

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN JAPAN 2007

Religion in a Consumer Society: In the Shadow of Spirituality

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The following report on “religion in the news” in Japan from late 2006 through 2007 is a translation of a report published in Japanese as 「消費社会の〈宗教〉: スピリチュアルブームの陰で」 in the pages of 『現代宗教』 [Gendai shūkyō] 2007, a journal published annually by the International Institute for the Study of Religion. It is based on the database of the RIRC (Religious Information Research Center) and on information culled from newspapers, journals, and specialized religious publications. As in previous years, the author has kindly consented to allow us to translate her report into English in order to provide information on the current state of religious issues in Japanese society.

Before delving into the theme of this issue, I want to look at new trends related to religious education following the publication of the 2007 special issue of *Gendai Shūkyō* on “The Horizons of Religious Education.”¹

Aiming for Religious Education

As was mentioned in the last issue, amendments to Article 15, section 1 of the Basic Education Law were officially announced and implemented on 22 December 2006. The section “Religion in general education” has been added to the law. It now states: “Attitudes regarding religious tolerance, general religious education, and the position of religion in social activities must be respected from an educational viewpoint.” The second section, however, with no change from the previous law, states: “Schools established by state and local public bodies

1. [See the translation of this section in last year’s *Bulletin* (31: 50–5).]

shall refrain from religious activities or religious education of specific religions (religious neutrality)”; carrying out education regarding religion in Japanese public schools is disallowed. As was brought up in the previous issue, aside from private religious schools, the religious elements at present have become a topic of discussion amongst some educators. As a part of education about life and death issues, “death education” that makes children think about the meaning of life when studying about death is being discussed.

In March 2007, the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations held a symposium entitled “Religion and Education,” with Shimazono Susumu (Tokyo University) acting as Chair. Taishō University President Hoshino Eiki, referring to the “General religious education” that was added to the Basic Education Law, stated that there has been progress made in state education regarding religion. Other panelists also confirmed that the association will continue to have a proactive approach towards religious education. This will include religious moral education for young people that will evolve into fostering a sense of ethics, as well as to value interpersonal relationships. In addition, Hoshino is continuing with the project to translate religious textbooks from abroad. The progress that has been made in understanding different cultures through religion and developing religious morals were introduced at the symposium. For example, textbooks such as those from the U.K. for five to seven-year-olds depict the daily life of an Islamic girl.

In January 2007, Taishō University held a symposium entitled “Life Education and spirituality.” Yumiyama Tatsuya (Taishō University) acted as Chair at this symposium, where the possibility of religious education within elementary and secondary education was discussed. There were three speakers: Iwata Fumiaki (Osaka Kyōiku University), Kondō Taku (Tōkai University), and Carl Becker (Kyoto University). Iwata discussed the training of staff regarding course curriculum and experimenting with religious moral education, Kondō discussed the need to bring shared experiences to nurture fundamental self-respect, and Becker spoke of the essential and necessary role of religion when studying Japanese culture.

It is not known to what extent these proposals brought up in the symposium are reflected in current educational establishments, but when thinking about the future of religious education, it is important to encourage the educational world, such as Taishō University’s project to translate foreign textbooks.

For both teachers and students in the educational world, “religion,” as it were, is today kept at arm’s length. For young people, the desire to acquire basic knowledge on “religious things” as well as their natural curiosity is suppressed, with little experience and only fragmentary information available through games and the mass media. However, sooner or later the time will draw near when they will deal with religious matters. It is not desirable for this situation to continue for a

long time. Even when state education is concerned, instead of sitting and waiting for changes in the law to be recognized, we must prepare by proposing measures for religious education.

The Concept of “Specialists in Religious Culture”

The trends highlighted here are The Japanese Association for Religious Studies’ concept of “Specialists in Religious Culture”:

The purpose of a “Specialist in Religious Culture” is to nurture those capable of acquiring accurate knowledge regarding religious cultures in Japan and around the world. It is therefore necessary that standardized credits be acquired when taking lectures related to religious culture in universities.

The sixty-sixth conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies was held from 15 to 17 September 2007 at Taishō University. On the second day of the conference, at the Committee for Investigating the possibility of a panel of Educational Specialists in Religious Culture, the potential and significance of the concept of a Specialist in Religious Culture was set down. The committee Chairman, Inoue Nobutaka (Kokugakuin University), Ōmura Eishō (Kwansei Gakuin University) and Fujiwara Satoko (Taishō University) spoke about this concept, and announced objectives to inaugurate this system at the member’s meeting in 2010.

There are other academic societies concerned with similar cases of authorizing qualifications. In 1988, for example, sixteen academic groups, including the Association of Japanese Clinical Psychology, established the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologists, recognizing the qualification of Clinical Psychologist. In 2003, three groups, the Japan Sociological Society, the Behaviormetric Society of Japan, and the Japan Society of Educational Sociology, established the Japanese Certification Board for Social Researchers, recognizing the qualifications of Specialist in Sociological Surveys and Expert in Sociological Surveys. There are no state qualifications for specialists in psychotherapy and counseling, but the term “clinical psychologist” is a non-official qualification, and has already gained societal recognition. Specialist jobs such as Specialist in Sociological Surveys and Expert in Sociological Surveys develop questionnaires and interviews, carry them out, and then analyze them. These are not only for research institutes, but also for industries that wish to know the attitudes of consumers, plus the growing demand for self-governing bodies that sound out the level of satisfaction with government. Both of these two precedents are succeeding. So what can be expected for Specialists in Religious Culture?

Inoue, the leader of this project, stated that there is societal demand for a qualification system, and not only to strengthen student's appetites for learning about religious culture. One example is that when Japanese industries are economically active abroad, basic religious knowledge is needed to avoid unnecessary problems.

Admittedly, Japanese industries making inroads abroad are not so well informed regarding religious considerations, and occasionally they have serious problems. In 2001 in Indonesia, for example, a major problem occurred for "Indonesia Ajinomoto," the overseas subsidiary of a Japanese food company. Despite having the mark of *halal* (approval) to show that their goods were produced following the established method of production that obeys Islamic law, in actual fact pork was used as an ingredient during the production process. Although not the state religion, about ninety percent of the population in Indonesia follows Islam, which abhors pork as impure. The present-day situation is complex, what with the times changing and the increasing production of processed food. The presence of a *halal* mark is an important matter for followers of Islam, who strictly observe the precepts of their religion. In this case there was a lot of anger toward Ajinomoto which, despite receiving warnings, did not take them seriously. The situation was finally resolved with the approval of President Wahid, but the economic loss to Ajinomoto was enormous. This case is representative of the religious problems that Japanese businesses can encounter. A Specialist in Religious Culture may help to avoid these problems in advance.

Inoue also noted that Specialists in Religious Culture would be welcomed in the tourist industry. It looks as if Specialists in Religious Culture could become accepted as World Heritage sites undoubtedly command international interest. If we limit ourselves to thinking about Japan, many people visit tourist spots that are imbued with religious significance, such as Kyoto, Shikoku and Nagasaki. The popularity of local licenses in many places in recent years also shows the intention to deepen understanding of home-grown tourist attractions. As expected, those who have a certain depth of knowledge of religion could make a contribution.

In conclusion, there is potentially a high demand to obtain the qualification of Specialist in Religious Culture, but it is not easy to get this on track. Aside from the issues raised by Inoue, what kinds of demands are being considered? This needs to be investigated from many angles, and depending on the situation it may necessary to expand the scope of what is covered in classes on religion. It is also conceivable that practical knowledge and ability be demanded. For example, for a Specialist in Religious Culture, this could include specialist knowledge of religious corporation law, or the management systems of religious organizations and so on. However, just how far can these expectations be met within the

framework of universities? Here we will take a look at what developments will attract attention.

Mass Media and the Boom in Spirituality

A number of years ago, I was in charge of teaching a first year class called “Japan’s Religions” at a university in Tokyo. I handed out a questionnaire that stated, “Please write something that you wish to know regarding religion, or any questions you have.” The most common question in the responses was, “Is ‘spirituality’ a religion?” Inoue Nobutaka was responsible for editing *The Fourth Japan-Korea Student Religion Survey Report* (2008). The following question was posed: “Which of the following do you feel when you hear the expression ‘spirituality’?” The following five choices were given: 1) emotionally deep, 2) easy to get close to, 3) skeptical, 4) I don’t know, and 5) something else. From these answers, 42.2 percent of respondents overall answered “emotionally deep,” and so Inoue understood that the university students grasped that “spirituality” is like a movement of the spirit or the state of the soul. This movement of the spirit or the state of the soul was once closely tied to religion, but as shown by the student’s question, spirituality is expanding beyond the bounds of religion. It has already been a long time since the words “spirituality” and “spiritual” became well known. It seems as if the words appear frequently, almost daily, on television and in magazines. In the publishing world, the topic of spiritual procurement was covered in the September 2007 issue of the magazine *Henshū kaigi*. Here I would like to summarize the “spiritual boom” that continues to expand while drawing a firm line between itself and the religious world, in connection with the special edition *Gods in the media*. First, I will give a brief background to this situation.

Two of the sources of spirituality are the phenomenon of “new-age” and the “world of psychology.” A new direction in psychology developed in Europe and America in the 1970s, and then arrived in Japan. Individuals sought sacred experiences such as a “new spirituality movement/culture” (Shimazono). There was conflict between this spirituality and existing religious traditions and religious organizations. Initially, it was translated as “New age” and became fashionable, and while taking in Oriental elements such as yoga, meditation, and zazen, finally settled in the world of psychology. These new religious groups, the so-called “new new religions,” continue to appear one after the other.

A boom in the occult sprouted during the latter half of the 1970s. Many people remember the real-life experiences of this time. UFOs became a hot topic, and the Paranormalist Uri Geller visited Japan, and appearing on tv, he restarted watches that had stopped. Mysterious phenomenon such as ghost photography and ghostly experiences became incessant in magazines and on tv. Among

children, “Mr. Kokkuri” (an ouija board) was popular, adults couldn’t control the mass hysteria, schools couldn’t cope, and there were many instances when this was banned. At the beginning of the 1980s *Kuchisake-onna* 口裂け女 (a slit-mouthed woman) became the hot topic nationwide. This occult boom is also thought to be another source of the current “spiritual boom.”

These sources were eradicated all at once with the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway system carried out by Aum Shinrikyō in 1995. The world of psychology and the occult were then understood to be dangerous, suspicious worlds, and the boom went into rapid decline. The current boom in spirituality often emphasizes the difference between itself and the negative images of the previous boom.

“Spirituality/spiritual,” which today are common terms, do not change society or people’s lives by harnessing the extraordinary power of extra-sensory perception. Their main features are to acquire perspective and techniques to make the problems of everyday life easier. They feature the easy acquirement of knowledge, and being able to put this into practice immediately. This comes from listening to messages that come from the soul, and abiding by the judgment of fate when using astrology as the source. One of the earliest examples is Dr. Copa, a *fengshui* expert, who experiments with adopting *fengshui* to domestic chores, although these days many digressions are made. Spirituality/the spiritual appear before us in a variety of forms, and are understood to be closely tied to specific people. In the current boom, well-known people in this field include a variety of people with differing job titles: Ehara Hiroyuki (spiritual counselor), Hosoki Kazuko (fortune teller), Miwa Akihiro (singer and actor), Kimura Fujiko (psychic), and Kagami Ryūji (researcher on astrology). Here we will look at the relationship between them and the mass media.

What made these people become well-known was, in many cases, women’s weekly magazines. As Ehara tells his guests, communicating with their guardian spirit allows them to solve any worries they may have. This also holds true for Gibo Aiko, a medium who died in May 2003. It is easy to amplify this topic as there are row upon row of ads for astrologers and mediums in the advertising section of women’s weekly magazines. In the meantime, this doesn’t mean that they haven’t made any appearances in the mass media, but they have become noticed due to women’s weekly magazines. Gibo is a typical example of this. At this juncture I will compare ideas on spirituality in today’s mass media between Gibo and Ehara, the standard-bearer in the field.

According to the religion information database, the November 1986 issue of the magazine *Josei jishin* was a special issue on ghost photography with Gibo Aiko, who appeared as the expert in the issue. From then onwards, she was picked up by TV through issues such as the “ghost photography series,” “animal (pets) ghosts that can change you,” “fashion ghosts that can change you,” and

a “ghost discussion area.” However, while on TV there were programs validating the evidence of the occult phenomenon, at the same time there were also some doubts regarding this spiritual ability in a series published in *Josei Seven*. From August 1993 *Josei Jishin* ran a series of articles titled “The dirty truth about medium Gibo Aiko,” and whilst suffering these attacks in the mass media, she virtually disappeared.

Looking at the case of Ehara in the same database, in the women’s weekly magazine *Josei Seven* in 1992, there was an article titled “Talking to a Medium: The Laws of Satō Aiko.” What is interesting is that Gibo restricted her appearances to *Josei Jishin* only, and in contrast, in the same year Ehara was introduced in the fashion magazine *CanCam*. On top of that, Ehara was active in many magazines aimed at the younger generation such as *An’an*, and *More*. Ehara appeared in the August 1999 issue of *An’an* talking about the process of learning in an article titled “The power of summoning good luck.” On top of that, in the same year, as per the established practice at year’s end, Ehara’s name appeared in the prediction pages that forecast love horoscopes and so on for the following year. Ehara enjoyed prolonged sales of his book titled “Reeling in good fortune, a spiritual book” that was sold by the publishing house Mikasa Shobō in 2001. In this book Ehara used the term “spiritual” for the first time. The editor, who had the experience of creating psychiatrist/psychologist Wayne W. Dyer’s self-help book, was seeking authors targeting female readers in their 20s and 30s, with “something that can be put into practice in everyday life, something with a cute and fashionable appearance; a spiritual book” (Editor’s meeting, quoted above).

Ehara made appearances on TV, and there were repeated printings of his book; exactly what the editor had hoped. The March 2000 issue of *An’an* described Ehara as a “medium,” but it must be pointed out that it was only at this time that he became known as a “spiritual counselor.” In this way, looking at the discrepancies in the appearances of Gibo and Ehara in women’s magazines, the boom in the occult, the world of psychology prior to 1995, and the current boom in spirituality, the trends in style and target are different. They have changed from emphasizing peculiarity and abnormality to a more relaxed daily routine, and the focus has changed from middle-aged women who have an interest in these mysterious phenomena to younger women.

TV still follows the topics of women’s weekly magazines. Ehara made regular appearances on *Egura Kaiundō* (TV Tokyo, October 2003 to September 2005) as an advisor on women’s love lives and life. The program was broadcast late at night, and this was a program where Ehara told of messages from the deceased to those who had lost family members and were heartbroken. “Ehara Hiroyuki special: Letters from Heaven” was broadcast for the first time in April 2004 on Fuji TV. It was popular with audiences as the theme was familiar to all, that of

losing a loved one. Since the third show it has been broadcast at 7 pm during the peak viewing time.

With a background such as this, *Newsweek Japan*'s issue dated 16 May 2007 was titled "Japanese and spirituality," with a feature on the "Ehara phenomenon," and an interview with the man himself. The feature itself contains fairly typical contents for those who are searching for a way to heal the soul by easily obtaining something spiritual in this new Japanese society of "haves" and "have-nots." We can also say that by becoming a topic of conversation this "boom" itself merits attention.

On another program, the fortune teller Hosoki Kazuko, who established the "Six Stars Fortune Telling" program, acted as a counselor on the program titled "Say it frankly!" (TBS, August 2004 to March 2008). Hosoki didn't mince her words, with famous people even changing their names due to her suggestions, and generating a great deal of publicity. According to Hosoki, following the publication in 1983 of "How to read your fate with six-star fortune-telling," a series that was already well-known, each person comes under the six "protective stars" of Saturn, Venus, Mars, Uranus, Jupiter, and Mercury, with each person's fate being divided up into "six-star fortune-telling." Through TV she again became well-known during the late-night TV show *Neporigue* (Neptune League, Fuji TV, April 2003 to March 2005). There was a "consulting corner" segment with famous people which became very popular. Hosoki herself became the main attraction, and then was given her own TV show.

Beyond that, the leader of the male idol group SMAP, Nakai Masahiro, hosted the program "To SMAP: Nakai Masahiro's Fridays," (TBS, began broadcasting October 2001). Appearing on "SMAP's Friday Yin Yang" program was Ishida Chihiro, the "founder of Ishida-style yin-yang." The corner "Ishida's yin-yang miracle reform" was for good fortune, with explanations concerning the position in which to construct housing plans for worried viewers. In order to have an impact he wore impressive clothes, and there was a strong sense of Ishida being the center of activity on TV. As expected, he appeared in women's weekly magazines such as *Josei Seven*, and before long was getting coverage in magazines for young female readers, then made appearances on TV, and so followed a path similar to Ehara. In the same example of "To SMAP: Nakai Masahiro's Fridays," Kimura Fujiko appeared in the series "Kimura's God Series" as the "God of Aomori." In Kimura's case, in Aomori Prefecture, her birthplace, her prediction that a large snake would escape from a department store exhibition was shown across the whole country. Before long, *Josei Seven* had taken her up, and in 2007, Shōgakukan, the publishers of *Josei Seven*, published "Realize your happiness." So in contrast to Ehara and the others brought up here, she took a different route, going from TV to women's magazines.

Upon seeing these “spiritual” people come out on TV shows, the one that stands out is the talk show “Kokubun Taichi, Miwa Akihiro and Ehara Hiroyuki’s ‘Spring Aura’” (TV Asahi, began broadcasting April 2005). On this program, Kokubun, a member of the male idol group Tokio, is the host and Ehara, through his clairvoyance, sees the aura, previous lives, and guardian spirits of his famous guests, introduces the heretofore unknown people, and then together with Miwa imparts all kinds of advice. At first the show was broadcast late at night, but as the viewer ratings were high, in April 2007 it was moved to premium time.

Miwa, who is a regular on the show and is known as the “Love evangelist,” has a long history in showbiz as an actor and singer, and is known by those above a certain age. In addition, he has experience as a radio personality, giving advice on life issues. From a young age he has been tormented by a kind of “psychic phenomenon,” has a deep interest in the world of psychology, and has contributed his views on religion and life in the specialist religious newspaper *Chūgai Nippō*. He published “Life Notes” in 1998 for the younger generation, and in the same year appeared on the TV show on longevity, “It’s okay to laugh!” (Fuji TV, began broadcasting October 1982). The host, Tamori, said by way of introducing Miwa, “You had better trust this person,” attracting more attention to Miwa. He is also known as a voice actor in the animation films of Miyazaki Hayao, such as “Princess Mononoke” (1997) and “Howl’s Moving Castle” (2004). According to a skeptical Miwa, when it comes to fortune tellers and mediums, the previously mentioned Kimura (of “Gods of Aomori” fame), together with Ehara, are two of a very small number of people who are the real thing. That is why one element of Miwa’s so-called “recommendations” is to support the interests of Ehara. In actuality, it isn’t so much that the show has high viewer ratings, although it gets regular viewers, but even in the *Fourth Japan-Korea Student Religion Survey Report* (2008) mentioned above, over ninety percent knew the program name “Spring Aura.” In addition, forty-five percent stated that they believe the ghost stories featured on the show, and it is easy to see why this TV show is well-received.

Looking at it like this, the current “spiritual boom” has, aside from being introduced in magazines and on TV shows, been influenced by famous people in a big way. In addition, many of these programs are variety shows, withholding any kind of search for anything skeptical or doubtful, and this could be considered as an attempt to sweep away the shadow of 1995. By connecting with famous people on everyday TV shows, these spiritual people have become familiar on TV. Through them a new side to these famous personalities is shown, increasing the feeling of closeness with them. With their incessant appearances on TV, they themselves have constructed a more accessible image.

Naturally, an aspect of fragility to this construction can be felt. In February 2007, The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales submitted a request to improve the subject matter of TV shows that bring up psychic phe-

nomenon or extrasensory perception to the following organizations: NHK, The National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan, BPO (Broadcasting Ethics and Program Improvement Organization), tv Asahi, Nippon Television Network Corporation, TBS, and Fuji tv. At this meeting, the tv shows were alerted to make sure they promote awareness and pay attention to their influence on society. It was pointed out that by using fraudulent practices, such as selling goods by claiming that the purchaser will obtain supernatural benefits, these tv programs could potentially cause harm to consumers and to those who become believers and ground their faith in destructive religious cults. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (also known as the Unification Church) uses fraudulent practices to systematically collect funding from all regions of the country. The aforementioned National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales is a group that was established in May 1987 for the purpose of preventing harm and aiding victims of fraudulent practices. Their petition states:

tv shows feature mediums and self-styled mediums who declare that they can see the spiritual world and auras that most people generally cannot see, and point out various things to tv personalities. These tv personalities believe this without any doubt, tremble and shake, and show deep emotion. Other tv shows feature a fortune teller who decisively predicts the future of the tv personality, those around him/her truly believe what they are being told, and they earnestly respond. These shows, that are frequently being broadcast at present, lead people to easily believe in the spiritual world and the afterlife, especially an audience of young people, minors with limited life experience, and housewives, of whom many have an absolute belief in fortune-telling.

Bear in mind how obvious this is in the afore-mentioned “Spring Aura” and others. The petition continues on regarding how the Unification Church solicited people by showing videotapes of these programs. They brought up examples such as fear of the afterlife and the existence of a spiritual world, and strongly appealed for the necessity in holding a memorial service for the dead. The serious consideration that was placed on the production of the tv shows for audiences meant that they were being used by fraudulent practices (emotionally manipulative sales techniques), and this set off alarm bells ringing.

Furthermore, the broadcasting standards of the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan were cited in the petition:

When bringing up religion, objective reality is disregarded. The content of the shows should not deny science. The reality is that religion gives its followers hope and encouragement, but this is not a justifica-

tion for the denial of modern science. Regarding fortunetelling, or anything similar in judging luck, do not force people to believe or make any judgments. Based on the common sense of people of today, when unscientific superstitions such as physiognomy, palm reading, phrenology, divination of someone's fate by studying his personal seal, house physiognomy, graves, feng shui, fate, judging luck, sensing the supernatural, and spiritual ability are brought up, they are not treated positively.²

As pointed out in chapter 8 ("Regarding Expressions"), it was suggested that they reconsider whether the program being broadcast conform to strict standards. Following this, from April 2007, at the end of "Spring Aura," subtitles appear that state:

The "previous world" and "guardian spirit" have not been verified by modern science. These are just hints to get people to lead better lives.

However, it seems that the brakes are not being applied to this "spiritual boom" at present. On the contrary, it is being diffused more widely by straddling age groups and areas of concern. For example, in the case of Kagami Ryūji, a researcher of astrology who has adopted elements of astrology into psychology, the emphasis is more on the connection with intellectuals and cultural figures rather than celebrities. Also in discussion with Kagami were Miyadai Shinji and Kayama Rika. With a background of completing a master's course at International Christian University (Mitaka City, Tokyo metropolitan area), he brought up a slightly different idea of "spiritual" people, giving an interesting example of a lot of work being available at culture centers.

Looking at other publications, specialist magazines on spirituality aimed at women in their 20s and 30s are being published one after the other. For example, *Trinity*, *Voice Style*, and *Sundari* were first published in 2001, 2005, and 2007 respectively. The Project Editor of *Sundari* stated, "We thought it would be good if we could touch on spirituality with the same sense of enjoyment as fashion and beauty salon treatments." All three magazines combine spirituality and fashion, stress the visuals when creating the pages of the magazines, and introduce how women can get their hands on beauty and happiness and put this into practice in their everyday lives. In this way, the barriers to "spiritual things" can be broken down every day.

Finally, I would like to mention a report on Shimo Yoshiko. In April 2007, the actor Hosaka Naoki entered the priesthood at Rokusui'in, the head temple of Shingon Rokuji Mikkyō, and the Head Priest, Shimo, attracted a lot of attention.

2. Cited from chapter 7, "Religion."

For some time Shimo has appeared as a medium on TV shows. However, it was in 2000 when she became instantly known after performing a ritual to get rid of the mysterious phenomenon of an abnormal noise that was troubling the residents of public housing in Gifu Prefecture. Hosaka appeared on the same show, and as a result decided to join the priesthood. This case is also an example of the connection with the world of celebrity. In Shimo's case, looking at the history of her career, the style of "a spiritual person" is slightly different. In order to have detailed news of Hosaka entering the priesthood, each of the TV gossip shows decided to introduce detailed information about Rokusu'in. This is a religious group with facilities and etiquette that differ from traditional religions. It was broadcast during the lunchtime slot through commercial broadcasting. I was able to confirm this on each channel. Since 1995 the taboo in the mass media on dealing with religion has faded, and we recognize that there was a paralysis of the media prior to this "spiritual boom." It is unclear how long this boom will last, or whether it will just remain one part of consumer behavior, but after its demise, what becomes of the relationship between the mass media and religion should be noted.

Mass Media and Religion at Present

In the preceding paragraphs I looked at the relationship between the spiritual boom and the mass media, but are there any changes in the relationship between religion and the mass media? As far as can be seen from documents collected at the Religious Information Research Center, there are no real changes occurring. The tendency to cover these incidents remains. If we look from the present, Jōyū Fumihiko quit Aum Shinrikyō (now known as Aleph), and in May 2007 the inauguration of his new group, The Circle of Rainbow Light, was covered in the media.

Spanning one month from 6 January 2007, a commercial was shown on TV called "Power for living." It was simultaneously broadcast across the country and attracted a lot of interest. Appearing in the advertisement is the coach of Nippon Ham Fighters, Troy Hillman, as well as other famous people, talking about their faith in Christianity, urging viewers to read the "Power for living" booklet, which is about faith. The Arthur S. Demoss Foundation is based in Florida, and the purpose of the commercial was to spread the word of Christianity. The biggest reason why there was a negative public response was because Japan had never experienced such a large number of commercials by foundations unknown in Japan, and they were shown all of a sudden at peak viewing times. On top of this, one of the reasons why they became much discussed is because many said that they had no idea what the purpose of the advertisements was. As the advertisements running on TV in Japan mostly urge people to buy specific products, it is

difficult to see the point of ordering a booklet via a toll-free number to get information on the Christian faith. Furthermore, in this case, those in the Christian world in Japan were not contacted in advance at all. At the same time as the commercial was broadcast, the “Power for Living” booklet was sent to Christian churches all over Japan. Aside from one faction of Japanese new religions such as Sōka Gakkai, religious commercials on Japanese TV are traditionally advertisements urging people to visit temples and shrines during their first visit to a shrine at New Year. In this case, we watch these TV advertisements whether we like them or not, and again, we realize that in Japan we are not yet familiar with this style.

So what about the internet? The website of the Religious Information Research Center contains a database of information on religious organizations which is accessed many times every day. When people seek information on religious groups through the internet, if they cannot find a homepage, or even if people find a religious organization’s official homepage, there may not be enough information there for them. In reality, there are also religious organizations whose information on the internet is only part of the Religious Information Research Center’s data. From *The Fourth Japan-Korea Student Religion Survey Report*, thirty-five percent of students said that most of the articles on Wikipedia were correct (twenty-six percent said they didn’t know what Wikipedia was). Gathering information on the internet has become an everyday occurrence, but regarding this aspect, it is still uncertain whether we can say that religious organizations are aware of this.

Naturally, as can be seen with Shinto, there are cases where a cautious attitude to the development of the internet can be taken. In 2006, the Association of Shinto Shrines decided that with the special features of the internet, there was a fear of infringing on the sanctity of the shrines. Therefore, they posted a warning against internet practices such as virtual visits in which one can visit the mock grounds of a shrine by following the instructions on the screen, requesting prayers through email, and distributing amulets and charms via the internet. There are many cases when development of internet sites is deliberately avoided because of the sacred nature of the shrine. On the other hand, as mentioned before, the internet is overflowing with “spiritual people.” Firstly, there isn’t anyone without an official site, and their writings, TV appearances, and recent goings-on can be easily confirmed on these sites. Naturally, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the information contained within is correct, and in fact it is often very limited, but many people are satisfied with the search results, and trust this information, as this is all they can do. Above all, there is a strong tendency for young people to have limited knowledge and ways of investigating things.

Now we will take a look at an even younger generation, minors who are not yet of age. At present, a topic in the news is that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and

Communications, the National Police Agency, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology are promoting the popularization of mobile phone filtering (restricting harmful websites). For children, who use mobile phones a great deal more than computers, they are an important window into an as yet unknown world. However, in recent years the number of children accessing dating websites and being involved in unsavory incidents is increasing. In February 2007 the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the National Police Agency, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology cooperated in sending out documents requesting ways to tackle this problem. This was in order to protect children from harmful information on the internet and was sent to the administrative divisions of Japan, the Boards of Education, and the police nationwide, regarding the promotion of filtering for mobile phones. This information was passed on to those concerned with schools, guardians, and local residents. At first glance, this would appear to have nothing to do with religion, but in fact it is surprisingly relevant.

Three mobile phone companies (NTT Docomo, KDDI, Softbank Mobile) plus Willcom and Emobile, have adopted a “harmful website filtering service.” Access is restricted to the websites that are classified into the following categories:

- a. Illegalities: (illegal behavior, illegal drugs, inappropriate usage of drugs)
- b. Advocacy (military matters, terrorism, extremists, weapons and arms, slander, suicide, running away from home)
- c. Adult (sexual behavior, nude images, searching for sex services or web links)
- d. Security (hacking, distribution of illegal copies, public proxy server)
- e. Gambling (general gambling)
- f. Dating sites (dating services, marriage/sex partners introductory services)
- g. Grotesque sites
- h. Occult sites
- i. Communication (webchat, bulletin boards, IT bulletin boards)
- j. Lifestyle (gay and lesbian)
- k. Political activities, political parties
- l. Adult tastes (adult magazines, smoking, drinking, alcoholic products, bathing suits, underwear, fetish images, writings of a sexual nature, cosplay [dressing up in costumes])
- m. Religion (traditional religion, religion in general)

As can be seen from a quick glance above, despite no restrictions on sites dealing with spirituality, predictions, and so on, access to religious websites that include traditional religions is prohibited. So for minors, information relating to

religion can be seen as being rated as “harmful.” For example, children who visit the famous temples of Kyoto as part of their school excursions when in elementary school may harbor an interest in these temples. However, even if they try to access the temple’s websites, they cannot, as they will be subject to their mobile phone’s filtering system. This can be unfair, but there is the worry that children will come into contact with religious cults through their mobile phones and from the information available on the internet, and be unable to distinguish between a “normal religion” and an “abnormal religion,” and so taking some kind of action is unavoidable.

However, when minors at some time or another become interested in religion, aside from the ease of dealing with the internet, it is debatable whether they will be able to look for accurate information. And when that occurs, will those able to provide accurate answers to their questions be close by? It is necessary for us to consider the process for religious education that was referred to at the beginning of this essay, and be ready for when that time comes.

This essay was written using the databases of the International Institute for the Study of Religions and the Religious Information Research Center (newspapers, magazines, and articles related to religion collected in specialist studies on religion).

[translated by David White]