

KUROKI Masako 黒木雅子

## A Hybrid Form of Spirituality and the Challenge of a Dualistic Gender Role

### The Spiritual Quest of a Woman Priest in Tendai Buddhism

This article is an examination of the unconventional spiritual exploration that one woman, a priest of the Tendai School, engaged in from her twenties into her fifties. It follows her conflicts regarding her spiritual quest and gender roles, and further through her encounters with Christianity, Shinto, and Buddhism. Throughout these encounters, she pressed ahead in her spiritual explorations while persistently refusing to make an either-or choice in her life, neither choosing between immersion in gender roles and pursuit of her quest, nor among the three religions. Neither rejecting nor choosing from these alternatives, she pursued her quest until it finally led her to find her “true station in life” in Buddhism. Until she reached that point, however, her path was not so much a trajectory through choices she made of her own volition as it was a process of rushing headlong, as though across an “invisible map,” and being guided to experience those encounters. Ever since building her own temple, however, she has still held the multiple identities of priest, Japanese language teacher, wife, and mother while also continuing her spiritual quest in the very midst of the secular world. This article examines how a certain woman maintained her unconventional spiritual exploration for forty years, and how she met the challenge of a hybrid form of spirituality and dualistic gender roles.

KEYWORDS: spiritual quest (*gudō*)—Tendai Buddhist women priest—station in life—dualistic gender role—spiritual hybridity

KUROKI Masako is a professor of sociology at Kyoto Gakuen University, and a member of the Board of Advisors of the International Institute for the Study of Religion, Japan.

WE FIND that, except for the cases of a few remarkable women in history, the models for protagonists in quest narratives who are seeking god have traditionally been men. The emergence of women who seek to live out quest narratives of their own, different from those that have men as protagonists, was significantly influenced by the second wave of the women's movement that started in America in the 1960s. Carol Christ, who studied women's spiritual quests in works by women writers, found that there were few publications on women and religion in the early 1970s, and that terminology for discussing women's spiritual quests did not even exist (CHRIST 1980, xxix).

In Japan, it was not until the early 1980s that research on women and Buddhism began to take off. Until then the focus of most research was on the history of established organizations, or the political and economic changes among individual temples or sectarian organizations, and mainly about the activities of male priests, so there were few studies on the religious experiences of women (RUCH 2002; KATSUURA 2010; KAWAHASHI 2011). Recently, however, a broader range of research topics have appeared, including "spirituality" and issues of religious belief and practice in daily life. The role of women has been seen as crucial in examining these issues (ŌSUMI 2002, xxv).

However, it is important not only to include women within such research topics, but also to be aware of various perspectives. By incorporating women's perspectives and experiences, the special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* in 2003 titled "Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan" was able to introduce the work of women who were engaged in reforming established religion (KAWAHASHI and KUROKI 2003).<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will look at the spiritual quest of a certain lay woman spanning over thirty years, and the challenge toward established religion that this quest involved. This was a twofold challenge, both against gender roles and against unitary models of religious belonging.

Until now, feminist research in Japan has mostly involved criticism against established religion. However, if we accept religion as a product of a false consciousness, and religious salvation merely as cleverly disguised oppression, the

1. On the debates concerning "the perspectives of women" and "the experiences of women" in the 1980s and beyond, and on the relationship between feminism and religions, see KAWAHASHI and KUROKI 2004.

point of the religious quest by women is suppressed (KAWAHASHI and KUROKI 2004, 15). Many feminist scholars of religion point out that the dualism of spirit and matter, or of spirituality and politics, is oppressive to women.<sup>2</sup> This dualism is an easy trap to fall into, not only with regard to established religion, but also for secular feminists.

Ursula King provides a fruitful and decisive analysis of the intersection of feminism and spirituality:

Negatively speaking, feminist critical thought challenges traditional religions and spiritualities, for their exclusiveness, their rejection and subordination of women: positively, it seeks to discover different, more integral world-and life-affirming religious possibilities. (KING 1993, 6)

This problem, however, is not an issue just for feminist or gender studies. It could be said that feminism and gender have been introduced as concepts into the study of religion in Japan with a specific political intent, which is an unwelcome stance that lacks academic neutrality (NOMURA and KAWAHASHI 2001). This kind of stance in religious studies may indicate that the questions and experience of people who want to rethink the meaning and potential of religion has not been adequately grasped. Margaret Miles wrote that it is necessary to keep in mind three “differences” for the study of religion in the twenty-first century (MILES 2000, 474–77). The first is “difference,” that is, religious studies is an inherently interdisciplinary discipline that could answer complex questions and address broad issues such as those in feminism and cultural studies. The second is “religious difference” that is stimulated through encounters with religious others. The third is manifesting the voices of those who have, until now, remained on the periphery through differences in gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In this article I will focus on gender and religious differences.

The source for this article is a narrative that was elaborated through a series of interviews conducted with Yokoyama Hōyū.<sup>3</sup> These include the first interviews that were conducted at her home in 1997, and additional interviews and informal conversations up to February 2011. I also accompanied Yokoyama to the temple on Mt. Hiei that was the point of departure for the latter part of Yokoyama’s spiritual quest (*gudō*). There I also had the opportunity to talk with priests engaged in ascetic practices, including an Ajari who had inspired Yokoyama by completing the thousand-day mountain circumambulation practice (*sennichi kaihōgyō* 千日

2. Starting with CHRIST and PLASKOW (1992), debates have raged for more than thirty years over the possibilities and limits of feminist spirituality. For recent publications see the Roundtable Discussion in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24: 143–87.

3. For the English-language and Japanese-language versions of an article that deals with Yokoyama’s spiritual exploration, see KUROKI 2005, 2008, 2010.

回峰行).<sup>4</sup> In June 2002, the author participated in a part of the Kyoto *kirimawari*. This ritual practice, which takes place as part of the hundred-day mountain circumambulation, involves walking from the mountaintop to temples, shrines, and homes of Tendai devotees in Kyoto and conducting ritual prayers at these different locations.

### *Women and the Study of Spirituality*

“Spirituality” has multiple meanings, and is difficult to define. Ursula King writes, “From a historical, anthropological, and comparative point of view, spirituality always exists in the plural, as spiritualities,” and finds that “these different spiritualities can be seen as different cultural forms” (KING 2002, 379). My view here is that spirituality is connected with something greater than oneself. That greater something may for one person be a deity, while for another it may be a Buddha, or Nature, or Truth. Though people seek it through different methods, spirituality provides those people with a foundation for their human existence that transcends the framework of organized religion, and presents them with meanings and orientations for living their own individual lives (KUROKI 1996, 70).

King further notes that although this word itself originated in Christianity, spirituality also occurs today in secular, nonreligious contexts, and she introduces two different perspectives on the question of whether spirituality is ultimately possible without religion (KING 2002, 378–80). In the first perspective, the attempt today to split apart religion and spirituality is seen as a result of post-modern thinking, and this approach affirms that such a split should not take place. The second perspective, conversely, affirms that spirituality should be freed from the fetters of religion. In any event, interest and research in spirituality in secular contexts has been increasing in Japan in recent years (YUASA 2003; ITÔ, KASHIO, and YUMIYAMA 2004; SHIMAZONO 2001 and 2007). However, very

4. During the first three years of the thousand-day mountain peak circumambulation practice, the practitioner makes pilgrimage circuits to 255 locations on Mt. Hiei. This course, approximately 30 km in length, is followed without resting every day for one hundred days each year. During the seven-year period, the mountain peak circumambulation practice occupies a total of one thousand days and the practitioner walks approximately 40,000 km, which is equivalent to one circuit around the earth. This thousand-day circumambulation is said to have begun during the Heian Period, and according to the surviving records kept at Enryakuji, forty-seven people have completed the practice as of 2003.

In 1991, the BBC produced a documentary film titled “The Marathon Monks of Mt. Hiei” on the thousand-day mountain circumambulation performed by Mitsunaga Kakudō. Attention generally tends to focus on the walking aspect of the practice, but the mountain circumambulation is “neither a running practice nor a walking practice.” It is a “worship practice” in which the practitioner walks as a means of performing worship (MITSUNAGA 1996, 88).

few of these studies on spirituality have introduced the difference in perspective of gender.

One of the few exceptions to the lack of attention to spirituality among Buddhist women in Japan is the work of Sallie KING (1987; 1988) on Satomi Myōdō. During a life that spanned eighty-two years from the Meiji to the Showa Era, from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, Satomi rejected the traditional role of “good wife and wise mother,” which was the dominant mode of her time, and instead struck out on the path to spiritual enlightenment. The woman priest taken up in this article, Yokoyama Hōyū 横山豊寿, lives in a very different time, but she has also engaged in spiritual exploration that poses a challenge to polarized gender roles. Other points that these two women have in common include the desire to seek the way to truth and the will to accomplish it, as well as the reception of multiple religious resources. Throughout these encounters, Yokoyama pressed ahead in her spiritual explorations while persistently refusing to make an either-or choice in her life, neither choosing between immersion in gender roles and pursuit of her quest, nor among the three religions she encountered. Neither rejecting nor choosing from these alternatives, she pursued her quest until it finally led her to find her “true station in life” in Buddhism.

When Yokoyama Hōyū took the step of entering the priesthood on Mt. Hiei, and completed the series of priestly disciplines there, she was forty-eight years old.<sup>5</sup> She is one of just one-hundred-and-three female chief priests in a Tendai priesthood numbering nearly 7,400 in all. She had always had a distaste for following established forms, and she considers herself less a religionist than a spiritual seeker.<sup>6</sup> The circumstances that led Yokoyama to undertake the demanding course of priestly discipline on Mt. Hiei, with all the austerities involved, as well as everything in her life that has followed from those circumstances, has been and continues to be a process—in the present progressive tense—of searching for her own true station in life. This chain of circumstances has been and continues to be her spiritual quest (*gudō* 求道). This is, in other words, her station in life. Here we will explore, with a focus on gender and interfaith encounters, how the woman Yokoyama Hōyū sought and found her connectedness with some-

5. It should be pointed out that the profile of the typical aspirant who enters an abbey of the Sōtō Zen tradition has changed over the past forty years. Nuns used to enter at age sixteen, but now the average novice's age is forty-three, and many of them come from ordinary lay families. Most novices used to enter in their teens because it was their parents' wish, but novices today choose this path as a conscious, mature decision of their own (ARAI 1993, 203–18). This was also the case with Yokoyama's spiritual quest.

6. According to statistics on Tendai female priests issued by the Publishing Office of the Tendaishū General Administration Department, there were 7,379 priests as of 18 April 2002. Of that number, 1,555 (21.07%) were female priests (*josei sōryo* 女性僧侶), and 103 of those were female chief priests (*josei jūshoku* 女性住職). Yokoyama Hōyū became a chief priest in 2001.

thing greater, something which, for her, constituted truth and her true station in life. We will also examine how her quest involved two challenges: the dualistic gender categories and unitary models of religious belonging.

### *Gender Roles and the Spiritual Quest*

Up to now, the religious experiences of women have often been described in terms of those women's exercise of a spiritual faculty or their transgression of fixed gender roles. Regardless of whether this is correct or otherwise, psychic abilities did not play a central role in the spiritual journey of the woman who is described here. Yokoyama herself considers the fact of being a woman "neither an advantage nor a disadvantage" in seeking out her spiritual path, and adds that she has never been especially conscious of being a woman:

I don't think that being a woman was very relevant to my personal spiritual quest [*gudō*]. On the other hand, the world of priests is a man's world, so there are some things I'm not able to do because I'm a woman. Even before I came up against that, however, I had a household, and was a mother and a housewife. Therefore my situation kept me from being able to do those things [that is, undertake the same disciplines as a man] from the very start.

Is it true, then, as Yokoyama claimed, that gender was not an issue for her? Despite her own awareness (or lack thereof), it seems that the gender roles in her household were very important for her spiritual quest. Needless to say, it is necessary to examine spirituality not only in terms of gender but with regard to the interface of social location, which includes factors such as generation, class, and religion. For example, Roof et al. provide an example of cross-cultural research on the interface of spirituality and generations (ROOF, CARROLL, and ROOZEN 1995, 248–55), and the woman priest who is the focus of this article shares many characteristics of the Japanese postwar generation. She possesses a number of different identities. She is, for example, a wife and mother who married in her twenties and has two children. She is also a Japanese language teacher who has been a member of, and teaching at, the local YWCA for sixteen years (as of 1997), and she was enthusiastically engaged in its various activities. Moreover, she is not only engaged with her own family, but also with her parents and siblings, who all live together on the same property. With them, therefore, she wears the additional identities of daughter and younger sister, so it appears that she "had no freedom in anything, with someone always there in the vicinity watching." She tells us that as a wife, mother, and Japanese language teacher, "there was something within me that could not be satisfied with just that, and that never let me stop seeking" from very early on in her life. What Yokoyama was seeking was to learn the nature of truth, and to discover where she must go to find it:

No matter how wonderful my husband is, and no matter how dear my children are to me, and regardless of the total fulfillment I feel in my heart because my family are here beside me, this is a separate matter. Of course I love my family and my children, and I don't feel any lack there.

There appear to have been very few people who sought out religion for reasons like that of Yokoyama, even among the religionists she encountered. Among women in particular, a few were motivated by bereavement, but many were motivated by divorce, by never having married, or by some other similar reason. When Yokoyama mentioned that she had a husband, therefore, people would exclaim their astonishment, or wonder out loud why, in that case, she felt the need to pursue religion:

The reason in my case did not have anything to do with my [home] environment. Rather, the reasons had entirely to do with matters of the heart and mind. With the exception of temple wives, I suppose that people like me are anomalies.

It was not only people at large who were unable to understand Yokoyama's reasons for pursuing truth in religion. At first her family also failed to understand. That was why Yokoyama's spiritual quest was carried on amid ongoing conflict within her extended family. Her first conflict with the family occurred when she came across the Bible, became interested in Christianity, and began attending church frequently. On the one hand this resulted in conflict with her other family members, who were Buddhists. On the other hand, when an evangelist visited her home and initiated Yokoyama's encounter with the Bible, this also opened a spiritual door for her. At the time she was a young woman in her twenties who, as she described in her own words, "was anti-religion and a realist who only believed in what she could see, who thought that gods and buddhas did not exist, and had a special antipathy to Buddhism."

Her interest, however, gradually became consumed by the Bible, and she began attending church every Sunday. Yokoyama grew so absorbed that she lost sight of her surroundings, to the point that one time she went to church carrying her baby's feeding bottle, and her family members united in opposition to what she was doing. Yokoyama, however, believed that what she was doing was good, and she could not understand why they would oppose her going to church. At church she had companions, but at home she was isolated. As a result of her experience at this time, Yokoyama tends to feel sympathy for people who join cults regardless of the opposition they experience from everyone around them. At the same time, however, she says that her experience also made her aware of both the positive and negative power that religion can exert on a person. When Yokoyama was finally told that her parents would disown her, she seems to have considered leaving home, but could not bring herself to do so. Ultimately, she gave up attending

church, but she was not happy with this decision. Having cut off the connection to her faith in this way, Yokoyama felt as though a great emptiness had opened up in her heart. This discouraging setback at the age of twenty-five meant that she no longer went to church, but she did not give up her search for truth.

Despite what Yokoyama said about herself, I take the view that this woman's spiritual hunger and conflict cannot be understood without discussing her fixed gender roles as wife and mother. In fact, it is the author's opinion that Yokoyama's dissatisfaction with those roles even seems to be propelling her spiritual quest. Unlike men, women are almost invariably forced to choose between religion and family. Though Yokoyama has continued to be troubled by the conflict between her spiritual quest and the family roles that are expected of her as a woman, she nevertheless steadfastly refuses to treat these as exclusive alternatives.

In other words, it can be said that this woman faced a challenge from a profoundly dualistic and divisive spirituality that is assumed by traditional religion and also some secular feminists. That is, the assumption that for a woman, self-realization (spiritual quest) and family must be in conflict. The fact that she could pursue both without accepting that as being in conflict could be examined in terms of gender, class, or generation, but in this article we will focus on gender. This woman's religious journey encompasses both portions that were enabled by the fact of her being a woman, and other portions that were limited for the same reason. For example, it would probably be very difficult socially for a lay man to undertake a thirty-year-long spiritual quest while also supporting a family. In this case, therefore, gender could be considered both something positive and something negative.

### *Religious Wandering and Encounter*

After Yokoyama left the Christian church, she felt "as though a string had snapped," and she entered a phase of wandering from one religion to another. She took an interest in various new religions, and looked into some of them, but did not join any of them. Yokoyama felt that all religions "help some people, so that is good," but she also felt that religions had an overwhelming power "to change people, in a negative sense." The reason that she did not join any of those religious groups, despite their proselytizing efforts, is that what she sought was not a religious organization or group, but her own personal spirituality.

Subsequently, however, the illness of one of her children led Yokoyama to start attending the services of a small "new new religion" in a Shinto-Buddhist syncretic tradition.<sup>7</sup> Once her child had recovered, however, Yokoyama put this

7. This group, which is legally incorporated as a religious organization, is thought to have had about three hundred members at its peak, and lasted only for the founder's generation.



religion out of her mind and stopped attending services there. The time was not yet ripe for her spiritual awakening, which would not come until after her second encounter with this church. This came about several years later when Yokoyama was facing a certain problem. She went back to that church and spoke with the founder of the religion about her problem. Yokoyama felt he understood and sympathized with her, she said, though she had not yet developed her own religious faith, so she was going there more as someone receiving counseling.

Then one time she was brought to realize the truth of her impasse when the founder said to her, “You are always coming around here, but you never put your hands together in prayer and worship. Why is that?” Up until then, she had been aware that members of the religion faced the altar and worshipped, but she herself did not feel inclined to do so. Her reason was that she disliked conventional formalities, and therefore she disliked idol worship. “I was searching with tremendous intensity for a deity, but had no idea how to go about searching for a deity,” she says, so that question came to her as a jolt. Yokoyama recalls that she had lost faith in religions when, “no matter how deep I went, they ended up being no more than form.” Therefore, as she put it, even though she was seeking religion, she had in effect placed herself in the farthest place away from any deity.

At about that time, overcome by worries about problems her children were having, Yokoyama went to have her fortune told. The fortune-teller told her to recite the *Heart Sutra* (*Hannya shingyō* 般若心經) for a thousand days. Thinking that she might as well try doing this, Yokoyama copied out the sutra on calligraphy paper and started reciting it out loud once a day. Then, gradually, she found herself increasing the number of recitations from once a day to twice, three times, ten times. She only met with that fortune-teller once, but after two and a half years without missing a day of recitation, when the thousand days were starting to draw to their end, Yokoyama had started attending her former church again. That group also made a practice of reciting the *Heart Sutra*.

At that time, the founder of the religion was already in his late seventies. Feeling uncertain about the future, Yokoyama asked him what she should do if he died. “You don’t need to worry,” he told her. “If you keep searching for your spiritual path, and never waver from your heart’s goal, then you are bound to find your salvation.” Hearing this, Yokoyama says, she felt much relieved. What he meant was that if she kept holding out her hands to the deity, then she would receive help even if there was nobody visibly there to help her.

Yokoyama seems to have been greatly influenced by this advice, though the influence continued only for a brief period, ending when this leader died shortly thereafter. She was taught “what it means to pray,” and she encountered the *Heart Sutra*. Coming ten years after her encounter with the Bible, which first opened a spiritual avenue for her quest, this was her second formative spiritual encounter. This church would have no second-generation leader, however, so

Yokoyama was told that if she wanted there to be a church, she should start it with her own strength. The greatness of that founder, Yokoyama says, is that he did not appoint a second-generation leader:

I am all in favor of the idea that a religious founder's leadership of a religion should last for one generation only. You can see how religions up to now have set up second-generation and third-generation leaders, and those religions have changed as a result. That is why the leadership should stop after the founder's generation, and the number of people in the group has nothing to do with this. Isn't that how it was with Jesus's group?

When the founder died, Yokoyama went in search again, by herself, of a place to pray. She had heard the founder say, "There are many different religions, but they all differ only in the key. Once you unlock their doors, they are all the same." Consequently, she did not cling to any particular religious framework, though Buddhism, she says, seemed the most distant to her. She had been worshipping a deity up to that point, so she telephoned Shinto shrines and even the prefectural office of the Association of Shinto Shrines in an effort to obtain information about Shinto. Apparently there was even a university for people wanting to become Shinto priests, but that was not what she was looking for. Yokoyama also found that there were correspondence courses for people who wanted to become Buddhist priests. They had different priestly ranks, she said, and the prices were different. "Idiotic," she thought. That was because gaining those qualifications or credentials was not her goal.

Then one day Yokoyama happened to notice, in a newspaper travel section, an invitation to a one-day mountain circumambulation practice. She decided to participate because, she said, she had previously seen newspaper articles about the Ajari who accomplished the thousand-day mountain circumambulation practice. When she read those articles, tears welled from her eyes and would not stop. Clearly, something there was deeply significant to her.

That April, Yokoyama's first time on Mt. Hiei, it was still cold up on the mountain. The one-day mountain circumambulation involved walking thirty kilometers in the dead of night. She signed up for the practice. Half of the participants had already experienced this practice before, and she hoped that she would be able to walk all the way without causing the others any inconvenience. At six o'clock in the evening, Yokoyama had a very simple vegetarian meal, then napped. Waking at midnight, she had a rice ball made by a young Buddhist priest in training, and then she set off with the other participants. There were about thirty of them trailing behind the Ajari, relying on the paper lanterns they carried to make their way through the jet-black night, reciting mantras and walking in total absorption. It started to rain at about three o'clock. Yokoyama became soaked with sweat and rain, then shivered in the cold. They finally

returned to their starting point at about seven-thirty in the morning. A hot bath had been made ready, but Yokoyama held back since she was a newcomer to this practice. As a result, however, she caught a cold, and apparently had a very hard time the next day when she had to go back to her job teaching Japanese. Yokoyama commented that when the group dispersed after the one-day mountain circumambulation practice ended, she said to herself as she descended the mountain, “Well, I probably won’t ever be going up Mt. Hiei again,” and “It was a good experience.” About the time that Yokoyama recovered from her cold, however, and her feet stopped aching, the memories came flooding back to her. She realized this was it, she says. This was her third formative spiritual encounter.

That circumambulation had a truth for me that went beyond the religious framework we think of as prayer or practice. I felt it was something that could not be achieved or affected by lying, cheating, position, or reputation. It was something done as though the doer’s life depended on it. I went through it as though my life depended on it, and I thought that was why I discovered my true station in life.

Deciding that she wanted to know more about the circumambulation practice, Yokoyama telephoned Mt. Hiei to ask about borrowing some video material, and as a result ended up visiting the mountain again after all. At that point, she did not even know that the mountain was associated with Tendai Buddhism, nor did she care. All she knew at that time, Yokoyama says, was the *Heart Sutra*. She also wanted to take part in the circumambulation practice again, so then and there she registered herself formally as a member of the religion. She subsequently obtained an introduction to a Tendai teacher who accepted women as disciples, and in 1991, at the age of forty-three, Yokoyama entered the Tendai priesthood. It took at least three hours for her to reach Mt. Hiei from her home, but Yokoyama bought a commuter ticket and began spending about half of every week there.

In 1993, she formally renounced secular life and took the tonsure. Then she began the sixty-day series of practices at the Mt. Hiei training center, culminating in an examination (*kōgaku ryūgi* 広学豎義). This was a comprehensive examination in esoteric doctrine and ritual said to date back to the year 801. She completed it at the age of forty-eight. Looking back over these sixty days of practice, Yokoyama explained that it had been a time of great emotional complexity as she swung back and forth between the ambivalent feelings she was having about her family and about her religious practice.

There is part of me that would like to spend all my time on my spiritual quest. [Therefore] those sixty days spent secluded [on the mountain] were a very happy time for me.

At the time of the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, Yokoyama's own home was hit hard by the earthquake, but ten days later she was already back up on Mt. Hiei. "Even when everything was rocking back and forth in the earthquake, the main thing on my mind was Mt. Hiei." Yokoyama explained that when one is trying to accomplish something, "You can't do it until you get to the point where you're just charging headlong toward your objective."

Upon completing her period at the training center, Yokoyama did not feel satisfied so much as she felt drained. This was because she went there not in order to become a Buddhist priest but "in search of her own spiritual path." Yokoyama embarked on her training at a peak of emotional momentum, so in some ways she seems to have come out feeling more disappointed than otherwise. The reason, she said, is that the young people who were taking the training were doing it to become priests so they could inherit their family temples. Some of them seemed to have no interest at all in religious faith. Looking back at it now, however, Yokoyama feels more tolerant of those priests, and she sees them now as people who are subject to their various individual circumstances.

### *Hybrid Forms of Spirituality*

It was after completing her training on Mt. Hiei that Yokoyama Hōyū became a priest of Tendai Buddhism. When asked about her "station in life," this was her reply:

My station in life is not located on Mt. Hiei or in Tendai Buddhism. Rather, I found it in Buddhism. That was the location, but I am not particularly attached to that religious framework, either. Actually, if the YWCA held services, I would not hesitate to attend them.

Yokoyama's reply expresses a spirituality that embraces a diversity of religions. The emerging form of that spirituality was already apparent at the initial stages of her spiritual quest. In her twenties, she experienced a connection with "Christianity, which opened my eyes to religious faith." That connection still existed, though tenuously, during her subsequent period of wandering in search of spiritual truth. At the time of the interview at her home, Yokoyama was wearing a pendant and amulets that indicated to her that spirituality is a hybrid form that includes Christianity, Shinto, Buddhism, and various other religious influences. For Yokoyama, every one of those influences represents an encounter whose impact is still felt within her and coexists with the other influences without contradiction. She said:

Probably a priest who only associates with people in one sect or denomination might find it strange, but it does not feel at all mysterious to me. I have been guided like this in so many ways.... Some might say that this is messy or inconsistent, but I don't care what they think. Right now I am a priest with-

out any hair on my head, and I am teaching Japanese, and I am absorbed in worldly life, and I go to the supermarket to buy meat and fish to eat. You see? It isn't that I'm two-faced. None of this is fake. All of it is me. In fact, I think it's strange to make those distinctions in the first place. If you transcend all of those distinctions and see things in a higher dimension, instead, then there isn't going to be any single conventional framework to limit experience.

Why is it that this kind of hybrid form of spirituality has been viewed as problematic? Voss Roberts points out that “modern definitions of religion are partly responsible for perceptions of multiple commitment as problematic and the metaphor of belonging obscures important dynamics of religious identity” (VOSS ROBERTS 2010, 46). As in the case of Yokoyama, whose identity as a female spiritual seeker is neither that of the religious elite nor of the mass of ordinary practitioners, she could be classified with Voss Roberts's “Model 3: The Hybrid,” as one with multiple religious belonging (VOSS ROBERTS 2010, 51) that is both double and partial. In other words, hybrid identity is double because it affirms multiple realities; it is partial because it is never completely at home in any of them. “Partiality” in particular fits well as a description of the spiritual quest of Yokoyama's life until she found her place of belonging.

Thus Yokoyama was not confined by the limited framework of any one religion. In this respect, her consciousness was influenced by the founder of the Shinto-Buddhist syncretic religion she had encountered, and also by her work as a Japanese-language teacher, which led her to “encounters beyond the boundaries of nations, languages, customs, and religious views.” Even when Yokoyama was instructing Catholic nuns and priests in the Japanese language, she and they were “influencing each other spiritually.” Again, through her experiences with people who have come to work in Japan, and people who work at various embassies and the United Nations, the values that Yokoyama used to hold dear gradually fell apart, and she discovered that “my moral compass turned out to be useless.” Now those many and various encounters have revealed their meaning. When she looks back over her spiritual quest, Yokoyama feels that she was being led through “an invisible map” so that she “did what needed to be done in order for it to turn out the way it had to.” As she describes that process, it was as though the totally scattered “pieces of a jigsaw puzzle came together one by one to form a picture where everything fit where it was supposed to fit.”

As we have explored above, with a focus on gender roles and interfaith encounters, Yokoyama could sustain a multiplicity of selves within herself as a result of her resistance to dualism (KUROKI 2008). Yokoyama's spiritual quest indicated that spirituality not only takes multiple forms in different people; it can also take multiple forms—a hybrid form—within the same individual.

Wonhee Anne Joh, a Korean-American postcolonial feminist theologian, has suggested that we need to shift “our feminist episteme that is radically open

to ways of being ... that might even be different from the tradition of Western Enlightenment liberalism” which demands us to think in terms of either/or (JOH 2008, 171). In her spirituality of resistance and transformation, JOH emphasizes “letting a multiplicity of selves into my being” (2008, 172). Her argument for a multiplicity of selves holds true in Yokoyama’s case as well.

In the summer of 2002, five years after our original interview, Yokoyama felt the desire to give back to society the many wonderful things that she had been taught, and so she founded a Tendai temple. She erected it in a corner of the property where she and her family live, and named it Mushō Kongō’in 無障金剛院. In February 2011 I visited Yokoyama again to ask if there had been any further changes in her spirituality. She has gained confidence in Buddhism as the proper place for her life, and still reaffirms that gender is not particularly central to her spirituality.

As for the future prospects of her temple, she “wants the temple to be a place where the people who visit become well [*genki* 元気].” She added, “Sad to say, often the reason people visit a temple is due to unfortunate circumstances [such as deaths or other tragedies], but a temple should be a place for people who are alive. But whatever the circumstances, I hope to build up relationships with many people.” For example, a funeral or other religious services should not be the end of a relationship, but can be an opportunity to help people who have to return to their daily lives. Among the requests for funerals, some are for people who have committed suicide, or from nursing homes, and Yokoyama does not want to take these lightly. She feels that a small temple can serve well for such cases, even when there are no family members to attend the ceremony. Yokoyama adds:

Sometimes I wonder why people come to such a small temple as this, but some people say that, unlike other temples, it feels much more friendly; we are invited in to the temple for tea, and it seems that the Buddha is within reach. Perhaps it lacks in solemnity or grandeur, but it feels familiar. They can discuss things freely without feeling daunted by an imposing priest. Often when they leave they say with thanks that they were able to talk about things that they hadn’t anticipated.

Many of the people who visit this temple are women in their fifties or sixties, so it is a temple that seeks to provide relief from their pain. For Yokoyama, this is her way of realizing the Tendai Buddhist slogan of “lighting up one corner” (*ichigū o terasu* 一隅を照らす). Yokoyama adds, “There are many ways to interpret this, but I think it means that you can change society if each person shines a light in the corner in which they stand.”<sup>8</sup>

8. Evening edition of the *Asahi Shinbun* 朝日新聞, 18 January 2007.

### Conclusion

This woman's spiritual quest has occupied her from her mid-twenties into her fifties. During that time, Yokoyama had three formative spiritual encounters—with the Bible, the *Heart Sutra*, and the mountain circumambulation practice—through which she discovered that her own station in life was to be found in Buddhism. After encountering the mountain circumambulation practice, Yokoyama pressed onward single-mindedly, driven only by her desire for spiritual discipline, until she became a qualified priest. She experienced guiding hands that led her along her way in the various forms of Christianity, Shinto, and Tendai Buddhism. Spiritual resources from these multiple religions all remain important to Yokoyama today. For her, they are not mutually exclusive. Her spirituality is not one of either/or, but is a hybrid form that supports her multiple social identities of priest, wife, mother, and Japanese-language teacher.

In addition, as noted earlier, neither does Yokoyama treat the demands of gender roles and the spiritual quest as exclusive alternatives. Although she does not assert it herself, she denies the dualism of culturally imposed women's roles and seeks a holistic spirituality. Behind this spirituality is a marginal experience and a spiritual thirst of a lay person with aspects of gender and religion that is apart from both religious elites and the experience of the mass of ordinary practitioners.

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