

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN JAPAN 2010

A Deluge of “Religious” Information on New Religions, Power Spots, Funeral Services, and Buddhist Statues

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The following report on “religion in the news” in Japan from late 2009 through 2010 is a partial translation of a report published in Japanese as 「現代日本『宗教』情報の氾濫——新宗教・パワースポット・葬儀・仏像に関する情報ブームに注目して」 in the 2011 issue of 『現代宗教』, a journal published annually by the International Institute for the Study of Religions. The data for this article is up-to-date as of the end of February 2011. Information on each topic was collected from the religious article database at the Religious Information Research Center of the International Institute for the Study of Religions. Tsukada concentrated on the second and the third sections, whereas Ōmi was responsible for the fourth and fifth sections. As in previous years, the authors have kindly consented to allow us to translate their report into English for publication in our Bulletin.

LOOKING AT bookstore shop fronts, one can see a variety of weekly and monthly magazines featuring special sections related to “religion.” On a particular week a certain weekly magazine may focus on funeral services while another might consider new religions. There might be a women’s magazine featuring a special section on “power spots.” In the book sections, we might find a lineup of new titles related to “religions.” “Are funeral services necessary or not?”—these kinds of titles have become a subject of discussion. This trend can be seen not only in books and magazines but also newspapers. Power spots, funeral services, election campaigns, and religious groups—books on these topics are on the “recommended” lists of online shopping sites. When we take into account the Internet, 2010 was the kind of year during which there was virtually no end to the amount of information available on these subjects.

The Deluge of Religious Information

This report examines religious trends in Japan for the period between October 2009 and September 2010 (hereafter cited to as “the period”). Inoue Nobutaka, a noted sociologist of religion, has made a concise summary on the “religious information boom” focusing mainly on reporting of new religions (INOUE 1992). According to Inoue, the so-called “boom” does not necessarily mean that existing religious groups are becoming more active or that new movements are emerging one after another. Inoue states that the boom is purely on “the level of information” in that “the essence of the boom lies in the mass consumption of topics relating to religions.” Further, he holds that “the overwhelming majority of the information is rather mocking and critical in nature,” and its prime characteristic is as “a form of consumption is that it constantly picks up on new movements or religious groups that are discovered, and then forgotten.” He goes on to state, “The points that are considered interesting when reported as information are amplified and exaggerated and they are reported repeatedly. The story ends when the information becomes boring” (INOUE 1992, 208–10).

With this in mind, we would like to focus on the following questions: Is this “boom” in fact occurring or is it just happening on “the level of information”? Does this kind of information and reporting reach out into society and draw forth some form of change? In order to produce a thorough and credible analysis, for this report we will mainly use print media, such as newspapers, magazines, and books.

In the next section, we review the information boom on new religions, which gained attention mainly in relation to the themes of politics, election campaigns, and money. We then examine the power spot boom that took off rapidly from the beginning of 2010, followed by an examination of the details of various issues and reporting surrounding funeral services that picked up pace from the same time and developed into a kind of social problem. Finally, we explore the development of the Buddhist statue boom.

The Deluge of Information on New Religions: Power, Business, Money

Special Features on “New Religions” in Magazines

Examples of these kinds of articles included:

“The Darkness and Light of the General Election! Battle between New Religions”; “Kōfuku no Kagaku: The Extremes of Ambition”; “Complete Data File on 20 Major New Religions”; “The Shocking Financial Power of New Religions”; “The Soka Gakkai without Daisaku Ikeda”; “Members’ Rankings of All Religious Corporations—The First Survey!”

A 50-page feature published 12 September in *Diamond Weekly* was themed “New Religions: All the Facts about their Mega Businesses.” These kinds of feature articles on new religions in magazines flourished around the 1980s and 1990s. Even though this trend declined after the Aum Shinrikyō incident, such articles appeared once every couple of years. However, in the period under question, the quantity of the same types of feature articles was quite noticeable. In fact, according to *Asahi Weekly* (2 October 2009), that issue of *Diamond Weekly* sold 110,000 copies, which is one of the best sales results in the last couple of years. It is quite obvious that this became the claim that ignited the boom during this period.

It is noteworthy that the feature focused on elections and political activities. This is probably due to the general election of the House of Representatives that was called at the end of August 2009. The reporting mentioned that “the activities of religious groups had a great effect on the result” and “it was a major victory for Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan and a major defeat for Soka Gakkai.” This reflected issues such as the collapse of the coalition between Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komeitō, the significant gains of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) through the support of the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan, and the fact that the Happiness Realization Party (Kōfuku Jitsugentō) ran so many candidates.

Further, the business model of the Happiness Realization Party (and Happy Science) received attention with the explanation that “the books written by Master Ōkawa are a great source of funding for the group.” This perspective on money, such as business models and assets, runs throughout the special feature. Connected to this is a focus on data, numbers, and the scale of financial activities.

The section “Investigated for the First Time! Membership Rankings of All Religious Corporations” takes up five pages and lists the number of the leaders and teachers for 522 organizations. The Association of Shinto Shrines is ranked at the top with the membership of 68,053,757, followed by Happy Science with 110 million. The figures are said to be based on independent telephone interviews (281 respondents) and on the Religions Almanac (produced by the Agency for Cultural Affairs).

The *Diamond Weekly* feature appears to be based on “thorough research,” which is a rarity these days, and it also contains some interesting articles. As for the problems, we will mention them later as they are not unique to this particular feature.

After it was published, similar special features started to appear one after another. The magazine *Sapio* published a special feature on 10 and 17 February 2010 titled “‘Money and Power’ of Japanese Religions that Nobody Knows.” Running over twenty-three pages, it raised topics such as the tax system for religious corporations, election strategies of Soka Gakkai, side businesses of

religious groups, and selling and buying of dormant religious companies. In the 25 August issue, *Sapio* published a 26-page feature titled “Sorting out ‘Japanese religions,’” introducing the scale, facilities, assets and business models of Soka Gakkai, Shinnyoen, and Happy Science.

A supplement of the magazine *President Fifty Plus* published 17 April 2010 was entirely devoted to religion. Spanning fourteen pages, it introduced basic data on religious groups and a summary entitled “Shocking Data Rankings of 10 Major New Religions.”

In addition there were numerous feature articles of a couple of pages long but they are not of particular interest because most of them used *Diamond Weekly*’s feature as a primary source by copying and pasting data and charts it published. Also, although articles related to incidents related to election campaigns and scandals appeared intermittently elsewhere, this is fairly standard practice and cannot be described as a boom.

One special feature that is worthy of mention is the May 2010 issue of *Takarajima* entitled “Comprehensive Survey of Japanese New Religions! Political Power, Assets, Businesses, and Income of Founders and Leaders.” There are many topics covered in this forty-four-page section, including interesting articles based on independently gathered data such as, “The 30-year History of the Billionaire’s List of ‘Honorable’ Founders and Leaders,” “We Ask the Believers! How Much are You Paying Each Year?,” and “The Distasteful Content of the Unification Church’s Spiritual Goods and Services Sales Manual.” However, much of it is familiar fare and it is difficult to differentiate this feature from that of *Diamond Weekly*.

The 13 October 2010 special feature of *Diamond Weekly* titled “Religion and Money” can be described as the culmination of a series of publications that make up the new religious information boom of the period. Most of the fifty-six-page special feature covers topics such as money, economic power, and business models under the titles like “Rich New Religions Starting to Wander Aimlessly,” “Growth or Decline—Offence and Defense of Three Major New Religions,” “Dissecting the Economics of Religious Corporations,” and “Astonishing Religious Business Models.” Naturally the topics are diverse, and while there are some data covered in articles like “How much does it Cost to become a Believer? Revealing the Fee System of New Religions” and “What’s the Image of 20 Major New Religions? Urgent Survey of 1000 People in Japan,” which deserves attention, but the reheated versions of last year’s articles are also noteworthy. Finally, beginning with 24 June edition of *Shūkan jitsuwa* these issues were taken up again by journalist Yamada Naoki in a series of more than forty installments under the general title “Religions and Money.” The focus of these articles is mainly on businesses, money, and the troubles faced by different religious groups.

Characteristics of Information on “New Religions”

What are the characteristics of this deluge of information about new religions? The first thing we can point to is the media, which are mostly economic, industry-related, and entertainment magazines. Presumably the readers are adults and salary men. In this regard, they appear to differentiate themselves from women’s magazines and their special issues on power spots (discussed below). As for books, there were no observable trends that could be described as a boom, apart from some “mooks” (magazine books) and journalist Yamada Naoki’s *The Money of New Religions: Secrets of Untaxed “Giant Donation Boxes”* (*Takarajima shinsho*, March 2010).

As for newspapers, although there was some coverage relating to New Komeitō and various incidents, there was not much noticeable coverage on other topics apart from a little on the campaign support of religious groups at the time of the Lower House election (the same applies to television coverage, as far as we can ascertain). In this sense, the boom of this period differs qualitatively to the boom of the 80s and the 90s during which many articles dealt with new religions as problems related to cultural and mental conditions.

Turning to content, one viewpoint that appears to be shared within the media is the trend to consider new religions as social forces in relation to election and political activities. This also applies to questions of number of believers and scale of activities. It could be said that this interest goes together with the idea of change of government, contingent election support, and political involvement. The next thing we can point to as a noteworthy feature is the media’s focus on new religions’ strong attachment to money. The scale of their facilities, the works of art in their possession, the types of businesses and content of their income—from an extreme point of view, new religions essentially receive attention from the viewpoint of money and business. Most of the coverage delves into and reveals financial details of how much money new religions can gain using their business systems (naturally, this may be somewhat welcome from the perspective of the need for groups to comply with publicizing their membership and annual fees). Behind this is the critical view towards tax breaks for religions corporations, including non-taxable religions activities (such as donations) and reduction and exemptions of tax for associated with the thirty-four kinds of income-generating businesses (22%). We cannot judge, however, whether the media is serving to act in a kind of detached, comprehensive manner by trying to keep pace with the movement of tax reform concerning religions corporations under the public corporation reform scheme promoted by the DPJ administration. Furthermore, the media are quite one-sided in that their arguments focus only on large-scale new religions but not traditional religions. In any case

it can be said that these special features reflect social concerns at the same time as drawing attention to them.

Changing perspective, it is unclear how readers will interpret and use this data. Topics such as the rankings of the restaurant industries, comparisons of insurance companies, average of costs of funerals by prefectures, functions and prices of cell phones, personal computers, and electronic books are also presented as special features. The same value is placed upon these issues as data relating to religious groups. Nevertheless, the media do not seem to suggest new business opportunities (apart from banks, securities and financial businesses) nor propose selection criteria regarding these, as in the case of special features on funerals and graves. This leads us to question whether the media, in covering new religions in this manner, were predominantly motivated by the curiosity factor.

Problems Related to Information on New Religions

Although we have thus far dealt with the characteristics of media content and the social background, we cannot stop there. When we focus on articles in detail unusual points, such as data, can be observed. For example, the membership figures for Happy Science are listed at 110 million in a number of magazines. Of course these are official figures, but if we look at the election results clearly there is a huge difference from the reality. Nevertheless, this figure is listed by the media without question. The same applies for other religious groups. If the standard for listing data is not set and is unreliable, there is hardly any meaning in terms like “Ranking is . . .” and “20 Major New Religions” (although this is understandable if the purpose is to let the readers know about the inaccuracy of data concerning religious organizations).

The genealogy of new religions that is recycled by different magazines is also quite sloppy. It would be worth asking the media about the supposed influence of mountain religions to Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō, Yamatokyō to Zenrinkyō, and the Rinzai sect to Agonshū, Shinnyoen, and Aum Shinrikyō. There were not only pure “errors” of data, but also some dubious statements regarding content, including coverage that purported to show how campaign support by religious organizations impacted on the political situation. It is certainly true that some new religions announced their support for the DPJ at the time of Lower House election. However, a candidate’s victory cannot necessarily be equated with their support alone. There are also moral issues at stake. For example, one of the former top leaders of Aum Shinkyō, Jōyū Fumihiko (who is currently the representative of the Hikari no Wa, which is under surveillance by the authorities) was put in a position whereby he presented his own views and criticisms of other religious groups. We need to question whether this is simply a minor issue or not. The point is that the literacy of some writers and editors is low. Fig-

ures, data, and sensational views tend to be taken alone at face value, even if the research is sloppy. Further, recycled data changes form and gets worn out. While readers should have media literacy skills, it is not so easy for them to distinguish accurate data from junk. This is a point of concern related to this boom.

In the “new religion information boom” focusing on special issues on magazines, there was less attention paid to newly emerging religions that appeared than the major topics focusing on the current situation of already existing groups. At the same time, rather than the media engaging in pure sarcasm and criticism, a major aspect of the coverage dealt with analyses of new religions’ sizes, relative power, and forms of business. Therefore, once an article is read and simply consumed it is then forgotten. Apart from trends relating to election campaigns and issues of leadership succession, it could be that this boom will not last for long.

The Power Spot Boom: Cataloguing and Renewal of “Sacred Sites”

“There is a site called Kiyomasa’s Well in Meiji Shrine—when I set a picture of it as wall paper on my cell phone, my luck increased and I scored a job.” Shimada Shūhei, the “palm-reading comedian,” made this statement on a TV program at the end of 2009. Then, at the beginning of the New Year, Kiyomasa’s Well suddenly attracted attention as a queue-making “power spot.” Taking this as an example, it can be said that 2010 was the “year of the power spot.” There was hardly a day when one did not hear the phrase “power spot” and related information seemed to overflow from televisions and magazines.

Cases of “Power Spots” in the Print Media

The phrase “power spot” is not a sudden creation. We refer to SUGA Naoko’s research article which, as far as we know, is the only article on power spots (outlining the trends up until 2009). According to Suga, the word appeared in *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* [Basic knowledge of contemporary words] in 1986 (SUGA 2010). According to Wakimoto Tsuneya, a religious studies scholar, a power spot is “a sacred site where universal spiritual power gathers,” and in the book he lists examples like Tenkawa Daibenzaitensha and pilgrimage sites. At that time, however, the phrase was not widely covered by the media nor was well known by the public. While books such as *Hakken! Pawāsupotto* [Power spots discovered!], which was written by Kiyota Masuaki, who used to be called the “supernatural power boy,” and the term appeared in some media, that was about the extent of the coverage in the 1990s. There was a gradual increase in the usage of the term in the 2000s and then its usage exploded in the 2010. We will now take a detailed look at the appearance of the phrase “power spot” in magazines, newspapers, and books.

A title-and-keyword search of the magazines listed in the Ōya Sōichi Library (<https://www.oya-bunko.com>) revealed a total of 595 hits. The phrase appeared first in 1991 (which were articles related to Kiyota Masuaki), 12 times in the 1990s, 62 times between 2000 and 2006, 42 in 2007, 61 in 2008, 64 in 2009. It reached as many as 318 in the 2010 (as there is a variation between the publication date and selling date, the figure is not too exact. The number of hits in 2010 is much more when the search includes some of the publications from January [February] of 2011). However these figures are mostly the results of title searches, which means this number of articles on the power spot theme were published. The number of hits would be greater if we include the number of mentions of the term in the main texts.

Turning to newspapers, a full article search on *Asahi shinbun's* database *Kikuzo II bijuaru* (<http://database.asahi.com/library2>) revealed 167 hits. It first appeared in 1993, and there were only 8 other appearances up until 2007. In 2008 and 2009, there were 6 and 7 instances respectively. However, in the 2010, the number rose rapidly to 92 instances beginning with an article on Kiyomasa's Well on 9 January. In 2011, the instances rose to 54 within the first 2 months. The instances are quite small under an article title search, with 17 in 2010 and just 4 in 2011. We will take up this point further later. (For the record, a full article search on *Yomiuri shinbun's* *Yomidasu rekishikan* (<https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/>) revealed 178 hits in total, with 106 in 2010 and 53 in 2011.)

Turning to books, a search on the National Diet library's NDL-OPAC database (<http://opac.ndl.go.jp/>) revealed 59 books on power spots. The first one was the above-mentioned *Power spots discovered!*, and there were 11 books in 2008, 6 in 2009, and 41 in 2010.

Content of Power Spot Coverage

What kind of content was covered and published in the press? Considering magazines first, we will look at some examples that seem typical and are somewhat substantial, and also consider their layout. Firstly, in March 2010 CREA published a special feature titled "Complete Edition on Power Spots in all 47 Prefectures: From Shrines and Temples to Giant Trees, Hot Springs, and Sacred Mountains." This feature took up about one hundred pages out of a total of two hundred pages of the issue, which turned out to be extremely popular, selling out within ten days (5 March, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, Tokyo edition). It contained articles such as "Hirosue Ryōko visits the Grant Shrine of Ise, Forest of the Gods," "An Encounter with a Jōmon-period Cedar Tree in Yakushima, the Island of Life," "Specially Selected Power Spots in the 23 wards of Tokyo that you can Visit on a Whim," "Might this Work for Marriage Prospects? Visiting Izumo for Marital Connections," "Women's Guide to the Old Road of Kumano," and "Ten Selected Spots of Waterfalls, Giant Trees, Mountains and Hot Springs of Japan."

Another special feature is the supplementary edition of *Ikkojin for Woman* published in August titled “Bringing Good Luck! Complete Guide to Power Spots in Japan.”

These kinds of magazines, which comprise one complete volume, are almost the same as mooks. There is no significant difference in content between the March issue of “Complete guide to Power Spots around the Country: Supplementary Volume Randonée,” and the September issue of “Sacred Mountains, Sacred Rivers: Complete Guide to Power Spots around the Country: Supplementary Volume Randonnée.” Many of the publications that are released as books are of the same type. Also, it is probably reasonable to consider that special features of a couple of pages in other weekly magazines are abbreviated versions of these publications. As indicated above, the medium for such content, which is mostly directed towards women, are women’s magazines.

On the other hand, it is rare to find features on power spots in men’s magazines, general magazines, and special interest magazines. The June issue of *Otoko no kakureya* (Men’s hiding places) had a special feature titled “A Journey to Recover the Heart that has been Buried in Daily Life: Visiting Japan’s ‘Sacred Sites.’” This feature, which ran over one hundred pages, is in effect no different to power spot-related features in women’s magazines. However, it may be intentional that the word “power spot” is not used. Although it is not a men’s magazine, *Nikkei otona no OFF* (Nikkei Adult’s Downtime) also had several related articles, such as the June issue titled “Primer on Bringing in Good Fortune,” the October issue titled “Guide to Good Fortune Spots in Kyoto and Nara,” and the January 2011 issue “Guide to the Benefits of Shrines and Temples in the 47 Prefectures” (approximately eighty to ninety pages). The common thread running through these are “power spots,” although the word itself is not much used.

Looking at these publications we can point to the following characteristics. Firstly, they appear in many women’s magazines and the content is directly targeted toward women between the ages of twenty to forty specifically. Titles with formats like “[Such and such] visits [here and there]” are noteworthy, and photos of actresses and models, including Hirosue Ryōko, Tsuruta Mayu, and Haneda Michiko posing in front of shrines and nature may be inviting readers to actually visit there and do the same thing as these celebrities. Words such as *konkatsu* 婚活 (marriage partner hunting) and “marital connections” may hint at the motivations why people visit power spots (naturally, this is not just limited to women).

Although it is impossible list all the areas characterized as power spots, they can be separated largely into shrine-type spots, such as the Grant Shrine of Ise, Izumo Taisha, Tokyo Daijingu, and so on, and natural spots like Yakushima, the Old Roads of Kumano, the Bungui Pass, and mountains and waterfalls. There are relatively few temples. Although there are overseas sites such as Sedona

and Hawai'i, we can say domestic spots are driving this boom. There is a great deal of coverage on shrines in Japan, and such articles are integrated with basic introductions of shrines and Shinto. In particular, large features mostly take up a passage or a section to explain etiquette when visiting shrines, basics of myths, deities, and the history of Shinto. Sometimes the emphasis on etiquette and knowledge becomes a feature in itself, and this tendency is much more remarkable in men's magazines and general interest magazines (media content that emphasizes Buddhism, sutras, priests, and posthumous Buddhist names are covered in the fifth section).

Each power spot is accompanied with beautiful photographs and explanations pointing out sites that should be visited. Also, information on access and opening hours, accommodation, food and local specialties is invariably included, and the publications are presented as a type of tourist guide. Their point is to encourage readers to feel they want to go there rather than just to enjoy the magazines.

It should be kept in mind that these power spots are not necessarily newly-discovered places. Most of them are traditional shrines or temples, or natural heritage sites that have long been considered as sites where one can receive healing or practical benefits and bring good fortune. For instance, Ehara Hiroyuki's *Supirichuaru sankuchuarī* (Spiritual sanctuary: Ehara Hiroyuki's visit to the gods) was published in January 2004. The sites Ehara visits in this book have traditionally been considered as "sacred sites" (or alternatively "castles of spirits" or "hallowed ground"— as mentioned previously, some men's magazines shy away from using the term "power spot" in favor of "sacred site"). In this sense, the term "power spot" is just a relabeling or renewal of such traditional terms. Having said that, although a special issue on *Power-Spot Shrines* in a magazine like *Voice Style* (vol. 2, November 2006) did not differ greatly from magazines and books published in 2010, it did not cause much of a splash. Therefore the success of these publications cannot be clearly put down to simply renaming. Presumably, this is due to the effects of timing and other factors.

Moving on to newspaper coverage, we should note that, compared to the magazine, there is a strong tendency for newspapers to delay its coverage in the name of prudence. As previously mentioned, the number of hits under title searches is small. Most only included some words in their articles apart from some that explain one aspect of the power spot boom itself. In other words, they tend to touch on the theme simply by saying "(this place) has been reported as a power spot" within articles on tourism, travel, and local information. In additions, local newspapers and local editions of major newspapers tend to cover this theme more often, which reports on local power spots suddenly becoming crowded and popular.

Actual Conditions of Power Spots

Now let us consider the actual influence of this coverage through some examples in terms of how many people are actually visiting power spots.

Kiyomasa's Well in Meiji Shrine became synonymous with the "power spot boom." It became almost like a fad. Kiyomasa's Well is a small spring water located inside the gardens of the Meiji Shrine. The entry fee to the garden is 500 yen for adults and it is open from 9:00 to 16:30. During the period, it was common to see queues of men and women between the ages of 20 to their 40s from the beginning of the year. Someone might take several moments to take photos, cleanse their hands in the water, and join their palms together. At times hundreds of people queue up before opening hours. At one stage a queue of several hundred of people was five hours long. Due to this, the garden administrators introduced a system where they issued one thousand tickets per day but these were all distributed by the morning. Meiji Shrine commented on this by announcing "The idea of a power spot where you can make your dreams come true is problematic," and "we would like to see this not just as a boom but hopefully as something through which people start to develop a sense of appreciation toward nature" (cited in *Asahi shinbun*, Tokyo's evening edition, 9 January 2010, and other publications). During the boom, some women's magazine even featured a pinup of Kiyomasa's Well, which may have been for the benefit of readers living in remote areas.

Between 1 January and 19 December 2010, the total number of visitors to the inner and outer shrines of the Grand Shrine of Ise reached a record 8,603,748 (announced by the shrine administration). The previous record was 8,590,126 in 1973, achieved at the time of the shrine's reconstruction ceremony, which is held every twenty years. It is said that establishing a new record apart from this event is quite unusual. The record has been increasing by hundreds of thousands every year since 2005. The power spot boom and toll-free expressways have been listed as factors (cited in *Chūnichi shinbun*, Mie/Hokusei edition, 21 December, and other publications).

Another site that has been introduced as a power spot is Togakushi Shrine in Nagano city of Nagano prefecture. The constant stream of tourists from outside the prefecture is also due to the influence of a popular JR East Japan television commercial featuring actress Yoshinaga Sayuri. Although the figures are not confirmed, there are reports that the number of visitors tripled from the previous year (*Asahi shinbun*, Nagano Tohoku edition, 25 September).

The power spot boom has had many influences in local areas. In the former town of Hongū in Tanabe city, Wakayama prefecture, where the Kumano Old Roads and Kumano Hongū Taisha are located, the number of tourists in May increased 13.2% compared to the previous year (*Asahi shinbun*, Wakayama edi-

tion, 11 June). The Yahiko Shrine in Niigata prefecture had increases in the number of visitors of 23% in May, and 15% in the June to August period compared to the previous year (*Asahi shinbun*, Niigata edition, 7 December). Ishigami Shrine in Toba city, Mie prefecture, received 3.6 times more visitors than the previous year (*Asahi shinbun*, Mie edition, 22 February 2011).

On the other hand, there are some problematic cases. Takachiho town in Miyazaki prefecture announced 16 September that a traditional event “Iwato Nage Taikai,” which was scheduled to be held on 23 September during the autumn festival at Amano Iwato Shrine, would be cancelled. This is an event related to a myth and has been held every year since 1987, and it used the parking lot of the shrine. It is not a shrine ritual. However, the organizers decided to cancel in response to a sudden increase in the number of tourists due to the power spot boom, and to avoid confusion by opening up the parking lot (*Yomiuri shinbun*, Miyazaki edition, 17 September). Naturally, this is a decision that was not made lightly; however, it is potentially leading to a dilemma between placing priority on the needs of shrine parishioners and local people or to place priority on tourists who come in great numbers. In addition to this case, in the previously mentioned Togakushi Shrine, there are concerns over environmental impact as the soil around the cedar tree roots, which are designated as prefectural natural monuments on the approach to the rear part of the shrine, have been trampled over (*Shinano Mainichi shinbun*, 8 October). The same problem is occurring at natural heritage sites in places like Yakushima. Furthermore, local citizens have expressed their concerns over worsening traffic manners, violations of traffic rules, and incidence of traffic jams.

As we can see, the power spot boom is not simply an “information boom” but can be said to be a phenomenon that has some resonance with the reality of people’s daily lives.

Views on Power Spots

What are people’s views toward power spots? Let us introduce some results of surveys on this theme. The “10th Japanese College Students’ Attitudes Towards Religion” obtained valid responses from 4311 university students around the nation between April and June 2010. When asked “do you believe in the existence of power spots?” 53.8% answered in the affirmative (I believe/I think they are possible) and 45.2% answered in the negative (I do not really believe in them/I deny their existence). Furthermore, compared to male respondents, where 46.5% answered in the affirmative and 52.7% answered in the negative, 59.8% of female respondents answered in the affirmative and 39% in the negative, indicating quite a contrast (INOUE 2011). Although the survey is only limited to students, we can grasp the orientation of the thinking that supports the boom. In the questionnaire run on the website “e-woman,” which targets work-

ing women, on 21 and 25 of June, 383 (72%) voted yes and 148 (28%) voted no to the question “do you believe power spots?” (chaired by Inoue Nobutaka).

In a survey conducted by *Asahi shinbun* targeting 5224 respondents (survey method unknown), 34% responded yes and 66% responded no to the same question. Among those who responded yes, when asked “how do you know about it?” 45% answered television and 16% answered magazines. Further, among those who answered no, many indicated that “there is no scientific evidence” (2068), and “people are swayed by the mass media” (1802) as reasons (multiple response allowed). It is interesting to note, however, that 66% of those who responded in the negative admitted to offering prayers to Shinto deities and the Buddha (*Asahi shinbun*, Tokyo edition, 12 June). The fact that the surveys show a large number of both positive and negative responses does not mean that they cancel each other out. Rather, it indicates the high affinity felt by particular age groups.

We have analyzed the details and realities of the power spot boom, concerning that the incidence of the term grew rapidly in the media in the year 2010. Furthermore, “sacred sites” such as shrines and natural spots were characterized mainly in women’s magazines in the style of guidebooks or catalogs, power spots are actually visited by many people, and they seem to have an high appeal amongst women of a particular generation. Further investigation is needed on the motivations and types of people who visit such sites. Although this is an impression, we have the sense that from 2011, the coverage has settled down somewhat. Will the media boom on power spots simply be consumed and forgotten? Only time will tell. We need to bear in mind whether the phrase power spot itself will cease to be used, whether it will become a standard phrase, and indeed whether people will actually continue to visits these sites.

The Funeral Information Boom

Books and Magazines

One important area of the religious information boom for the period under question was religious customs associated with how we treat people after death, such as types of funerals and styles of graves. In particular, information on funerals spread throughout society rapidly, which can surely be called a boom. Special features on funerals repeatedly appeared in magazines, and here are some examples of the titles:

“Considering Life’s ‘Finale’: The Status Quo of Modern Funerals,” *Josei seven*, 12 November 2009; “Latest Information on Funerals for 2010: I want an ‘Ideal Ending,’” *Fujin kōron*, 7 February 2010; “Special Feature: Funerals you can Count on,” *Diamond Weekly*, 13 February; “Seeking a

Beautiful ‘Way of Death’: New Trends and Ideas for End-of-life Care, Funerals, and Graves. What is the ‘Ideal Ending?’” *Shūkan gendai*, 13 March; “No Regrets! Inheritance, Business Succession, and Funerals, and Graves,” *Tōyō keizai*, 17 April; “Special Feature: Primer on Funerals in the Heisei Period,” *Chūō kōron*, May; “Special Feature: Experiencing Contemporary Funerals—Ash Scattering, Funerals in Space, Will Writing Tours,” *Takarajima*, September

These special features promote “ways to die with no regrets” to readers while introducing the latest situation concerning funerals. The main target is probably those of middle-age as they are starting to become conscious of their own deaths.

Before analyzing this information, it is necessary to briefly touch on the best-selling publication *Sōshiki wa iranai* (Funerals are not necessary) written by religious critic Shimada Hiromi. Given that this book was one of the significant factors that contributed to the deluge of funeral-related information, it requires consideration.

Published in January 2010, it received instant attention, perhaps in some part due to the sensational title. Within a few months it sold more than 300,000 copies, which is an unusually large amount for a book on funerals. Consequently, it dramatically drew the media’s attention to funeral information. Essentially the book criticizes funerals today as being overly “luxurious,” and suggests more reasonable ways of sending off the deceased. It argues that funerals are not necessary, and as a result its publication drew strong reaction from many funeral directors and priests whose livelihoods depend on funerals.

However, opposing views that were published and sold became another source of related information. This, in turn, generated a great deal of discussion amongst the public, including arguments on funerals based on reactions against Shimada’s stance. This created an understanding among media workers that information on funerals “sells very well,” and this encouraged the further production of funeral information. By becoming a best seller, this book became the fuel that ignited the explosion of funeral information.

In fact, it was obvious that books arguing for the necessity of funerals, such as *Sōshiki wa hitsuyō* (Funerals are necessary!) by Ichiro Shinya (Futaba Shinsho, April) and *Otōsan, “Sōshiki wa iranai’ tte yuwanaide* (Dad, please don’t say “I do not need a funeral”) by Hashizume Kenichiro were published with Shimada’s book clearly in mind. Although writers are both involved in the funeral industry, they do not present a complicated argument over how funerals are held these days based on calculations on cost and benefits. Rather, they question the significance of funerals from the viewpoint of the importance of holding them based on sincerity.

We should point out here that these writers, including Shimada, do not approve entirely with the way funerals are held in general. “In general” here refers to the practice whereby funeral directors usually organize funerals based on “funeral Buddhism.” In most cases, these kinds of funerals are now a formality only as an empty ceremony, and their cost performance is poor. Therefore one idea that Shimada and his critics share is that funerals do not meet with the needs of the people, which is why Shimada strongly asserts that funerals are totally unnecessary. His critics hold the position that although funerals are necessary, their significance needs to be reconsidered and revived as a ceremony designed for today’s needs. Although their positions are different, both parties are dissatisfied over how funerals are conducted nowadays. There is no doubt that spread of this idea is driving the funeral information boom of the period.

One of the characteristics of funeral information today is a search for new forms of funerals that are different from established ones. One core aspect of “funerals today” is the introduction of various types that did not exist previously—“family funerals,” in which long queues of mourners are avoided in favor of close relatives attendance only; “music funerals” where instead of sutra readings the deceased’s favorite music is played; “natural funerals” whereby the ashes are scattered in the sea and mountains; “tree funerals” where ashes are returned to the earth and a tree is used as a grave marker; even a beautified and sanitary staging of a “final goodbye” through the introduction of corpse preservation techniques (embalming), and so on. This is clearly a response toward increasing desire of the people of today for a change, who are dissatisfied with the succession of conventional funeral styles. However, escaping from conventional styles indicates a heavier burden on the individuals to choose on matters surrounding funerals together with the expanding freedom of choice regarding the type of funerals available.

The second characteristic of funeral information today is the individualization of death. Why is there a deluge of information concerning funerals these days? Clearly the answer is that for many individuals, the practice of “life’s finale” in order to welcome an “ideal ending” has become an unavoidable subject. There is a common idea that the time when one could simply leave what happens after one’s death to family or close relatives is over, and that we have entered an era whereby people need to take responsibility and make decisions about their own deaths. Such awareness is certainly behind the popularity over funeral information. It should also be noted that the term “society without connections” (*muen shakai*) spread amongst the population rapidly during the period, which is symbolic of this individualization today.

On 31 January, NHK broadcast a special program “Society without Connections: The Shock of 32,000 who Died without Connections.” Centering on Internet users, this documentary program elicited a large response. The pro-

gram investigated the sudden growth of “deaths without connections,” whereby people’s deaths went completely unnoticed due to the weakening of local ties and blood connections, to the extent that some corpses are not even claimed. According to NHK’s investigation, among all the 1783 local governments around the country, the number of people who died without connections (who were cremated and buried by local governments) rose to 32,000 in 2008. Further, it revealed the shocking fact that among this figure, there were even 1,000 people who could not be identified by the police or the local governments. The phrase “society without connections” presented in this program to hold instantly and stirred up a sense of crisis amongst people living alone and those preparing to live alone that they themselves might die without connections.

Those who “died without connections” were completely deprived of things that are probably essential in order to have a peaceful ending, such as having those close to them send them off. They are accepting their own death as almost entirely on an individual level. This can be described as the ultimate individualization of death and the expansion of such awareness is clearly responding with the increase of men and women who are driven to prepare for their “life’s finale.”

In principle, funerals for those who “died without connections” are conducted in the *chokusō* (direct cremation) style. This concept of *chokusō* spread widely in the recent funeral information boom. *Chokusō*, whereby ceremonies such as wakes funeral service are not held before cremation, rapidly increased from the year 2000 especially in urban areas. It is said that in Tokyo this practice accounts for 20 to 30% of all funerals. Originally *chokusō* was conducted in former times away from the public eye as welfare services for those who lived in poverty and those without family connections. In the funeral information provided nowadays, there is a strong tendency to recognize this as a style of funerals that replaces the old.

In many case, low cost is emphasized as the most appealing aspect of its “newness.” Apart from donations to priests, the extremely inexpensive price range of about 10,000 to 20,000 yen easily draws people’s interest in comparison to the high price required by the conventional style of funerals, which is despised by those who argue that funerals are unnecessary. Continuous media coverage that introduces *chokusō* as a simple and cost effective way of conducting funerals, and discusses its potential for being widely accepted, is appearing in part due to the influence of the recession that has continued over many years.

The third characteristic of funeral information today is the close investigations into the cost of funerals. In many cases when the media reports on funerals, they raise questions over the total cost of various types of funerals, the content of the estimates, and tips on how to not overpay. In other words, information about funerals being produced today seems to function as a kind of “product advisor,”

by answering question concerning choice of funeral styles, how to be a smart consumer, what sort of product you should purchase, and so on.

A typical example of this is seen in features and extra issues of the economics magazine *Diamond Weekly*. The 24 January 2009 issue included a special feature titled “Latest Investigation on Money Required for Temples, Graves, and Funerals.” This article clarified the economic situation surrounding contemporary funerals while asking readers, “are you spending money unnecessarily?” This was followed by another article published on 13 February titled “Complete Guide on Money, Procedures, and Etiquette: Trouble-free Funerals.” This article explains the price structuring of funerals and includes reliability rankings of funeral companies playing the appropriate role as “product advisors.” Furthermore, an extra issue was published on 29 April titled “Encyclopedia of Funerals, Temples, Graves, and Inheritance.” This piece gave an impression that the magazine was taking the lead amongst those that were producing information on funerals.

This “commercialization of funerals” had already been noted from the time when the involvement of funeral companies increased and they began to control those who have lost loved ones and priests. However it is unprecedented that details of “funeral product” prices are examined closely amongst the deluge of funeral information. This appears to be a change in the consciousness of consumers toward funerals, and it shows that funerals which are not satisfactory in relation to cost are undesirable for people today.

Such a wellspring of consumer consciousness, however, also presents the possibility for fundamental change in the funeral industry. This possibility was clearly indicated by the Aeon problem.

Aeon’s problematic donation guide and Buddhism

The Aeon retail corporate group entered the funeral business started “a priest introduction service” and put up a set of general guidelines regarding donation amounts. This drew such strong opposition from Buddhist priests that Aeon removed the list from their website on 10 September.

This problem involving Aeon and Buddhist priests was not only reported in major religious newspapers such as *Chūgai nippō*. General papers also reported details such as the activities of priests and their statements, which is quite unusual. As mentioned in the previous section, in general information that the media provide on funerals are mainly concerned with issues and funeral goods that will benefit consumers and the bereaved. There is usually little reporting on the stance of the Buddhist priests. Also, when this issue became a widely discussed topic, the media presented various opinions regarding the “price of donations.” In this process, an interesting development was that the issues and difficulties surrounding the current funeral industry and Buddhist circles were

revealed. This means that the issue caused the spreading of religious information that is extremely thought-provoking when considering the future of the funeral and Buddhist industries.

Aeon began an introduction service of funeral companies for those who have Aeon cards from September 2009 after joining with about four hundred funeral companies around the nation. As a part of this business, on 10 May they started a “priest introduction service.” In this process, Aeon claimed to provide this service with the permission and cooperation of “eight sects and about six hundred temples nationally,” and it presented a general guidelines of donations depending the types of posthumous names used and the number of sutra readings offered.

In opposition to Aeon’s new business venture, the Japan Buddhist Federation (JBF), which consists of fifty-eight traditional Buddhist sects in Japan, reacted by stating “there is no fixed price for donations” and “this is an invasion of religious activities.” The *Sankei shinbun* was the first media organ to devote significant coverage this matter, and its 2 July edition introduced the opinion of the Secretary General of JBF: “(donation is a religious activity) and it is problematic to treat it like a product by establishing a price.” At the same time it included an explanation from the Aeon side: “there were many people we heard from who said ‘because we do not know the price of donations, it causes us trouble’ and ‘even if we ask temples they do not tell us clearly.’ So we put up the list to respond to this need.”

On 9 July JBF submitted a formal opinion to Aeon by collecting information from participating organizations. They made two requests from the perspective of protecting the original spirit behind offering donations in Buddhism: One was that Aeon remove its online list containing calculation formulae for donations (one set of sutra readings + the price of posthumous names = XX yen), and the other was that Aeon issue a formal apology, announcing that the statement concerning “the permission from eight sects” is erroneous. In response, the next day Aeon apologized on its webpage, saying that the statement concerning permission from “eight sects” was inappropriate. Aeon kept the guidelines for donations by adding an explanation that “These guidelines for donations were not determined by our company but were gathered from the many temples to we introduce.”

Although Aeon tried to avoid criticism by stating that the basis for this donation guideline was not a company decision but rather a consensus opinion gathered from “many temples,” the JBF, which was concerned with the commercialization of donations, was not satisfied and continued its demands for Aeon to remove the offending list from the webpage. After some meetings attended by both parties, Aeon removed the list on 10 September. Aeon explained that “the removal of the list was a result of internal discussion from various perspectives

concerning our business and was not in reaction to the opinions expressed by JBF.” On the other hand, however, company executives visited JBF’s office on the same day and announced the removal of the list. Furthermore, Aeon presented a slightly different stance from its original position by adding new lines to the website stating, “Donations are originally made from the spirit of willingness to contribute and are not something that should be ‘standardized’ or ‘unified.’” It should be noted however, the company’s exclusive call centers continue to provide general guidelines verbally on the amount of donations.

Looking back, the Aeon problem was a small incident that was essentially resolved in a short period of less than 2 months. Nevertheless, this incident indicates to Buddhist circles confronted with the situation that they need to reflect upon the issue as difficulties surrounding contemporary funerals have generated this problem.

In response to the article in *Sankei shinbun*, the company’s Society Section received opinions from 596 respondents by 14 July. 85% agreed with the publication of the guidelines, which was a much larger figure than the 11% that opposed it. As for the reasons, over 100 stated that it is hard to know how one should think about this issue without guidelines even though it is a matter of one’s sincerity. Other major reasons included experiences from people whose donations were not accepted from priests who said the amount offered was not enough, and those who felt that nowadays it was not right that the amount of donation should be determined by relationships between the temple and the laity that has been passed down through generations.

On the other hand, in explaining the negative response to the publication, some stated that “our clear indication of the amount of donation puts a great burden for lower income earners,” and “guidelines should include a larger range of amounts.” Others opposed such a list from a religious perspective whereby some raised the question, “is it really necessary to clarify a price on one’s sincerity?” while others argued that “if you have been paying attention to ancestor veneration properly, you should naturally know what to donate and how much.”

Furthermore, in the 30 June issue of *Shūkan post*, a special feature titled “The Great Debate: Are ‘Fixed-priced Donations’ Good or Bad?” included various opinions from those directly involved. For instance, Aeon’s rival funeral company expressed the opinion that “it is outrageous that price should be determined according to Tokyo standards when there are regional differences.” According to a funeral industry consultant, companies introducing priests are receiving kickbacks from donations. The consultant points out that introducing a fixed-price system will eradicate these “sweet deals.” In addition, the article presents concerns from a Buddhist perspective that Japanese religions and rituals surrounding the deceased might weaken and disappear if the religious practice of

donation is consumed by an economic system. Also, an article titled “Buddhist circles split in two over donations” in the 14 August issue of *Yūkan Fuji* touches on the opposing opinions that are considered to be held by the majority of Buddhist circles: “Putting a price on religious practice will destroy the fundamentals of Buddhism,” and “This is a desecration of temples who have established good relationships with the laity.” On the other hand, it also introduced opinions that supported the guidelines among priests, including the following: “Those who are criticizing these guidelines are temples that are blessed with a large number of lay believers. There are many priests who do not have connections with laity and cannot earn a living,” and “deciding the amount of donation between funeral directors and temples in an unclear manner as occurred in the past only leaves the bereaved feeling uneasy.”

Taking all these opinions in consideration, it can be said that this problem occurred because Aeon, which was a newcomer to the funeral industry, did something that was rather unconventional without considering deeply the realities of Buddhist circles and the funeral industry. No matter how formalized funerals have become these days, Buddhist priests, who conduct religious activities based on faith, were hesitant to deal with donations as “products” with a price tag attached. At the same time, funeral companies, who in many cases have a very close relationship with local residents and temples, did not want restrictions concerning the activities of priests and their clients as a result of an independent rule established by one corporation. Aeon, unable to read such sentiments, “lost” this particular battle as it could not adequately deal with the unexpectedly large opposition.

However, as is clear from the many opinions sent to *Sankei shinbun*, the general public today is clearly inclined toward the clarification of donation prices. It is natural that people are beginning to be perplexed over the unclear prices of donations when the media is full of detailed information on “the cost of funerals.” It is not unusual for funeral companies nowadays to clearly emphasize financial details. Although JBF had a “victory” this time over their “sacred territory” of donations, it is difficult to think that they will be able to gain the public’s support for long. Also, it is inevitable that individual priests will be confronted with a difficult task of taking a lead in this matter and juggling between the consumer’s feelings and their own religious beliefs.

What must not be forgotten in this incident is that at the very least priests from approximately 600 temples who are cooperating with Aeon agree with presenting donation guidelines. It is likely that most of these priests come from small temples with few or no laypeople connected to them. They agree with Aeon’s idea, which responded to a certain need among contemporary Japanese, as an expedient means for temple management. As temples struggle to survive

and everyone knows their difficulties, there is less possibility that priests with such a realistic view will remain in the minority.

If the priests who agree with the clear indication of donation prices form the majority, it is inevitable that the idea that donations should be taxable on the grounds that receiving a fixed-priced donation is an income-generating business will take precedence. In other words, the benefit to the public brought about by religious activities of temples and priests will be questioned. As this is beyond the theme of this report, we will not discuss it in detail, but it is certainly an important issue that cannot be overlooked.

As mentioned above, this incident was not merely a fleeting problem but a landmark event that relates to changes in the Buddhist world that expected to develop further. Also, it is also possible that another major retail company will follow in Aeon's footsteps, enter the funeral industry, and try to do something similar. If this happens, we will see a major restructuring of the funeral industry together with Buddhist circles. We have now entered into an unprecedented of change for both "funerals" and "Buddhism."

Development of the Buddhist Statue Boom

The Buddhist statue boom seems to have no end. Exhibitions themed around Buddhist statues have been extremely popular for a number of years. There have been many books published that have sold well on themes such as simple explanations concerning the history of statues and how to appreciate them, and those written by writers and entertainers who have visited different Buddhist statues. The popularity remained strong during this period's religious information boom, and information on Buddhist statues appeared repeatedly, as if they were regular features in various types of magazines. Let us give a couple of examples:

"Learn all about Buddhism through a Pilgrimage to Beautiful Buddhist Statues," *Nikkei Adult's Downtime*, October 2009; "Complete Edition: Special Feature on Buddhist Statues in Kyoto," *Ichikojin*, November; "Illustrated Guide: 'Religions, Temples, and Shrines' that will Save Today's Businessmen" *President Fifty Plus*, 17 April 2010, supplementary edition; "Special Feature: There are 'Practical Benefits' to be found in Japan" *Discover Japan*, June

The ways in which Buddhist statues are handled are quite versatile. For instance, the first two magazines mentioned above take Buddhist statues themselves as the main subject, while the latter two devote many pages on Buddhist statues within the broader theme of religious culture.

The recent Buddhist boom began with the “Tōshō Daiji Exhibition” held at Tokyo National Museum in 2005 (approximately 400,000 visitors), which was followed by the “Buddhist Statues: Prayers Engraved in One Tree” exhibition in 2006 (approximately 335,000 visitors). After these exhibitions became popular, visiting Buddhist statues began to be recognized as a boom. It could be said that the decisive event that confirmed this was “National Treasures: Exhibition of Ashuras,” which was held from 31 March to 7 June 2009 and attended by a record-making 946,172 people. As for the boom, viewing Buddhist statues is no longer a minor hobby amongst dilettantes but became popular among many young people, especially women in their 20s and 30s. Also, the subject of Buddhist statues has been repeatedly covered on television and magazines, and they are widely popular as a type of “healing” for people who live in the grim prospects of society.

In terms of this period, the year 2010 marked 1,300th anniversary of the capital Heijō-kyō (Nara). Numerous events celebrating this occasion were held within Nara prefecture and what were visited by many people. This helped the stable continuity of the Buddhist statue boom. At the festival celebrating the 1,300 anniversary, in more than 50 temples, including Nanmyō-ji and Kinpusen-ji, the “Passageway of Prayer—Road to Nara Yamato—Special Exposition of Secret Treasures and Buddhas” was held. It is very rare that such items are opened to the public, and the number of visitors to the prefecture increased rapidly.

The link between the festival and information on Buddhist statues appeared in major special features in magazines, such as one published in the May 2010 issue of *Ichikojin* titled “Complete Edition: 1300th Anniversary of Nara Heijō-kyō Capital— Old Temples and Buddhist Statues in Nara”, and an article published in the May issue of *Sarai* titled “Special Issue 2nd Section: Visiting the Secret Buddhas of Old Temples and Shrines with Priests as Guides” in the “Major Special Feature: Walking through the 1300-year History of Nara.” Once again, this indicated a sense of trust concerning information of Buddhist statues provided by the media.

Hirose Ikumi, who calls herself “the Buddhist statue girl,” is one interesting individual who has appeared in the light of this developing boom. After quitting her job in May 2007, she started to use this call sign and began promoting the charms of Buddhist statues to the public. She distributed information on her website and started to appear on television and in magazines. Her book titled *Book of Buddhist Statues: Feel Them, Discover Them, Get closer to Them*, a primer on Buddhist statues with simple illustrations and easy-to-understand sentences was published in November 2008. Coinciding with healthy sales of this book, she was appointed as the first “Cultural Ambassador for National Museum of Nara” on 17 July 2009 to work on promotion activities in order to reach out to younger generations. In addition to appearing in various media during this

period, she also gave a special lecture held in conjunction with the above-mentioned “Passageway of Prayer” exhibition in related temples. She seems to have become the darling of the age of the Buddhist statue boom.

The main reason why she appeared in the limelight is that she gained popularity with her soft-spoken manner and friendly personality, earning strong support from women of her own generation, that is, those in their 20s and 30s. In addition, the media can easily point to her presence and statements as a novel example that can capture public attention when they report on the topic “Buddhist statues are also popular amongst women.”

In response to this enthusiasm toward Buddhist statues amongst young women nowadays, from the latter half of 2009 the term “Buddhist Statue Girls” (or Buddha Girls) became frequently used in the media. As is the case with the terms like “History Girl” (girls who like history) and “Railway Girl” (girls who like railways), this is a new word labeling women who are enthusiastic about things that were once considered to be the traditional territory of men. It seems that the term “Buddha Girl” was created in order to amplify the actions and statements of women as something new and interesting. They evaluate the Buddhist statues by their “coolness” and “sexiness” rather than their historical value or religious significance, or by the extent of “power” the statues give them. This term clearly expresses one of the important qualities of the Buddhist statue boom that has become stabilized in the last couple of years.

The trend of emphasizing “Buddha Girls” in the media, which tend to jump on new and strange phenomena, shows that the idea that many Buddhist statue fans are middle-aged men still remains prevalent in society. In fact, many magazines listed above are men’s magazines that target middle-aged men. Therefore it can be said that probably the majority of people who are at the foundation of supporting the recent Buddhist statue boom are still middle-aged men.

In any case, there is no doubt that the appearance of “Buddha Girls” and their frequent appearance in the media is contributing to the stable supply of information on Buddhist statues. We can say that this new phenomena can be considered as a new driving force which supports the co-development of Buddhist statue boom and the information on Buddhist statues.

Conclusion

We have considered the deluge of information in the media on “religion” through a wide range of topics. It will be necessary to pay attention to these from a longer time span, to see whether these matters are simply fleeting or whether they reflect much greater change. Nevertheless, in the four themes covered in this report, the common issue seems to be what kind of stance and actions religious people and religious circles will take when a large amount of “infor-

mation” appears in the media and is consumed, or when religious concerns are perceived from the viewpoint of “prices” and “business.” In any case, it is necessary for the public to develop media literacy skills so as not to be swayed by the deluge of religious information, and to examine the deeper background behind these developments rather than simply disregarding booms as passing fads.

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