those who do some never speak. Privacy is a major concern—even in Risshō Kōseikai’s own survey some respondents complained that “things I’ve said in the *hōza* have leaked and become the subject of gossip,” or “I cannot say what I really think” (see note 3, pp. 37–38). The *hōza*—the forum for candid repentance and guidance that has characterized Risshō Kōseikai ever since the practice was adopted from Reiyūkai—has with the passage of time lost importance as a religious activity and fallen out of favor with a generation increasingly concerned with privacy (TAKAGI 1973, pp. 49–50; HARDACRE 1984, pp. 54–58). It might also be that feelings of communal solidarity based on commonly shared religious experiences are weakening. The orientation of the younger members towards “group events” may be regarded as expressive of this trend.

Episcopalians report that of the topics discussed in church (a situation admittedly different from the *hōza*) about two-thirds are problems of faith and about one-third are personal, family, or social problems.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND BELIEF IN A WORLD AFTER DEATH

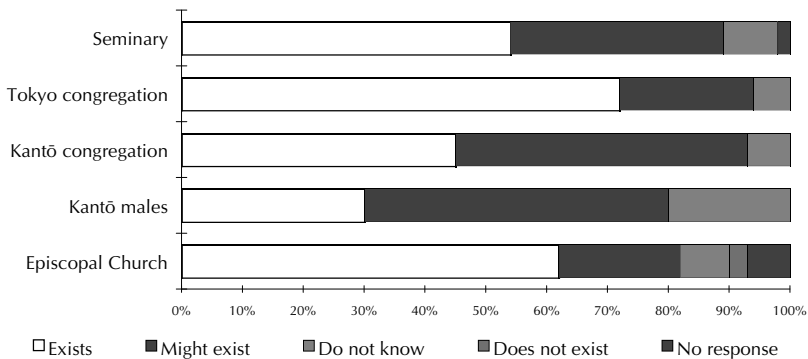
About half of the people in Kōseikai’s Tokyo and Kantō congregations reported spiritual experiences, while in the seminary only a little over a tenth did. The high percentage of people reporting spiritual experi-

ences in the two congregations suggests that a considerable number of the respondents were leader-type members; many of these people, presently in their forties and fifties, claim to have had their first spiritual experience in their teens (40%) or twenties (20%). The fact that so few of the students at the seminary, who are now in that age group, have had such experiences would seem to indicate a future decline of the number of people with spiritual powers. Has higher education acted as an impediment to religious experience? Not necessarily—one of the requirements for becoming an instructor in *Kōseikai* is the attainment of spiritual experience, a requirement that does not apply to those at the seminary. In the Episcopal Church a little over one-tenth reported religious experiences, while among ordinary university students the figures were 20% for the girls and 10% for the boys. It should be kept in mind, though, that the term “spiritual experience” is quite imprecise and can have a variety of meanings depending upon the respondent’s personality and religion.

Beliefs in a world after death show a similar variety. Sixty-three percent of the Episcopalians, 72% of the Tokyo *Risshō Kōseikai* congregation, 54% of the religious college students, and 45% of the women and 30% of the men in the *Kantō* congregation believe in an afterlife. If we categorize those who answered “It might exist” or “I do not know” as sceptics, then in the Episcopal Church sceptics amount to 27%; in the seminary 45%; in the Tokyo congregation 28%; and in the *Kantō* congregation, 55% of the women and 70% of the men (figure 4). The figures would seem to indicate that there are more male sceptics than female, and yet men are extremely keen when it comes to memorial services for their ancestors, perhaps because of their role as head of the household, one of whose responsibilities is performance of the family rituals. One might also see it as a result of the world-affirming teaching of *Risshō Kōseikai*, which regards memorial services not as something by which one accumulates merit or prays to attain buddhahood in the afterlife, but as an expression of overflowing gratitude for having received the gift of life. On this point the Christians hold much the same attitude. One also sees in their responses a variety of concepts regarding the Resurrection. Finally, no one among the believers denies the existence of a world after death, while among the ordinary university students about one-third deny it.

ABSOLUTENESS OF ONE’S OWN BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER RELIGIONS

In recent years many religious groups have started to stress such things as religious harmony and mutual understanding; they have ceased confrontation with other religions and have adopted a stance

Figure 4. World after Death

of dialogue and cooperation. In order to gauge the effects of this trend I inquired about attitudes towards, interest in, and knowledge of other religions. The results were as follows.

The percentage of respondents who felt unable to compare their religion with another was 67% among the Episcopalians; 24% among the Risshō Kōseikai seminarians; 30% among the Tokyo congregation; 20% among Kantō congregation males, and 10% among Kantō congregation females. The statement “All religions boil down to the same thing” found agreement from none of the Episcopalians; from 20% of the Risshō Kōseikai college students and Tokyo congregation members; from 10% of the Kantō males, and from 15% of the Kantō females.

“My religion’s teaching suits me” was agreed to by 27% of the Episcopalians; 50% of the Risshō Kōseikai college students; 20% of the Tokyo congregation; 30% of the Kantō men, and 43% of the Kantō women. “My religion is better than other religions” found agreement among 3% of the Episcopalians; 4% of the Risshō Kōseikai college students; 28% of the Tokyo congregation; 40% of the Kantō men and 33% of the Kantō women. The contemporary stress on understanding other religions and avoiding of value judgments has influenced the thinking of the young strata in the Episcopal Church and Risshō Kōseikai, but less so the middle-aged-and-over members of the Tokyo and Kanto Kōseikai congregations. Many of the latter remain convinced of the superiority of their own religion and proclaim it openly in proselytization activities.

How great is the knowledge of other religions among those surveyed? Only 17% of the Episcopalians reported a knowledge of Buddhism. About 50% of Risshō Kōseikai adherents reported knowledge of Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, its archrival among the Nichiren-related

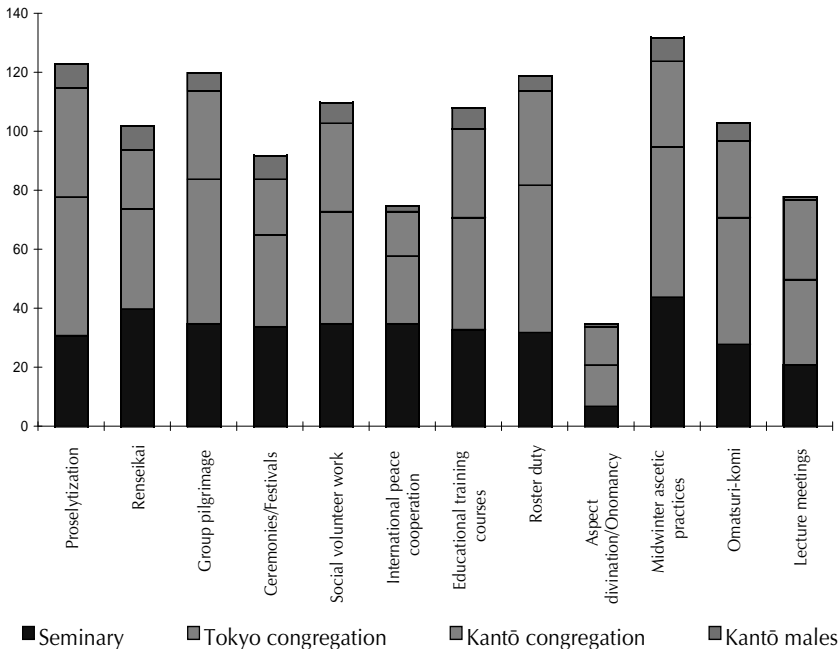
New Religions, followed by knowledge of Christianity, Tenrikyō 天理教, and, sporadically, groups like the Unification Church. Such knowledge seems focused on two general types of group. The first comprises those religious groups with which Risshō Kōseikai has friendly relations stemming from cooperative activities; this includes the Christian churches and such other New Religions as PL Kyōdan, Myōchikai, and Shōroku Shintō Yamatoyama 松緑神道大和山. The second comprises Kōseikai's rivals (Sōka Gakkai, Tenrikyō, Reiyūkai, etc.) and religious groups that have recently been targeted for criticism by the mass media (the Unification Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.).

It is not usually clear whether "knowledge" of another group indicates merely knowledge of its name or a true familiarity with what the group is and does. I attempted to clarify this point by asking Risshō Kōseikai members how much they knew about scriptures other than the *Lotus Sūtra*. Twenty percent of the Risshō Kōseikai students claimed to be reading the Bible, as did 20% of the males and 17% of the females in the congregations. Half of the Risshō Kōseikai students said they had read the *Hannyashingyō* 般若心經, which is the text used in their sūtra-copying exercises and chanted in ceremonies and for religious discipline. The figures indicate that the adherents' convictions about the superiority of their own religion are not based on a comparative study of other religions, but upon faith and feelings.

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

One of the questions asked regarded the frequency of church attendance. In the Episcopal Church 60% said "Every week," 27% said "Every month," and the remainder reported irregular attendance. In contrast, the percentage of Risshō Kōseikai members reporting daily attendance was 44% in Tokyo, 30% among the Kantō women, and 11% among Risshō Kōseikai students. Even given that the majority of women adherents are full-time housewives, this high rate of attendance is astonishing. Risshō Kōseikai students most frequently reported monthly attendance and attendance at "events." In both congregations a large number of people attended the services held at their churches every month on the date of a memorial service.

Figure 5 shows the responses of Risshō Kōseikai members asked about their religious activities. The activities most frequently mentioned by students at the seminary were the midwinter ascetic practices (96%), the training camp (*renseikai* 練成会) (87%), and ceremonies and festivals (85%). Members of the congregations cited proselytization (94% in the Tokyo congregation, 90% in the Kantō congregation); group pilgrimages (92% in Tokyo), midwinter ascetic practices (90% in Tokyo, 86% in Kantō), educational training courses (84% in

Figure 5. Degree of Participation in Religious Activities

Kantō), and roster duty. The least popular activities were lecture meetings and aspect divination/onomancy.

It might be pointed out in passing that in the Risshō Kōseikai's survey of its women's division the activity most strongly desired was "Short courses on family education" (see note 3, pp. 33); this contrasts with the low level of interest in lecture meetings found in my survey results. The apparent contradiction seems related to the contents of the lectures: the courses sponsored by the women's division took up such topics as the education of children, while the general lecture meetings seem to deal with wider topics, like international problems, religious cooperation, and Buddhist doctrine. Here we see the tie between the women's interests and family concerns.

The activities most often cited as ones the members wished to participate in were cultural lessons (33%), followed by aspect divination/onomancy (24%). As my survey shows, this latter was not especially popular when it came to actual participation (17% at the seminary, 12% in Tokyo, 15% in Kantō), but previously it was a very common practice in the Kōseikai, and perhaps there are those who would like to see it revived.

Complaints have emanated from the women's division that the

members feel overorganized and restricted, indicating that contemporary women in their twenties, thirties, and forties desire a situation with looser ties and more family-centered activity. They are not happy with enforced participation in doctrinal study sessions, proselytization activities, and social volunteer work; they would prefer volunteer activities that are less regular and study sessions dealing with cultural betterment and child rearing. Here we see a wide gap between the housewives and the students, 76% of whom participate in social volunteer work and international activities. This difference results, I believe, from the fact that 97% of those in the women's division are housewives, while 85% of the students at the seminary are single women (65% of them university students and 26% Kōseikai instructors).

My survey indicates that in the Tokyo congregation first-generation believers are quite enthusiastic about proselytization activities, while second-generation members are split between those who do and those who do not participate in such activities. The latter are thus divided between those who have thoroughly internalized the Risshō Kōseikai teachings they received principally from their mothers, and those who have failed to do so. At present the latter are in the minority, but I believe that with the increase in third- and fourth-generation members there will be a greater tendency in that direction.

Generally speaking, Risshō Kōseikai's women members are extremely active. As seen in the normal path to membership (the parent-child relationship of mother-daughter and *michibikioya*-child), women are the principal proselytizers in the family and in the neighborhood. The teachings of Kōseikai tend to be transmitted more through human interaction and down-to-earth examples than through doctrinal study, though believers are familiar with the *Lotus Sūtra* from chanting it during memorial services. Risshō Kōseikai faces the difficulty of professing a return to the primitive Buddhism preached by Śākyamuni while remaining a Nichiren-related body. It is quite clear that doctrinal study sessions are not very popular with women. The existence of two groups of instructors—an intellectual group of seminary graduates who rise to leadership through education, and a charismatic group of *michibikioya* who rise through proselytization and spiritual training—may be effective for preserving the vitality of the religion, but may not survive long-term. In most cases the former are male and the latter are female; as I mentioned above, there is evidence that the latter's numbers may taper off.

The differences in religious consciousness between the Episcopal Church and Risshō Kōseikai relate, I believe, to the stress put on social values and universality in the former as opposed to the weight

put on family, ascetic practice, and human ties in the latter. Also, the Episcopal Church is negative regarding Japan's multilayered religious consciousness, while Kōseikai is positive. But such practices as onomancy and aspect divination, which were popular when Kōseikai was founded, have gradually dropped off as the organization travels the road of modernization. Also disappearing are such conflict-causing practices as forcing believers to move their family graves out of the cemeteries of the Buddhist temples they were associated with.⁵ This is part of the practical wisdom a New Religion acquires in the process of gaining its rights of citizenship: if one wants to coexist within Japan's religious milieu one has to downplay sectarianism and avoid conflict with other religious groups.

Nevertheless one can see a clear move away from Shinto among the young, as well as a dissatisfaction with overregimentation and with the lack of independence or privacy. Young women members who have inherited their faith from their parent(s) show increasing signs of individualism. The Episcopal Church, on the other hand, rejects compromise and preserves its aloofness, following the traditional Japanese Christian pattern of Occident-oriented women of the middle intellectual class being led by a male clergy whose faith is founded on a perceived alienation between Japanese culture and their own faith. One must describe it as a system in which women are passive and lacking in structural power to act.

Family Consciousness and Religious Consciousness

MARRIAGE AND RELIGION

The New Religions of the Buddhist tradition have produced a revolutionary change in the power relationships connected with the ancestral rites that form one of the special features of Japanese religiosity. Family ceremonies have taken over from temple or gravesite rites, and the scope of the rituals has widened to include not only the husband's ancestors but also those of the wife, giving women a sense of equality and independent subjecthood and inspiring more female participation in ancestor rites. Women have become the mainstays of the rites, acquiring spiritual authority by maintaining their husbands' high profiles and adopting low profiles for themselves (HARDACRE 1984, pp. 208–21). How would such changes in family consciousness affect the

⁵ Even after joining Risshō Kōseikai one can maintain relations with a Buddhist sect by calling it "the family's denomination." Thirteen percent of the members admit that they are "fervent Buddhist parishioners." See CHŪO GAKUJITSU KENKYŪJO, ed., 1990, pp. 80–85.

religious consciousness of women? My survey results reveal conspicuous differences depending upon religious group and locale.

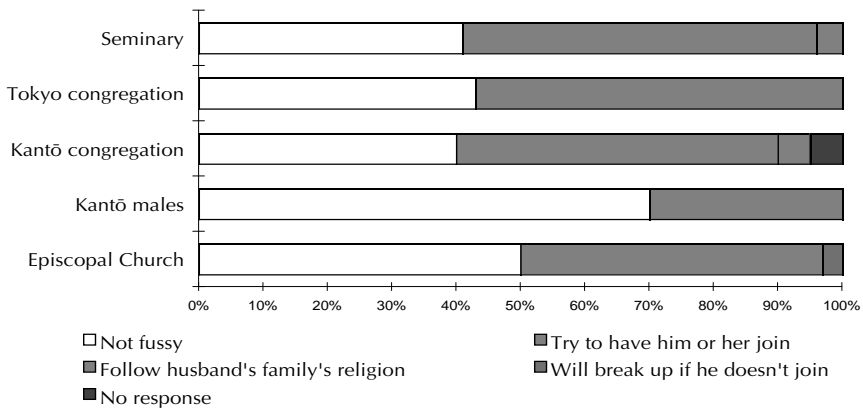
There is a wide disparity between the Episcopal Church and Risshō Kōseikai with regard to views of marriage. If we consider those who agreed with the statement “Men and women ought to get married” and “A person is better off getting married” to represent the marriage affirmation group, then this group constituted 13% of the Episcopalians, 52% of the seminarians, 56% of the Tokyo congregation, and 70% of the Kantō congregation for both males and females. This may reflect the effects of such things as educational background, employment, and regional customs.

The statement “I am not overly concerned with marriage” was chosen by 57% of the Episcopalians, in contrast to 38% of the Tokyo congregation and only a little over 20% of the Kantō males and females. The higher figures for Tokyo may be due to the fact that Tokyo residents are subject to fewer pressures to get married and have greater opportunities for employment. In rural areas the situation is more difficult, since remaining single can mean the extinction of the family line. Although old customs of primogeniture have ended, the continuation of the family is still a categorical imperative.

When it comes to choosing a marriage partner the most important quality was “character,” selected by all of the men and 80% of the women in both Kōseikai congregations, and by 70% of the students and Episcopalians. In the Episcopal Church the next most important thing was “religion,” at 20%; this was chosen by less than 10% in Kōseikai. When asked what they would do if the religion of their potential marriage partner was different from theirs, 70% of the men said it would make no difference, while only about half of the Episcopalian women and 40% of the Kōseikai women gave this response. The answer “I would try to have him/her join my religion” was given by just under 40% of the Episcopalians, 30% of the Risshō Kōseikai men, and over 50% of the Risshō Kōseikai women. The only ones to choose “I would follow the religion of the family into which I marry” comprised a mere 5% of the Kantō Kōseikai women (figure 6).

Hence, except for 3% of the Episcopalian respondents, religion would not constitute likely grounds for breaking off marriage discussions, even between people who are deeply religious. This cannot, however, be taken as proof of a widespread spirit of religious freedom. Though only 5% of the total, there are still women in rural areas who believe that when they get married they must change not only their family name but also their religion. Men do not see religion as a problem when choosing a marriage partner because they believe their wife

Figure 6. Marriage and Religion

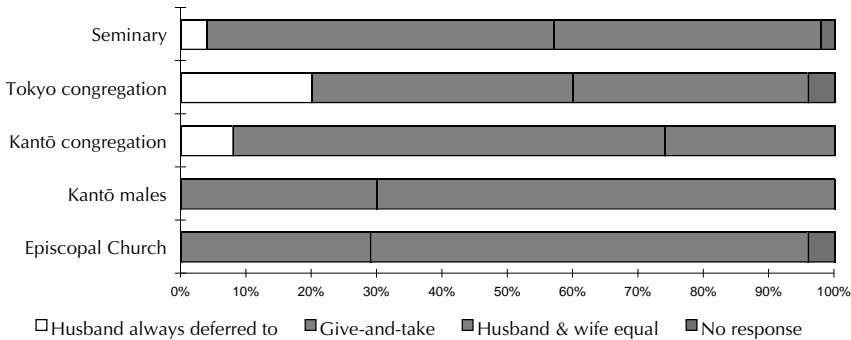


will naturally follow the religion of the man's family, while women are more concerned about their future spouse's religion because they realize the difficulty of holding to their own faith after marriage.

EQUALITY OF THE SEXES AND GENDER ROLES

It is commonly believed that notions regarding women's impediments to attaining Buddhahood and the importance of their being submissive, once preached in almost all of the established Buddhist sects and Buddhist-related New Religions, are finally disappearing from the doctrines of these groups. There are, however, some leaders who still preach this (HARDACRE 1992). And in the Episcopal Church of Japan, even now when in other countries the ordination of women bishops is allowed, there is still no notable sign of reform. Nor are there any signs of a protest movement, such as we see in other advanced countries, among the women who make up the majority of the faithful in these religious groups.

This is undoubtedly due to the double-layered structure of Japanese society, consisting of *tatemae* 建前 (professed principle; outer show) and *honne* 本音 (actual practice; inner feeling), and by the stress on submissiveness in Japanese women. The Japanese Constitution enacted in 1946 during the Occupation abolished gender-based discrimination, and while both the government and the community accept this in principle, neither are favorably disposed toward it, considering it counter to tradition and the country's ethos. Though half a century has elapsed since the Constitution was enacted, the wall of sexual discrimination still stands, and women's position in society remains unstable (although we must recall Hardacre's view that women have,

Figure 7. The Ideal Family Image

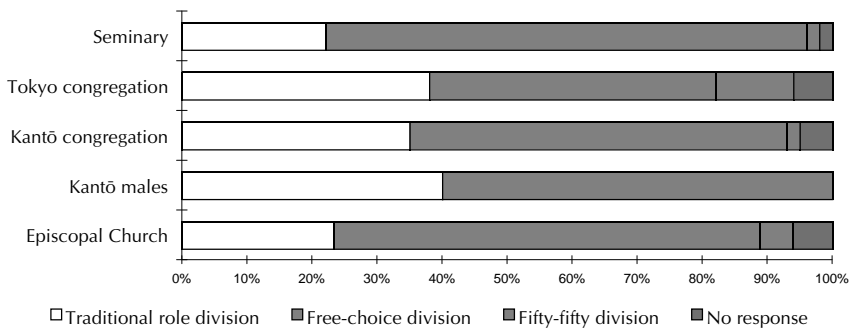
through “strategies of weakness,” retained real authority within the household and remain content with this situation).⁶

Four percent of those in Kōseikai’s seminary support the notion of female submissiveness, compared to 8% of the Kantō congregation and 20% in the Tokyo congregation. The rest of Rishō Kōseikai women profess equality, yet those who selected a “compromise” option—“Usually I defer to my husband but when there is a problem we talk it over”—slightly outnumber those who argue for equality in both Tokyo and the seminary; in the Kantō congregation those supporting equality decrease to 25%, while 68% opt for compromise. It might be pointed out, by the way, that 70% of those who are shown deference—the men—advocate equality, while men who enjoy being deferred to amount to no more than 30%. In the Episcopal Church 66% of the women, or almost the same proportion as the Kantō men, advocate equality (figure 7).

In summary, then, a sexually discriminatory view of women still seems firmly entrenched, but, at least outwardly, it seems to be gradually waning from people’s consciousness. Under present conditions men can be said to be in a “general principle” camp, and women in a “reality” camp. Let me also mention in passing that among ordinary female university students the equality and compromise options were split fifty-fifty; among the male students, 74% were for equality, 5% supported “letting the husband take the lead,” and the remainder opted for compromise.

Furthermore, there is, despite the support for equality, a conspicuous tendency to accept traditional divisions of roles. Group members were asked whether they agreed with the “traditional model” of “The

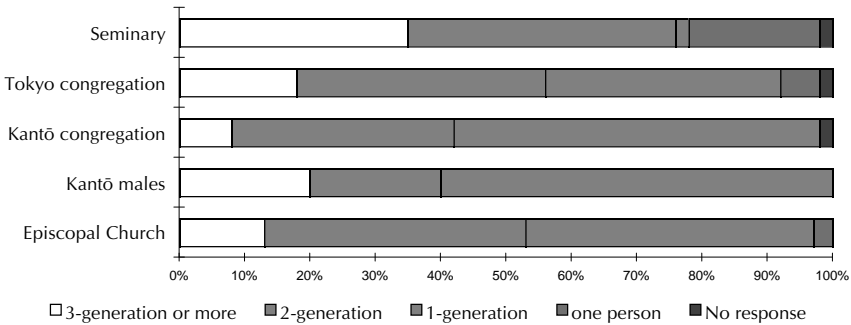
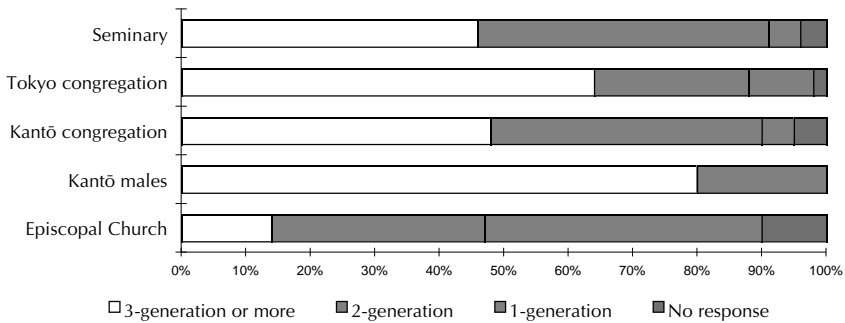
⁶ Women always report a higher degree of satisfaction in regard to daily living. See pp. 109–18 of the NHK survey cited above.

Figure 8. Male/Female Role Divisions

man's place is outside the home, the woman's inside," the "free-choice model" of "Regardless of gender, the role that suits one's individuality should be chosen," and the "equality model" of "Both the man and the woman should have jobs and share the housework." The results (figure 8) show that the traditional model is supported by 35% to 40% of those in the two Risshō Kōseikai congregations, and by 23% and 22% of those in the seminary and the Episcopal Church, respectively. Greatest support went to the free-choice model, selected by 74% of the students, 63% of the Episcopalians, 60% of the Kantō men, 58% of the Kantō women, and 44% of the Tokyo congregation. The equality model, chosen by none of the male Kantō members, garnered the least support; there was 12% support in the Tokyo congregation, but this no doubt reflects the aspirations of the 18% employed in that group.

The traditional model was supported by 28% of the respondents from the women's university and by 18% of those from the coeducational university (90% male student body); the free-choice model by 63% at the women's university and 66% at the coed university; and the bipartite model by 9% at the women's university and 16% at the coed university.

When these results are compared they show a similar trend overall. The main difference is that the bipartite model appears to have more support among the young, indicating that age, rather than religion or locale, is the most important factor here. One thing that should be noted is that hardly any of the women who selected the free-choice model entertain the notion that men should be in charge of housework or child-rearing. Rather, they apparently chose this model as a way of justifying traditional female roles—they are saying, in other words, that they choose to be full-time housewives not because of sexual discrimination but because they are family-oriented by temperament.

Figure 9. Actual Family Configuration**Figure 10. Ideal Family Configuration**

HOUSEHOLD CONFIGURATION

The Episcopalians are orientated towards one-generation and two-generation households, and have a low percentage of households with three generations or more (figure 9). Moreover, the actual household configuration closely corresponds with the respondents' ideal household configuration (figure 10). This indicates that most Episcopalians are living in the manner that they themselves desire.

Risshō Kōseikai households in the Tokyo and Kantō congregations are also primarily one-generation or two-generation in structure; three-generation households are found in only 10% of the Kōseikai's Kantō congregation and in 18% of its Tokyo congregation. This, however, is in sharp contrast to the ideal household configuration: a three-generation structure is the configuration of choice for 64% of the respondents from the Tokyo congregation. Eighty percent of the males in the Kantō congregation make the same choice; the figure is a lower 48% for women, who, concerned perhaps about personal relations, tend to show slightly more support for one-generation or two-

generation households than for three-generation households. Even in the seminary, where most of the respondents are unmarried, as much support is shown for two-generation as for three-generation households. The strongly family-oriented members of Risshō Kōseikai appear puzzled by social changes; they consider the present situation (nuclear families living in cramped living quarters because of the sharp increases in population and land prices in Tokyo) as a way of life forced on people by economic circumstances.

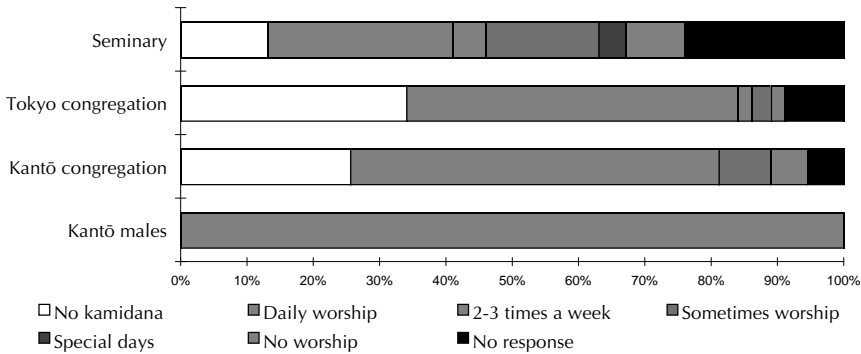
Support for three-generation households was shown by 21% of the female university students and 24% of the male students; the remainder were for one-generation or two-generation households.

These results may stem from the fact that women, especially young women, do not desire large families nowadays. Women who support the idea of three-generation households often do so because they feel that they can then obtain help in child-rearing from their mothers or mothers-in-law.

The difficulty of reconciling employment and child-rearing represents an impediment to women entering society, but while only 7% of the Episcopalians said that such a reconciliation was "absolutely impossible," the figure for Risshō Kōseikai members was around 30%. Those who indicated "It is possible if there is cooperation in the family" were most numerous in Kōseikai (40% in the Kantō group, about 50% elsewhere), but the "cooperation" intended here is most likely that of the mother(-in-law), not the husband. It seems the Kōseikai women are hesitant about employment. Some say, however, they are unable to work, or choose not to work, because they wish to concentrate on religious activities, and there is no doubt that those in leadership roles find their fulfillment in proselytization and religious activities. Also, the fact that many women did not answer this question suggests that it is a difficult one to address for both full-time housewives and single women, few of whom have nearby role models who have reconciled the two.

ANCESTRAL RITES

More than half of the Episcopalian respondents said that ancestral rites have nothing to do with the Christian faith, and that the performance of the rites should be left up to the individual. Forty percent said they perform these rites from a sense of gratitude to their progenitors. Families with Buddhist altars in their homes comprised only 7% of the total; some of these families report that they remember only the father's line, some that they remember both family lines, and some responded "Other." Services are not performed on a daily basis.

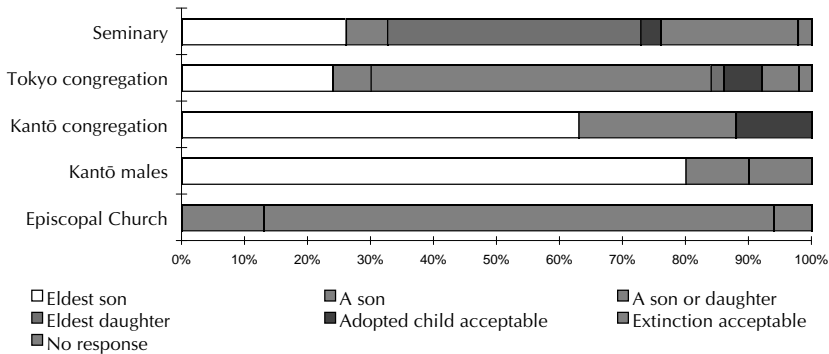
Figure 11. Kōseikai: Kamidana [Shinto Altar] and Frequency of Rites

There are no families with a Shinto altar in the home.⁷

In Risshō Kōseikai, with its stress on ancestral rites, most—though not all—families have Buddhist altars. The majority perform morning and evening prayers for the dead, though a few report doing them only “sometimes.” Most families pray for the ancestors of both the husband and the wife; in two- and three-generation households they also pray for the ancestors of the families of the spouses of their sons and daughters. The number of people who perform services for the ancestors of both the husband’s and the wife’s families roughly coincide with the number of those who never miss the morning and evening prayers. Asked their reasons for performing the ancestral rites, 90% of the students, 90% of the Kantō congregation, and 70% of the Tokyo congregation replied that they do it from a sense of gratitude. Sixteen percent of the Tokyo congregation and 10% of the Kantō males answered, “If you don’t perform services for them the family will not thrive,” while 2% of the Tokyo congregation said, “If you don’t perform services for them it will bring bad luck” —an exceptional figure.

All male members of the Kantō congregation claim to pray daily at the family’s Buddhist and Shinto altars. In the homes of female members 64% perform rites before Shinto altars. In the Tokyo and Kantō congregations such rites are performed daily by half of all members; in the seminary the figure is 28% (figure 11). Among middle-aged respondents those who know what kami are enshrined in their Shinto altar slightly outnumber those who do not; among the younger respondents from the religious college more than twice as many are

⁷ The results of David Reid’s well-known survey indicate that 25% of Christian families possess Buddhist altars. Those he surveyed belonged to congregations of the United Church of Christ in Japan and other churches. See REID 1989 and 1991.

Figure 12. The Family and Inheritance

unaware of the divine name(s) as those who are. There are many examples of several kami being enshrined together, such as Amaterasu-Ōmikami, the clan kami, and malevolent deities. The Kantō region faithful are most inclined to believe in such deities, followed by those in the Tokyo congregation; the students are least likely to believe. The indifference on the part of the students may be due either to an exclusive belief in Buddhism or to the general drift away from Shinto among the young.

THE FAMILY, INHERITANCE, THE FAMILY GRAVE

From the time that the Tokugawa Shogunate made it compulsory for all members of the population to associate themselves with a Buddhist temple through the *danka* (parishioner) system, Buddhism has taken a firm hold on Japanese life through its performance of memorial services for the dead. Content with its role as *sōshiki Bukkyō* (funeral Buddhism), much of the tradition has become empty of content.⁸

Continuity of the family is, of course, central to the family system, and even now it is not uncommon for a son to be adopted if there is no natural son to take over the family assets and assume care of the parents in their old age. Although the old primogeniture-based household system was abolished after WWII and economic changes have made it difficult to inherit traditional occupations, family consciousness has remained strong, particularly in rural areas.

There have, nevertheless, been clear changes as well, and here we find conspicuous differences according to religion, region, age, and gender. Within Risshō Kōseikai there is a wide gap between the results

⁸ It should be remembered, however, that it was not until 1870 that commoners were permitted to bear anything but first names, so that the common practice of worshipping at graves bearing the family name is a rather recent phenomenon (FUJII 1993, pp. 536–39).

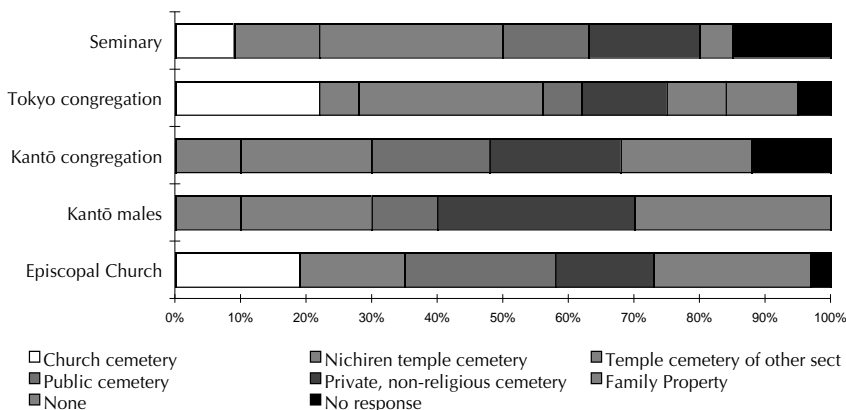
obtained for the seminary and Tokyo congregation on the one hand and for the Kantō congregation on the other (figure 12). In the former group 24% were in favor of primogeniture, while in the latter group the figure was 63%. Support for primogeniture was particularly strong among Kantō men, at 80%; support for inheritance by any son, not just the first, stood at 90%. In the Kantō congregation both men and women believe that household continuity is an absolute duty; that inheritance should go to a son; and that a son should be adopted if there were only daughters or no children at all. Within this framework, however, women tended to be slightly more flexible than men, with 25% feeling that it was all right if either a son or a daughter took up the inheritance.

In contrast, the Tokyo congregation showed 30% support for male succession and 56% support for succession by either a son or a daughter. The propositions "Would adopt a son if there are no children" and "Extinction [of the family] is unavoidable" were each agreed to by some 6% of the respondents, showing how strongly people feel about succession. Among the students there was 30% support for eldest son/any son inheritance, 39% for the possibility of a daughter inheriting, and 9% for the adoption system, but 20% willing to accept extinction of the family. Thus even in Risshō Kōseikai, with its emphasis on ancestral rites, the idea of succeeding to a family and taking on the concomitant ancestral duties is on the wane, especially among the younger generation (a reflection, perhaps, of changes in family consciousness in the community at large). Even among men, where family consciousness is generally strong, support is gaining (at least in Tokyo) for the view that religious affiliation depends on the decision of the child.⁹ Accordingly, it can be said that family succession and continuation of the ancestral rites will tend to taper off in the future.

Care of the family grave, the last bastion of the old family system to survive under the present law, is thought to remain deeply connected with the admittedly much-diminished family consciousness. In order to find out more about present attitudes we first asked about the location of the family grave (figure 13). Although both Episcopalians and Risshō Kōseikai adherents desire to have their graves in cemeteries belonging to their respective religious groups, this was an option only for urban residents, and for a minority even of them. Most family graves are in the cemeteries of established Buddhist sects, and in this age of sectarian coexistence few people are willing to battle the sects

⁹ In Risshō Kōseikai 42% replied, "I will let my child(ren) decide whether to continue," 23% replied "I strongly desire them to carry it on," and 16% replied "I would like them to carry it on if possible." See CHŪO GAKUJUTSU KENKYŪJO 1988, pp. 300-16.

Figure 13. Location of Family Graves



for the right to relocate. As a result, only 20% in the Episcopal Church, 9% in the religious college, and 23% in the Tokyo congregation have graves located in the cemetery of the religious body they belong to. In the Kantō congregation no one does—the graves of even second-, third-, or fourth-generation Kōseikai adherents are in the cemeteries of other religious sects.

Even among the Episcopalians the family graves of 17% were in Buddhist temple grounds. The use of publicly or privately operated burial grounds unconnected with any religious group is the choice of 40%, since this sidesteps possible problems with the established Buddhist temples. Thirty percent of the seminarians had their family graves in nonsectarian cemeteries, as did 20% of the Tokyo congregation. In the Kantō congregation 30% of the male respondents and 20% of the female respondents reported that their family graves were on their own property; even in the Tokyo congregation 8% of the respondents were in this category. Most of these people are undoubtedly members of farming households. Reflecting the recent shortage (and expense) of grave sites in Tokyo, 20% of the Episcopalian respondents and 10% of the Tokyo Kōseikai adherents reported that they have no grave. The result has been that many believers remain nominal parishioners of the temples where their family graves are located, utilizing them for funerals and memorial services even though they are not followers of the temple's sectarian teachings.

This question evoked a considerable number of “No response” choices as well. It would seem that younger people, in particular, sometimes have no idea where their family grave is located.

People who visit the family grave one or more times a month are usually those whose grave sites are located on their own property. The

midsummer *bon* 盆 holiday is when most people (80%) visit their graves, since school and business summer holidays are concentrated around that time. The *higan* (equinox) holidays are also times when grave visits are made, though fewer people return to their hometowns than at *Bon*. New Years and death anniversaries are other occasions for such visits. Episcopalian respondents tend to visit their family graves most often on the anniversary of death (33%); this no doubt is because this occasion is free of the strong Buddhist coloring of the *Bon* and equinox ceremonies, and because custom allows some leeway in selecting the actual day of the ceremony.

Among those *Kōseikai* members who cite the performance of ancestral rites as the main reason they joined the group, it would seem that rites at the grave-site are not as important as those in the home, since 10% of these members never visit their family grave. Yet most adherents faithfully pray before the family altar every morning and evening; this is the pillar of their religious practice.

When women contemplate their own deaths, what sort of burial do they desire? In many cases graves and burial methods are less a manifestation of the deceased's religious views than a product of compromise among legal statutes, social customs, and the wishes of the surviving family members. Recently, though, more and more people wish to mark the end of their lives in a manner expressive of their beliefs, and this has become possible through the stipulation of burial arrangements in one's will. We thus asked the respondents what sort of burial they would like, assuming that they could freely choose one; the results are shown in figure 14.

Kōseikai women (60% of middle-aged women, 50% of younger women) consider it perfectly natural for marriage to involve entering the husband's family, maintaining that family's grave, and eventually burial there themselves. Among the younger housewives only a slight discrepancy could be discerned between *tatema* and *honne*.¹⁰ On the whole the women who chose "the grave of the husband's family" were also diligent in maintaining it. It is probably only natural that younger people would follow their feelings and choose the grave of their own family, which is territorially and consanguineally much closer to them. It is similarly natural that those desiring husband-and-wife households

¹⁰ In the *Kōseikai*'s 1991 survey 59% of the respondents answered, "I think that as a married woman I should be buried in the husband's family's grave," while a mere 3% chose "Marriage does not make me a member of my husband's family, so I do not want to be buried with them." Support for the middle position—"I can understand the feeling [of not wanting to be buried in the husband's family grave]"—stood at 27%. See the survey cited in note 3 above, p. 21.

Figure 14. Where One Wishes to Be Buried

would choose burial with their husbands in a “husband-and-wife grave”; interestingly, this answer was given by 20% of the women in the Kantō congregation, where conservative notions of family are strong. The choices “Natural burial” (*shizen-sō* 自然葬) and “Joint grave” (*gōdō-sō* 合同葬) appear to have been inadequately understood;¹¹ the few people who chose “Natural burial” coincided with those who do not believe in the existence of a world after death.

In stark contrast with *Kōseikai*, the type of burial most frequently chosen among the Episcopalians was “Joint grave,” with 37%. The reason for this strong wish to be buried together in the church cemetery is that these people believe in the Resurrection and desire to be in the same community with others of the same faith. Next came “Husband-and-wife grave” (23%) and “Natural burial” (13%). Those who opted for “Husband’s family’s grave” (10%) were mostly older people; those who chose “My family’s grave” came to 7%.

Among female university students, “My family’s grave” and “Husband-wife grave” garnered 40% each; 10% selected “Husband’s family’s grave.” The choices of the male students were divided about equally among “My family’s grave,” “Husband-wife grave,” and “Natural burial.” On this question, then, there were large age differences and religious differences.

¹¹ When I conducted the survey at the women’s university I did not explain the terms; there were comparatively few respondents who chose these items. When I explained the terms before conducting the survey at the coeducational university, however, they were chosen by quite a large number of the respondents. It seems clear that the difference is not merely of gender.

Conclusion

In the New Religions women adherents outnumber the men, are more active in religious activities, and form a more dynamic force for proselytization.¹² Yet these contributions are not receiving due recognition. Women in Risshō Kōseikai during the turbulent postwar years looked up to cofounder Naganuma Myōkō, a strict religious guide with unusual spiritual gifts. Devoting themselves to ascetic practice and proselytization, many became *michibikiyoa* and even heads of branches and congregations. Now few of these early women leaders remain, and of those who are gone, no doubt their places were taken by men.

With Kōseikai's organizational expansion and its increased participation in the international peace movement, university-educated male executives have come to form a conspicuous part of its public relations machinery. Such a development would no doubt be quite disturbing to many of the early women adherents who believed in traditional gender roles: "Men's place is on the outside, women's place is on the inside." Although there may at first have been few women ready to engage in public relations work at the same level as the men, Risshō Kōseikai has not done all it can to train women and promote them to key positions. For change to occur there must be a reform in traditional views of women.

As mentioned above, three-quarters of all Episcopalians are women. The proportion of women among Risshō Kōseikai adherents is not known, but it is estimated at about the same. Thus full-time housewives, otherwise not employed, form the overwhelming majority in both religious groups. At present thirty to forty percent of the Kōseikai women are second- and third-generation believers, most of whom were in their twenties or thirties when they internalized the faith they received from their mothers; this is about the time they married and became mothers themselves. Episcopalian women tended to join the faith at a slightly earlier age, while they were still single. Both groups are similar with regard to the fact that after they joined their respective religious groups they experienced a realignment of outlook. And because Christianity has recently accepted ancestral rites as long as the ancestors are not treated as deities, there is common ground also in the fact that the faithful of both groups revere their ancestors primarily out of a spirit of gratitude (SWYNGEDOUW 1992).

¹² Similarly, it was found that out of several personal-development groups, which are linked with business enterprises and thus promote male-centered values, the only one that showed any growth was one that "succeeded in involving large numbers of housewives, who are not especially restricted to any particular social stratum" (NUMATA 1978, p. 155).

It is also an undeniable fact that there are manifold differences between the two organizations, enough to overshadow such common features. As I indicated, the motives cited by the believers for joining their respective groups tended to be socially oriented among the Episcopalians, family oriented among the Kōseikai adherents, and individually oriented among the students. The same tendencies were clearly evident in such things as the changes experienced after joining, the topics discussed in the church or *hōza*, and the sorts of religious activities engaged in. These differences were related to such factors as region, education, and the teachings of the respective religions.

In contrast to the universality and morality preached by the Episcopal Church, the Risshō Kōseikai originally focused on the ancestral rites, the performance of which are premised on the continuity of the family. In recent years, however, it has increasingly stressed universalization and internationalization through international religious cooperation for world peace. The group has put a great deal of effort into educational programs designed to expand the consciousness of women away from the old family-centered teaching and toward social and international solidarity, but to little effect except in the younger members. Since most of the faithful are seeking not doctrine but interaction with the spiritual guides, it is unlikely that such a shift in values will take place unless it is led by charismatic women role models. Such models, however, have yet to appear within Kōseikai.

On the other hand, even the Episcopalian women, who to all appearances have been liberated from the Japanese family system, accept traditional gender roles and tend to compromise with social customs. Christian schools for girls, based on Western cultural values, have contributed greatly to higher education for Japanese women, but have not gone beyond preparing them to be “good wives and wise mothers.” In the Episcopal Church, which like the Catholic Church has a male-dominated hierarchy, it is quite difficult for women to act on their own initiative. The accepting attitude toward traditional gender roles seen in both religious groups has its roots in the structure of Japanese society.

We are in a transitional period, in which traditional, sexually discriminatory ways of thinking are shifting to attitudes of equality. The older New Religions struck a reassuring note in a nation confused by the changes of the postwar era, preaching the importance of the ancestral rites and the old family system upon which they are based, thereby building a stable conservative force in society. As in the past, the wife deferred to her husband, performed the ancestral rites,

enjoined her family to join the religion, and devoted herself to proselytization. She could thereby gain moral authority within the family and find a self-realization normally unavailable to a housewife, all without questioning the traditional view of women or gender roles. This is one of the reasons why the religious groups have primarily attracted women.

It is not only for the sake of family rituals that women join religious groups, however. The strong interest that women—single as well as married—show in religion may be due to the fact they are the gender that conceals within their bodies the secrets of birth and life. Particularly among the Episcopalians, the younger Risshō Kōseikai adherents, and the ordinary university students we can see a tendency to seek faith for individual reasons. These women have joined their faith communities out of their own choice. This is the one reason why the survey results for the various groups occasionally show agreement.

In contrast to the Episcopalians, who aspire to be together not only in the present world but also in the world after death, the young members of Kōseikai display what could be described as a free-participation model, in which many of the young feel restricted by the human relations of their faith community and refuse to be made part of the organization. This is a manifestation not of a weakened faith, but of the trend toward individualism characteristic of this generation; it can be seen as a new form of religious belief. The excessive restraints in religious organizations are one of the reasons why today's youth are distancing themselves from them. Individualization is regarded as one of the defining characteristics of the "New New Religions"¹³ and shows up in the way they gather new adherents from among the young, but it may also be seen among the younger stratum in the New Religions and established religions. The young are, however, enthusiastic about "events," and I believe that the sense of unity they experience on such occasions stimulates in them a community consciousness. Still, this consciousness does not possess the binding power and unifying force fostered through regular participation in ritual or the sharing of religious experiences in *hōza*.

Though the foundation of faith may change, from the community to the family to the individual, there is probably little change in the interest of women in religion. A certain transformation in consciousness is inevitable, though, given the shift in family configurations and the march toward nuclear families. The system of primogeniture still prevalent in rural areas is in disfavor among women, and is in any

¹³ Concerning New New Religions see SHIMAZONO 1992a and 1992b.

event increasingly harder to practice in this age of small families. Male inheritance and the family system itself are being questioned in the cities, where there is comparative freedom from traditional customs, and where women are making their way into outside society and pushing for the right to retain their maiden names after marriage.

As women grow more independent both materially and psychologically the traditional family system will come under increasing pressure for reform. Other developments are sure to hasten the process. The shortage of cemeteries in the urban areas is already forcing a rethinking of the matter of family graves, and there are movements in the religious world that suggest a turning away from funeral Buddhism and back to early Buddhism. For the Buddhist-related New Religions with their lay orientation any changeovers will probably be comparatively easy. Again, the type of individual faith that frees itself of the bonds of the family grave through the choice of a "natural burial" or "joint grave" is sure to attract increasing interest in the future as individualization tendencies proceed. The religious consciousness of contemporary women believers has begun to show signs of these changes.

Surveys on the consciousness of the Japanese people have pointed out a pattern: "First women change, then a few years later men follow suit" (NHK YORONCHŌSA-BU 1991, p. 41). The same pattern may be discerned in the present survey. Hence I believe the trends discussed above concern more than women alone; they are portents of the future.

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