

Religion in the life of Higuchi Ichiyō

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INTRODUCTION

There is a variety of both approaches and perspectives available to the researcher who would study the religious consciousness of the Japanese. It is, for example, possible to approach the question spatially, and it is also possible to deal with it by working within the flow of time. One can close in on a single personality and examine the tendencies of his or her religious consciousness, or one could look at groups within a given social area to see what roles they play for the people within them.

Religion is a social phenomenon, and as such it appears as an important element of the various systems that make up the core of any culture. Because it gives direction and form to the consciousness of the people who belong to that society, the mutual interrelationships between religion and cultural types are, as in the case of other cultural systems within the society, quite close.

The question of precisely what religion is stands at the point of departure in religious studies, but this question has by no means been given a satisfactory solution. The host of conventional definitions formulated by a large number of scholars generally have some built conception that was important to the disciplines from which they came. Most characteristics commonly found in conceptions of what "religion" is bespeak this.

The conception of "religion" that took root in the West, while it does not interfere with our understanding of Western religions, is lacking in several respects when we attempt to fit it to Japanese religions. Perhaps the Japa-

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nese religions themselves are at the root of this problem, but when we look at the religious consciousness of the Japanese people it is necessary to considerably enlarge our idea of "religion" or a good deal of what is interesting will fall through the eyes of our net. In my opinion, the main reason that the Japanese are considered to not be religious, or are considered to be without religion, as compared to Westerners, is the amount of material that the net called "religion" is unable to handle (see Takagi 1983).

John Dewey attempted to reconcile the conflict between religion and the natural sciences, and defined religion in a manner that was able to satisfy both sides of the issue. Dewey's distinction between "religion," to indicate organized religion, and "religious elements," by which he meant something much broader, including the religious feelings and attitudes of human beings, is valid here. Dewey expresses it in the following way:

To be somewhat more explicit, a religion (and as I have just said there is no such thing as religion in general) always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or tight. In contrast, the adjective "religious" denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs. It does not denote anything to which one can specifically point as one can point to this and that historic religion or existing church. For it does not denote anything that can exist by itself or that can be organized into a particular and distinctive form of existence. It denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal (Dewey 1934, pp.9-10).

The use here of "religious" elements means the attitudes of human beings, and Dewey uses these as his base for considering religion. Dewey attempted to free religion from the framework in which it had been considered until then, and to shed light on those religious elements which are not bound up in the authority, institutions or

organizations of existing religion, but nonetheless have taken root deep in the hearts of human beings.

Dewey's conceptualization of religion attracted several adaptations within the cultural sphere of religions like Christianity, which are solemn and clearly defined, and I think it can be well applied also to religions such as those found in ancient Japan, where both Shinto and Buddhism lacked, from the perspective of their propagators, any really clearly defined character. Religion in Japan does not play such a strong role in the lives of most people, with the exception of professional religious practitioners or those living in the midst of a particularly devout belief. There are certain gaps in the meaning of religion.

One cannot, however, therefore say that the Japanese are not religious. Those people belonging to what might be called the general masses reveal a fairly strong religious tendency through their actions. There is hardly any Japanese person who does not participate in ancestor worship or in festivals, or who is not involved at all in some form of magical endeavor to gain profit in this world. These activities, I would submit, are at the core of the religiosity of the Japanese people.

There are, of course, numerous people among the so-called intellectual or educated classes who would look down on religious activities such as these, and call them habitual behavior rather than religion. But even these people could not be said to be completely cut off from religion in their hearts. Although they might, just as Dewey has described, resist taking in the doctrine or rituals of organized religions, and thus display an anti-religious attitude, many of them have "religious elements" at the bottom of their hearts, and are hence "religious," even though they themselves are unaware of the fact. A pursuit of this point, I believe, will best reveal the religion of the Japanese people.

This religion has a variety of forms. In some instances it is possible to see it in the arts, or sometimes in literature (Takagi 1983). And sometimes it reveals itself in the

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ultimate lifestyles¹ of people. Keeping this in mind, in this essay I would like to examine the life of a single Japanese—the writer Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896).

HIGUCHI ICHYŌ AND RELIGION

Higuchi Ichiyō is one of the representative authors of modern Japan. After the Meiji Restoration Japan received the baptism of Western culture, and all fields of endeavor sped toward the flowering of a new age. Literature was no exception—the methods of the Western novel were imported and there was a development from the old *gessaku* literature to the modern novel.

This atmosphere spawned one new progressive novelist after another, and Ichiyō attracted the attention of the world as one of these writers. One reason for her fame was also that she was a woman. Women until that time had been defined by the feudal system, which gave males precedence in all fields; they were always in the shadows of men, condemned to a life in the background and never coming to the surface. One of the truly remarkable accomplishments of Ichiyō, then, is that she broke through this feudal view of women and met men on their own terms, was active in society and determined to leave a name to posterity. She was, further, able to work only to the tender age of 24, when she died. To mention but a few of the works left by Ichiyō that continue to have wide readership today, there are "Takekurabe" ("Growing up"), "Jūsan-ya" ("The moon of the thirteenth") or "Ōtsugomo" ("New year's eve"). They are also frequently performed as dramas, and Ichiyō's fame continues today. Her literary activities and the literary value of her works aside, though, I have a great interest in the way Ichiyō lived as a person.

Her life was by no means materially blessed. Indeed,

1. It was Paul Tillich who first defined religion in terms of its connections to the Ultimate. In Japan this tradition was carried on by Kishimoto Hideo. See Kishimoto 1961.

just to give birth to a single story she was forced to do constant battle with the sufferings of daily life caused by her role as the pillar of support for her family on the one hand, and was forced to taste the bitter pill of working in a male world on the other. This meant that she was always caught in the midst of material and spiritual conflict. Although the fact that she had to live such a life was doubtless the source of some of Ichiyō's outstanding literary works, it is her way of life as a single human being, quite apart from the value of her literature, that brings her alive now as an "individual."

Ichiyō was a person who put out a great deal of effort. Her formal education was skimpy, and all of her study beyond the compulsory level was done alone. Furthermore, most of this centered on subjects such as Confucianism, poetry composition or calligraphy, which had been traditional since the Edo period. She did not leap enthusiastically into the new Western learning and absorb it. Compared to the activities of several of her contemporaries, who made the new culture a part of their lives, one could say that she continued to serve the old ways. She made no effort to instill the new ways into her works, and compared with other writers of the same period, one is struck by the narrowness of her vision.

Ichiyō was a hard worker, but she was not one who put all that much positive effort into the new learning or into the ways aimed at by novelists. This does not have a negative impact on Ichiyō's works, but she was fortunate to have lived during a period of development, when even though there were so many things that had to be studied, and so many things that had to be assimilated, they never became too heavy a load. Everyone had their eyes on the new culture, but this did not necessarily mean that the old ways had to be expelled, or that the new should be brought in above the old. Even without doing this she was able to write meaningful works.

Although the new Meiji ways might have been an object of curiosity for Ichiyō, this curiosity was not so

strong as to cause her jump right in. It was enough that she reformed her consciousness to think in terms of how to bring the old ways toward new directions. In this sense, the period in which Ichiyō lived was less a time of difficulties for her than it was a society which had opened a new freedom in which it was possible to write novels.

Also, Ichiyō's early death means that her works were limited.² It was enough that she received praise for these limited works. Because she did not have the time to complete one step before going on to the next, her literary position was made fully through the works which she published, and by them alone. Ichiyō's value has been established by the works she left behind. Her whole life was a disaster, but speaking from a literary point of view, it could also be called a blessing.

This is probably based more than anything on several factors—Ichiyō's superior qualifications as a person; her non-flagging efforts; the strong will that sustained them; the passion which seemed able to let her go to whatever distance she wanted once she had made up her mind; and her power of insight, which at times seems even cold and detached. Without these there would be no Ichiyō of today. And it was that extraordinary "way of life" pursued during her brief time on earth that formulated this Ichiyō. How was such a woman as Ichiyō brought into this world?

Early life and times. Higuchi Ichiyō (true name Natsuko) was born in Tokyo in the fifth year of the Meiji era, or 1872.³ Her father Tamenosuke (he later changed his name to Noriyoshi) was an official in the Tokyo prefectural government, but he came originally from an agricultural family in Yamanashi Prefecture. At the urging of his father (Ichiyō's grandfather) he immersed himself from an early

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2. Ichiyō wrote stories and also left essays, diaries and about 3000 *tanka*, or Japanese poems.
 3. I have relied on the work of several scholars in preparing this account of Ichiyō's life. I am particularly indebted to Wada 1972, Shioda 1968, Noguchi 1979, and Maeda 1979.

period in his studies and, with the idea of advancing himself in the world, went to Edo just before the Meiji Restoration. By relying on acquaintances from his home area, he served in minor positions with provincial officials, then gained employment directly with the feudal government. He was able to realize his remarkable dream to become a samurai. This type of background, while somewhat coarse to the new Meiji government, was helpful to him in getting his post as an official in the Tokyo prefectural government. Wada Yoshie, a student of Ichiyō's life and literature, sees in her father something of the Kōshū native—stingy and opportunistic—but while he was serving as an official in Tokyo he became deeply involved in the world of finance and business and amassed a certain amount of money. He eventually gave up his position with the government and went to work as a police officer, but he stopped this after a short time and started a transportation service. This also failed, however, and he died in a state of bitter disappointment. The vicissitudes of this man's life cast a very large shadow over Ichiyō.

Ichiyō's mother was from the same village as her father, and before they were married formally they decided to abandon their homes together. This was an act of considerable courage for a young woman from an agricultural village in pre-Meiji Japan, and it was also one that involved a certain amount of passion.

After arriving in Edo she served as wetnurse for a family of high rank. She was a woman of a positive character, not at all shy. After the death of her husband she set up housekeeping with Ichiyō, but her understanding of this daughter, trying so hard to make a success in the new world as a writer, was rather shallow. In Ichiyō's later affair with Nakarai Tōsui we can, in my opinion, see many elements that show that her mother's blood coursed in Ichiyō's veins also.

Raised without restrictions by her mother and father, Ichiyō was put at the age of six into the public Hongō School, which served at that time as a model for the new

education. Her father, however, did not approve of the type of education she was receiving there, and withdrew her almost immediately, putting her in a private school of the old temple school variety. She graduated from the fourth grade of the upper level at the top of her class in 1883 (Meiji 16).⁴ She was eleven years old.

Her grades had been good and her father had wanted to send her on for more education, but he bowed to her mother's objections that learning was not necessary for a woman and that was the end of her formal schooling. In a later work Ichiyō has this to say:

At the age of seven [six by the Western counting method] I put away the games played by girls and immersed myself in the *kusazōshi*.⁵ I liked most of all to read about the lives and brave acts of famous women.... At the age of nine [eight by the Western count] I began to worry that my life would be too normal, no different than anyone else's life, and I began to plan what I could do to add just one joint to the bamboo of my life.... (diary *Chiri no naka*, 10 August 1893).

It is clear that Ichiyō was not an ordinary young girl.

Ichiyō had three older brothers (one of them died shortly after his birth), one older sister (who remarried after her first marriage failed), and a younger sister. Her oldest brother was in poor health, and the other brother fell in with bad company and was forced to leave home from an early age. Her father placed his hopes on the oldest brother, and retired at a relatively early age, passing all the family property to him. This brother died in 1887 (Meiji 20), and although she was a girl, Ichiyō was

4. The Meiji educational system differed structurally from the modern one. There were four years of elementary school and four years of upper level elementary school. The three years of high school would actually correspond to two under the present system.

5. The *kusazōshi* were popular, illustrated reading materials that had been in favor since the Edo period. They were primarily directed at women and children.

forced to become the pillar of support for the Higuchi family. This curtailed her spiritual freedom to some degree. Ichiyō was sixteen years old at the time.

To add to her problems, the Higuchi family started a gradual decline at about that time. One result of all this was that the marriage Ichiyō's father had arranged for her with Shibuya Saburō, a man from his home, never took place, and her father died in the midst of great despair. The burden of family support was a great weight on the shoulders of the sixteen-year-old Ichiyō. One of the reasons she decided to become a writer was that she hoped it might provide her with a way of making a living. Her family had taken a 180 degree turn, and was headed from the morning to the twilight of its days.

At the age of fourteen Ichiyō, who had left elementary school without finishing it, became a disciple of Nakajima Utako at the Haginoya. The Haginoya was a private school at which the wives and daughters of the upper classes were taught *tanka*. It was at the height of its popularity when Ichiyō entered, and she was never able to feel comfortable in this somewhat gaudy atmosphere. Her knowledge and education were insufficient and even though she was a member of the gentry, hers was in reality an existence on the very fringes of the aristocracy.

No matter what she tried she came to feel more and more inept, and she and her friends Itō Natsuko and Tanaka Minoko came to be called the "Haginoya Commoners' Group." In point of fact, however, she immediately demonstrated her talents, and from that time on, for better or worse, was always under observation. Her inherent refusal to admit defeat and her willingness to work hard spurred Ichiyō on to great efforts, but to the cold eyes of her classmates she seldom displayed any emotions, and came to demonstrate an attitude of considerable reserve. Her classmates referred to her in scorn as "Princess Modesty."

As this nickname shows, Ichiyō was harboring something in the recesses of her heart. This "something" eventually broke out to the surface.

The Higuchi family fell to ruin after the death of the father. The question of how to support her mother and sisters was a major one. Ichiyō, who had been living temporarily in the Haginoya as a resident pupil, took her mother and sister from where they had been living with her second brother and moved them to a rented house in Hongō Kikuzaka. They had moved back to the place where her father had lived at the height of his prosperity. They lived on the meagre amount of money they could bring in by doing sewing and laundry and other such jobs. It was the 23rd year of the Meiji period, and Ichiyō was eighteen years old.

Her meeting with Nakarai Tōsui came the following year, in 1891. Ichiyō had originally gone to him to seek guidance in the writing of stories, but her attraction to Tōsui never diminished, despite various entanglements in the relationship, betrayals, slanders and the like, and it continued until Ichiyō's death. Ichiyō was introduced to the world as a writer by Tōsui.

She had become a writer from her desire to escape the financial hardships of everyday life, but there was in point of fact never any guarantee that she would be successful. It was a sort of gamble for her. But with Tōsui's help she published the story "Yamizakura" ("The cherry tree in the dark of night") at the end of Tōsui's *Musashino*, then three stories in a row, and eventually she published the story "Yuki no hi" ("A snowy day") in the magazine *Bungaku-kai*. This marked the birth of the writer Higuchi Ichiyō. Ichiyō's gamble at writing as a way to single-handedly raise enough money to live on had paid off handsomely.

But no sooner had Ichiyō gained this acceptance into the literary world did she pull up stakes, move to Shitaya Ryūsenji-machi and open a kitchenwares store. It is said that the complications in her relationship with Nakarai Tōsui made it impossible for Ichiyō to take up her pen. The kitchenwares store, however, turned out to be of no more meaning than a business enterprise undertaken by a samurai, and after a mere nine months she closed it and went

back to the creative activities that she was more suited to. In 1894 she moved again, this time to Hongō Maruyama Fukuyama-chō in Tokyo, returning to the Haginoya, which she had left temporarily, as an assistant instructor.

Her life continued to be difficult, and she engaged in some rather bold ventures, including approaching a stock broker named Kusaka in order to invest in the stock market. But Ichiyō was basically a woman with a talent for literature, and it seems to have been her fate to live primarily on her natural abilities in that field.

In a short period of time she wrote such works as "Ōtsugomori" ("New year's eve," 1894), "Takekurabe" ("Growing up," 1895), "Nigorie," ("The muddied inlet," 1895), "Jūsanya" ("The moon of the thirteenth," 1895) and then her most famous work, "Warekara" ("The skeleton shrimp"). All of these met with success, and assured Ichiyō of a position in the literary world.

None of the biographies of Ichiyō contains much detail about the illness from which she died. It is recorded that she became suddenly ill in July of 1896 (Meiji 29). She died on 23 November of that year, and the cause is said to have been pulmonary tuberculosis. Pulmonary tuberculosis is not something that is likely to have reached a critical stage so rapidly, however, and in the entries for June and July of 1896 in Ichiyō's diary we find no indication that she was ill. It is possible that the illness had been suppressed by her over-abundant psychic energy, or was connected to her passions, we will never know for sure. In any event, it must be said that Ichiyō died a valliant death.⁶

How did Ichiyō live out this brief life of a mere 24 years?—what was in the shadows to sustain her? Did her family offer her any sort of salvation, or was it of no use at all to her? In Ichiyō's own words her life was like "a

6. Periodically the diaries note that she has a "pain in the brain" [a headache], but there is no indication that such pains were of more than one or two days duration. Her entries for 21 May 1894 and 4 September 1894 indicate that she was suffering a good deal on those days.

current in a stream"—did she find satisfaction in it? In what follows I shall use the diaries left by Ichiyō to trace the figure of religion over the pattern of her life.

RELIGION IN ICHYŌ'S LIFE

Among the writings left by Ichiyō are stories, essays, poetry, diaries and letters. The diaries cover, albeit in a fragmentary manner, the period of April of 1891 (Meiji 24) to September of 1896 (Meiji 29). In addition to the normal daily entries these diaries also contain fairly detailed critical passages and impressionistic writing, and it is thus possible to come to understand the author's thoughts and emotional workings.

In the remainder of this essay I will discuss Ichiyō's religious consciousness and her general thought from the information that can be gleaned from these diaries. Before entering such a discussion, however, the diaries must be grouped together. Such a grouping could be made as follows:⁷

Yomogyū ("Overgrown in weeds"): Covers the period when Ichiyō lived in Hongō Kikuzaka-chō; 11 April 1891-14 July 1893.

Chiri no naka ("In the dust"): Covers the period when Ichiyō lived in Shitaya Ryūsenji-machi; 15 July 1893-2 May 1894.

Mizu no ue ("On the water"): Covers the period in Hongō Maruyama Fukuyama-chō; 4 June 1894-22 July 1896.

I will consider religion in Ichiyō's life from three different points of reference. These are religion as an intellectual experience, religion as a psychological experience, and religion as habitual behavior.

7. These classifications are based on *Zenshū*, Vol. 3. This volume is the source of all diaries cited in this article. I have omitted the subdivisions that have been made for each diary.

Religion as habitual behavior Let us begin with the category of religion as habitual behavior. This refers to religion as it appears in whatever form in daily life, and could be referred to as religion in the broad sense (Matsumoto 1981, p.45). The term "religious experience" has conventionally been used to designate special experiences, such as conversions, visions of the divine, and the like. A slight change of perspective, however, reveals that any behavior directed toward a religious object can, if accompanied by religious consciousness, be distinguished from secular behavior.

We can therefore refer to actions with a deep religious content, such as visits to temples or shrines, memorial services, annual observances, rites of passage, prayers and the like as "religious experience in the broad sense," or alternatively, as "religious experience."

From what we can learn through a reading of Ichiyō's diaries, it is obvious that she fairly punctually observed the religious customs conducted in society at large. To begin with, she earnestly participated in a variety of annual observances and rites of passage such as the memorial services for her father, brother and other relatives and acquaintances. As far as more special occasions are concerned, she made a monthly pilgrimage to the Hongō Yakushi temple, and never omitted her visits to the monthly festivals at the Marishiten and Daikokuten shrines in Ueno. These were religious establishments close to her residence, but there were also other reasons for her visits. Yakushi had always been known as a place where one went to pray for recovery from illness, and Marishiten had from the Edo period been the center of faith among the samurai class. Ichiyō could not, even in the new age, completely rid herself of the emotional support provided by her consciousness that she was a member of the gentry.

Ichiyō's performance of this habitual religious behavior was made in a formalized manner. One could not call formalized religious activity the sign of an unusually deep faith, but on the other hand, it is clear enough that this activity was underscored by a deep consciousness that as the head

of the family it was her duty to pray to the kami and the buddhas for the protection and prosperity of the household.

It remains true, however, that these activities were extremely formalized, and one's overwhelming sense is that they were activities that had to be performed as ritual, at fixed times on fixed days, and if they were not, Ichiyō would have felt ill at ease. This feeling can be seen, for example, in some of the entries in her diaries:

This evening was the monthly observance day for Bishamon [a mistaken reference to the Yakushi temple], so the area was very noisy and tumultous (*Yomogyū*, 22 July 1891).

Early this evening I am to go with Kuniko to the Mari-shiten shrine for worship (*Yomogyū*, 3 October 1891).

After it grows dark I will go with my mother to the Yakushi temple for worship (*Yomogyū*, 8 October 1891).

It should be noted, however, that such entries do not appear throughout the diaries, and thus cannot be taken as proof that she was always worshiping. But not every shrine visit is recorded in the diaries, and from the evidence available we have no real grounds for inferences concerning Ichiyō's habits.

It is clear, at least, that Ichiyō made no attempt to deny this type of habitual religious behavior, and that indeed her approach to it was quite positive. Furthermore, she was not without some belief in the this-worldly benefits of religious activities. According to the diary *Yomogyū*, on 25 April 1892 her sister, suffering from a toothache, visited the temple Myōseiji in Yanaka, known for its miraculous powers in treating decayed teeth. Immediately after returning home, her toothaches disappeared, something Ichiyō says "Was a most unusual event indeed."

In short, Ichiyō performed what might be called the formalized, traditional religious practices much as others did. On the other hand, her attitude was far from that of a person who would positively seek this-worldly benefits and

the salvation that could be derived from them when it came to dealing with the so-called crises periods in life such as unavoidable complications in interpersonal relationships or the hardships of extreme poverty. It was probably her intellectual background which prevented her from having such expectations.

In other words, habitual religious activities were, to Ichiyō, best performed within a formalized framework. At the same time, however, she did not attempt to take up a path of salvation through entering one of the established religions such as Buddhism or Christianity.

Religion as an intellectual experience. In considering religion as an intellectual experience in Ichiyō's life we must first deal with the question of Christianity. In Meiji Japan Christianity was a new religion, and as such became the object of Ichiyō's interest. Itō Natsuko, who had been a close friend at the Haginoya, had been attracted by Christianity since her days at a Christian mission school for girls, and another friend, Nonomiya Kikuko, who was herself a believer, explained the Christian faith to Ichiyō, the three of them often discussing Christianity.

Ichiyō was drawn by this religion (she used the word "religion" [*shūkyō*] to refer to Christianity), and went so far as to attempt a translation of Christian hymns with Itō Natsuko.⁸ She said things about Christianity such as, "Disliking Christianity without knowing anything about it is strange" (*Zenshū* III, p.731), and in a discussion with Nonomiya Kikuko, who insisted on the existence of God, she said, "There is essentially no difference in saying that god exists or that he does not exist," holding this to be a decision of one's own heart (diary *Shinobugusa*, 28 August 1893).

8. She translated the British hymn "The life everlasting" together with Itō Natsuko, and has this to say about it in her diary: "All translation is a matter of custom between the translator and the text. Further, I think the best way to go about the task is to first master the original, then say what it says, in my own words...." Considering the time during which she was working, this is a remarkable opinion.

One of the reasons that Ichiyō never fully entered Christianity in spite of her interest in it is certainly the fact that she had a Buddhist background, but an even more important reason was doubtless the fact that she was influenced by the anti-Christian ideas of Nakarai Tōsui. Tōsui would immediately cut off any talk whatsoever of Christianity, so she found it impossible to even discuss the matter with him (Diary, 21 March 1892). Tōsui had developed a strong aversion to what he saw as the corruption and depravity of Christian ministers. Ichiyō had been awakened to the ways of human society by Tōsui, and had what might be called a feminine desire to accept all of his ideas. She was therefore unable to actually enter the Christian church in spite of the encouragement she received from her friends.

Ichiyō had a greater intellectual understanding of Buddhism than she did of Christianity. Perhaps because she personally read Buddhist writings a number of references to Buddhism can be found in her diaries, although these show no trace of any systematic study of Buddhism. These references have two meanings.

The first of these is the value that Buddhism had as a touchstone for life.

Ichiyō's life—at least that part of it that took place after her father died when she was seventeen—was a constant battle against poverty. She would not, perhaps, have appeared at first glance as a person who was having a difficult time in just staying alive. She was surrounded by the grandeur of the Haginoya and visited constantly by acquaintances and friends, and she herself worked diligently in this atmosphere. She had once been scorned as "Princess Modesty" by her classmates at the Haginoya, and Ichiyō herself said of her own character, "Even though I might feel something in my heart, it is difficult to express much in words..." (Diary, 24 March 1892), and seems to have been the sort of person who would hold nearly all her feelings in reserve.

While on the one hand Ichiyō said that the period after

her father's death, when she had to support her family, was a difficult and sad time, she also shows signs of resigning herself to this as the fate assigned her.

Ichiyō acquired this attitude from her studies of Zen Buddhism. There are quotations from Zen masters scattered throughout her diaries. Even apart from the question of how well this young lady in her early twenties was able to understand them, they are still somewhat perplexing. When Hirata Tokuboku came to her at age 21, in the midst of his studies and worried about his future, Ichiyō—who was the same age as he—offered the following Zen adage as advice, with a great show of truth: "Wrong and right are as one; good and evil differ not."⁹

Ichiyō was explaining here that no matter what circumstances one might find oneself in, hearts are all the same, and that everyone is led down the path of truth. It is likely that she intended such phrases for her self, and engraved each one separately in her heart. It is difficult to say whether this was a study of Buddhism aimed at reconciling herself to the fate that had been dealt to her, or whether it is a case of the Buddhism that she had gradually acquired in the course of her education pointing out to Ichiyō the course of salvation from her miseries. Both interpretations could doubtless be affirmed, but the point is that Buddhism had, to Ichiyō, this type of meaning in her day to day life.

The second meaning that Buddhism had for Ichiyō was that it gave her strength to face life's troubles and helped in her efforts to gain insight into them. This is expressed in the fact that she took the penname "Ichiyō" ("floating leaf") She first used this penname in 1891 (Meiji 24), having derived it from a line in the poem "Ode on the red wall," by the Chinese poet Su Tong Po: "Hitch up a fast floating leaf boat." There is also a story that the Buddhist priest

9. There is a large number of entries concerning religion in the diary *Yomogyū*, especially for the year 1893. This quote was taken from 21 March 1893.

Daruma Taishi once crossed a river in a boat of reeds.¹⁰ Further, at a time when her affair with Nakarai Tōsui had been broken off, she wrote a poem in which she said, "I care not if my bad name floats as it will down the river like a boat of tree leaves," and her psychology is evident in the phrase "floats as it will."

The hardships of life are not all that provide unity to Ichiyō's life; there is also her love for Nakarai Tōsui. She was enslaved by this love from the time she first met Nakarai until she died. She went through all the entanglements of human relationships—misunderstandings, betrayals and slander—and at one point appeared to have broken off with him. This parting was only superficial, however, and the love smoldered ceaselessly, deep in her breast. Though she had coped with all manner of economic hardships, Ichiyō proved unable to extinguish the flame of this love. It was a source of confusion for her that lasted for her entire life.

Such confusion must find some kind of solution, and Ichiyō looked for hers in the teachings of Buddhism. We cannot say that she did not consider salvation from the God of the new religion, Christianity, but in the face of the anti-Christian position of her partner Nakarai, this type of solution proved beyond her grasp.

In this sense, the teachings of Buddhism became a source of great strength for Ichiyō. She writes in a diary entry for 29 May 1892:

Viewed intently from a dispassionate distance, what are these things love, hate, passions? As desire for material possessions increases, so too does regret increase. Doubts and anxieties are mere commonplace, vulgar emotions for the masses. For this very reason, is not a man of virtue like light on the water?

10. The story of Daruma Taishi plays in several ways on the word "ashi" ("reed," or "legs"). According to this story Daruma sat for a long time facing a wall, and as a result he was said that he "had no legs [*ashi*]." He hence came to be portrayed as a doll without legs. It was thus said that he had no "o-ashi" ("money"), so he came to be associated with poverty as well.

Here we can see Ichiyō, in the midst of the tribulations of her love affair, drawing from Buddhism and Confucianism for support.

Thus was Ichiyō wracked by troubles, and thus she made great efforts to exorcize them. Her resolve was to do away with all attachments. Once she had written:

The ultimate is the same as the yet to be formed. The troubles one is about to enter and the calm that follows enlightenment virtually resemble one another. Is this the shade of a young leaf, and that the beginnings of a troubled dream? A road sign on the path to enlightenment? If there is a person behind the tree, then:

Grow ever thicker!
Even as darkness falls....
one tree stand.

(Untitled diary, 24 June 1891)

Now, she was to write:

Is, for example, the world of dust not like a pair of worn-out shoes, and the decision to keep them or throw them out not one that rests in our own hearts? What difference does having or lacking money make in all this? If we have it, the world is all the more difficult to abandon, and to live in the currents of the floating world, to love, to become entangled in the bonds of human relations—this is to give in to desire and to wander for a lifetime at the crossroads of pain and pleasure. Thinking about it, is not this world of dust a strange place? (diary *Chiri no naka*, 15 November 1893.)

In these passages we get a clear picture of the figure of Ichiyō wandering confusedly, in the territory of enlightenment but not yet at her goal.

This quest for enlightenment followed the actual course of Ichiyō's life and eventually progressed toward one basic direction. In order to live calmly, taking life as it came,

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she gradually developed an attitude of adapting to her surroundings. Comparing life to a sea, she simply let herself be carried off wherever the angry waves might take her. This can be seen in a *tanka* she records in her diary entry for 23 August 1892:

Winds, waves--
where they are, where they are not,
thus will I go.
A floating leaf boat
bobbing through a floating world.

This attitude was the result of her conflicts in economic, social and personal matters, a way that Ichiyō gradually developed to cope with the world, and it was supported from the flanks by the knowledge of Buddhism she had managed to acquire.

This never passed beyond the level of mere knowledge, however, as can be seen by the fact that Ichiyō never attempted to gain release from the pains of life by engaging in Buddhist training, or embracing the teachings of any particular Buddhist sect.

Ichiyō's first goal in life was to support her family economically, and to be a novelist to do this; there was a love that saddened her heart in each step of her way. A positive quest after Buddhism, therefore, could have been of nothing more than secondary importance to her. Buddhist phrases such as "*Bonnō* ["worldly passions"] is but enlightenment" offered no salvation to Ichiyō, who lamented that it was impossible to become an ordinary person no matter how hard she might try, however close she might actually approach Buddhism. In this sense, Buddhism would always remain a distant reality to her.

The path on which she was embarked being one that would always leave her unsatisfied, Ichiyō gradually developed in her heart a sense of world weariness. It is not surprising that such a feeling should grow in a young woman who had to shoulder the burden of her entire family, sometimes not even knowing where the next day's

food was coming from, and who in the midst of these struggles found that despite the fact that the love she had gambled her whole existence on had been shattered she was still unable to give it up; a young woman who found that as her fame as a writer grew she was surrounded more and more by slander and jealousy.

To Ichiyō the world was a disordered and corrupt place, and she expected that a great religion would arise to save her from it (diary *Nittsuki*, 28 May 1893). For this reason she set about learning about the Buddhist law that "all fields of endeavor are without substance." This amounted to taking to heart various Buddhist teachings, such as the dogma of Amidism that life and death are not to be distinguished and if one is enlightened the Pure land is here and now, while of one is lost it is necessary to find the Pure Land; and the teachings of the *Muryōjukyō* that there is no distinction between existence and non-existence, that all is without limits. Her goal was to actually put these ideas into practice and escape from impermanence, but she was never able to actually accomplish this, and for that reason she began to wish mainly to be able to find a good place to die. She had been driven to the end of her tether by this time. This resulted in deep feelings such as are expressed in the words, "With no enlightenment in my heart, my body will continue to the end to be lost" (diary *Chiri no naka nikki*, March 1894, date not entered).

This was the stage that Ichiyō eventually arrived at, in her own way. More than being something she experienced, however, one feels that she began with an intellectual perception firmly in her mind, then got lost on her way toward the actual experience. In point of fact, there is no place in any of Ichiyō's fiction in which she describes any religious scenes.

Religion as a psychological experience. We can, thus, find many places where Buddhism has cast a long shadow over Ichiyō as an intellectual experience. There are additionally a number of places where there seem to be hints that it

also was a psychological experience. Buddhism served as a pillar of spiritual support to Ichiyō in her life, and its attitude of taking things "as they come" was doubtless always in her brain.

The stronger and more violent her love became the more necessary was this attitude to liberate her from that love's bonds. In the process of this, religion as an intellectual experience gradually changed—though only in small degrees—into religion as a psychological experience.

During the period she was working on "Takekurabe," for example, and her work was not going as she had hoped it would, she was often irritated. Once she wrote:

Today's Ichiyō should no longer feel the pain of the world as pain. To fall pennilessly through the world as I am doing is, I realize, a terrible thing. Even today, when there is no visitor to relieve the loneliness of a long rain, I can trust the various thoughts in my heart to my pen, and so for a time escape from the pains of poverty" (diary *Mizu no ue*, 17 May 1895).

Five days later she wrote, "...I am attacked and yet attacked again by my poverty, yet my heart is like a spring sea."

Ichiyō was already at the stage where there was no way for her to pull back the boat she was rowing across the vast ocean (diary *Mizu no ue*, 31 October 1895). She even shows a new attitude in order to float as she will on the water: "If I abandon my body, what is there in this world to fear?" (diary *Mizu no ue*, January 1896, date not entered). An even different stage comes with the words, "I will abandon all my passions, and all my pleasures, and then will achieve the existence after which I yearn" (diary *Chiri no naka nikki*, March 1895, date not entered).

Such entries do not show Ichiyō as having reached a stage of enlightenment, but they are different from those from the period of her confusion. After this there is nothing. From a logical standpoint, Ichiyō had already been awakened to the state of mind she should be in, and to the

path she needed to take. Had Ichiyō continued to live beyond this point, there would have doubtless been new and different roads opened to her. Within a year of her arrival at this psychological stage, however, her brief life came to an end.

CONCLUSION

Of the three types of religion that I noted earlier in this article, an examination of Ichiyō's diaries shows that it was religion as an intellectual experience that was the most important to Ichiyō's own heart. Ichiyō experienced some extremely difficult human problems during her life, and ultimately she did not solve any of them with religion.¹¹

On the one hand, Ichiyō had perhaps too much education to be able to transcend her material and psychological sufferings through any religion aimed at this-worldly benefits. As an intellectual woman raised in the atmosphere of the new social environment of the Meiji period, Ichiyō was unable to enter into the Buddhist faith, and she was also unable to run to Christianity. Indeed, we could state even more positively that criticism of Christianity made it impossible for her to have the awareness of someone who would accept Christianity as a believer. In this Meiji context both Buddhism and Shinto surrounded Ichiyō but as a religious atmosphere rather than as the objects of religious faith. Ichiyō absorbed a bit of this atmosphere, whether consciously or unconsciously, and we could thus say that she did indeed have a "religion."

The idea that the phenomenon called religion stands somehow above daily experience as a special existence is one that did not enter Japan until after Christianity, which was imported as a foreign religion. The Japanese, generally speaking, see religion in terms of ancestor worship or gain in this world, as something more tightly tied to actual life

11. In the diary *Chiri no naka* we have the statement that theoretical arguments made at one's desk are not necessarily false, but that "if practices have not been brought to the point of ripeness, then there will be no actual fruit borne." This, more than anything, can be said to exemplify Ichiyō's attitude toward religion.

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and which has a function in their own society.

Seen in terms of the relationship between religion and the general Japanese public, which does not consider the question of religious understanding made by logic and religious practice which transcends logic either introspectively or consciously, Higuchi Ichiyō is certainly a typical example of someone engaged in religious activities.

In short, even though she had a fairly good intellectual understanding of religion, she never got to the point of embracing religion in her heart and living her life as a religious person. The empty space in her she filled, consciously or unconsciously, one might say, by carrying out customary religious practices in a formalized way.

In this we can see one form of relationship with religion. But that which supported Ichiyō's life was not religion—rather it was literature, or perhaps her destructive yearning after Nakarai Tōsui.

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