

REPORT

Survey on Religion and Higher Education in Japan

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This paper reports on the results of the survey “Religious Studies in Japanese Undergraduate Curricula (2002).” Since religion is virtually excluded from school curricula in Japanese public education, colleges are, for most students, the first places where they can substantially learn about religions and religious studies. Ironically, undergraduate programs of religion have recently been downsized due to economic difficulties. The situation is especially critical, given that religion is gaining more attention worldwide and teaching about religion is a major public role that scholars of religion can undertake for an increasingly diversified society. Against this background, this survey gives, for the first time, detailed data about undergraduate curricula in Japan in which the study of religion is a central focus.

KEYWORDS: religious education – higher education – religious studies

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IN THIS PAPER I report on results of the survey “Religious Studies in Japanese Undergraduate Curricula” (“*Nihon no daigaku ni okeru shūkyō no jugyō*” *chōsa* 「日本の大学における宗教の授業」調査) based on data collected in 2002. Whereas discussions about religious education have generally been centered upon the lower school levels, I focus upon higher education. For the purpose of international comparison, it is quite reasonable to bring in the case of Japanese undergraduate education. Since the end of World War II, religion has been a “taboo” area in Japanese public schools as a result of the rigid enforcement of the separation of religion and politics. Religion has virtually been excluded from school curricula in Japanese public education, except in sectarian private schools. Therefore, for most Japanese students, colleges have traditionally been the first places to substantially learn about religions. As fifty percent of young people now go to colleges, religious studies in undergraduate curricula do represent the status quo of religious education provided to the public in this country. Therefore, I believe a survey of this kind is the best way of investigating the types of religious education currently being offered to the Japanese youth.

### *Background and Purpose*

Although Japan has a variety of religious traditions, a large number of Japanese citizens identify themselves as being “non-religious”<sup>1</sup> and profess little interest in religion as such. Sometimes they even show antipathy toward the idea of religion and religious organizations because of the memories of the State Shinto ideology that was used to justify Japanese imperialism, and more recently those of Aum Shinrikyō’s terrorism. Therefore, for the most part, the public have been taking the government’s policy to exclude religion from school curricula, except for a brief mention in history classes, as a matter of course. (Sectarian private schools are allowed to offer religious education.) Furthermore, even religion programs at colleges, where most students get the first opportunity to learn about religions, have recently been downsized due to economic difficulties, along with other traditional liberal arts programs.<sup>2</sup>

\* This is a preliminary report. Further analysis will be published in English in the near future. I designed and conducted the survey with the financial support of Taishō University and JSPS, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

1. According to the 2000 World Values Survey, 24.4% of Japanese say that religion gives them comfort and power, the second lowest figure among the 60 countries surveyed. 23.1% say that they are faithful, which is also the second lowest (DENTSU SŌKEN, NIHON RISĀCHI SENTĀ 2004, 192–211).

2. I discussed this point in FUJIWARA 2005, based upon the data from 1992 to 2002 of 33 colleges, which put weight on religious studies.

On the other hand, some politicians who attribute recent social problems in Japan to the lack of morals among young generations have started to reinforce moral education and advocate the necessity for religious education. While some scholars are criticizing this movement as reactionary, others are examining ways to incorporate religious education as values education in schools without violating the freedom of belief.<sup>3</sup>

In this changing situation, scholars of religion in Japan are facing two major tasks. First, in terms of undergraduate/graduate education, they need to articulate the importance of religious studies in higher education and foster the programs of religion in a renewed form that will appeal more to the public. Second, with regards to school education, they are more than ever expected to participate in the public discussion over the necessity of religious education. In order to tackle both tasks, it is necessary to know what is actually taught in colleges at present in courses on religion or courses that contain religious content. Since colleges, for most students, are the first places where they can learn about religions and religious studies substantially, data about undergraduate curricula could provide a blueprint for religious education in Japanese schools.

### *Method*

With the assistance of several graduate students and post-doctoral researchers,<sup>4</sup> I classified all 4-year colleges and universities (698 institutions in total) in Japan into categories, such as religious/non-religious, liberal arts/scientific, and so on. We randomly selected 100 4-year colleges and universities, and, based on their syllabi and curricula guidebooks for 2002, sorted all their courses in religion<sup>5</sup> into 26 categories.

We also selected 33 colleges and universities that put significant weight on religious studies (for example, a Buddhist college with a department of Buddhism, a non-sectarian university with a department of religious studies) and classified their courses in religion in the same manner.

3. See, for example, TAKAHASHI 2004, EHARA 2003, EHARA ed. 2003, and the article by Nishihara Hiroshi 西原博史, Ohara Yasuo 大原康男, and Kajiwara Keiichi 梶原敬一 titled “Shūkyō kyōiku o tōjō kyōiku o mōru” in *Asahi shinbun*, 26 January 2005, p. 15.

4. I am especially grateful to Ejima Naotoshi 江島尚俊, Yamanashi Yukiko 山梨有希子, Wachi Yukei 和智右桂, Kondō Mitsuhiro 近藤光博, Miyajima Shunichi 宮嶋俊一, and Satō Takehiro 佐藤壮広 for making the database. This is not a questionnaire-based survey. I classified all the courses of each college for fear of a low response rate and inconsistent answers.

5. In this survey a “course in religion” means a course whose major theme is related to religion. We picked courses that dealt with religion in some way for at least one-third of the entire course. The 26 categories of Graph 4 show what we regarded as “courses in religion” (for example, we included Confucianism in religion).

*Survey Results*

## 1. PROPORTION OF SECTARIAN

## PRIVATE COLLEGES AND SECULAR COLLEGES (1)

Graph 1.1 shows the proportion of non-religious colleges and sectarian private colleges in Japan, while Graph 1.2 shows the number of years each college has been established.<sup>6</sup> It is not easy to distinguish between religious colleges and secular colleges in Japan because there are some colleges that were originally established by religious organizations but have lost their religious characteristics over the years and now appear to be as secular as public universities. For this particular survey, we classified colleges according to whether or not they currently declare their religious affiliation publicly. We investigated their web sites and grouped those entirely lacking religiousness as “non-religious (secular)” and those with any religious characteristics as “religious (sectarian).”

The result was that 83.7% of all 4-year colleges are non-religious while the rest are religious. Among religious colleges,<sup>7</sup> Christian colleges far outnumber the total colleges of all other religions. This stands in sharp contrast to the proportion of religious organizations in Japan. According to a census conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2002, 46.7% of all religious organizations are Shinto shrines, 42.5% are Buddhist temples, while only 2.4% are Christian churches.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. PROPORTION OF SECTARIAN

## PRIVATE COLLEGES AND SECULAR COLLEGES (2)

We also sorted the 698 colleges into 6 categories: liberal arts, science, medical, university, special (for example, colleges specializing in gymnastics, arts, and so on), practical (for example, colleges specializing in social welfare, computer technology, and so on).<sup>9</sup> The proportion of religious and non-religious colleges among the colleges of each category is shown in Graph 2.

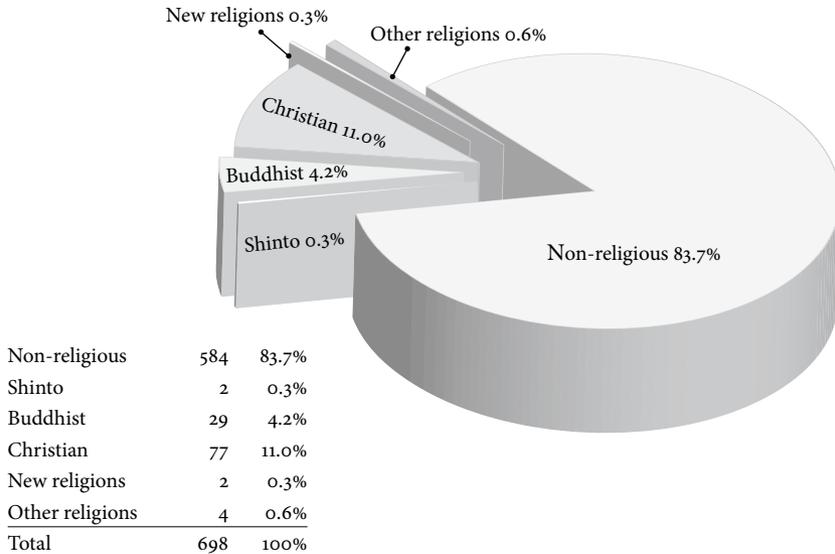
6. Graph 1.2 shows that 22 4-year religious colleges were established between 1995 and 2004, which is the highest record in history. It would, however, be hasty to conclude that religious colleges have recently been increasing in Japan. Many of these new religious colleges were originally 2-year religious women's colleges. It became popular within the past 10 years to change 2-year women's colleges to 4-year co-ed colleges for financial reasons.

7. In Graph 1.1, the two colleges categorized as being associated with “new religions” are Tenri University and Sōka University. The four colleges categorized as “other religions” have school missions explicitly based upon Confucianism.

8. Shinto organizations 85,067 (46.7%); Buddhist organizations 77,472 (42.5%); Christian organizations 4,378 (2.4%); Other religious organizations 15,306 (8.4%) (BUNKACHŌ 2002).

9. “Practical colleges,” which were mostly founded in the past 15 years, are different from traditional commercial colleges or business colleges.

**GRAPH 1.1** Proportion of sectarian private colleges and non-religious colleges (1)



### 3. TOTAL AMOUNT OF COURSES IN RELIGION AMONG COLLEGES SAMPLED, CLASSIFIED BY INSTITUTIONAL TYPES

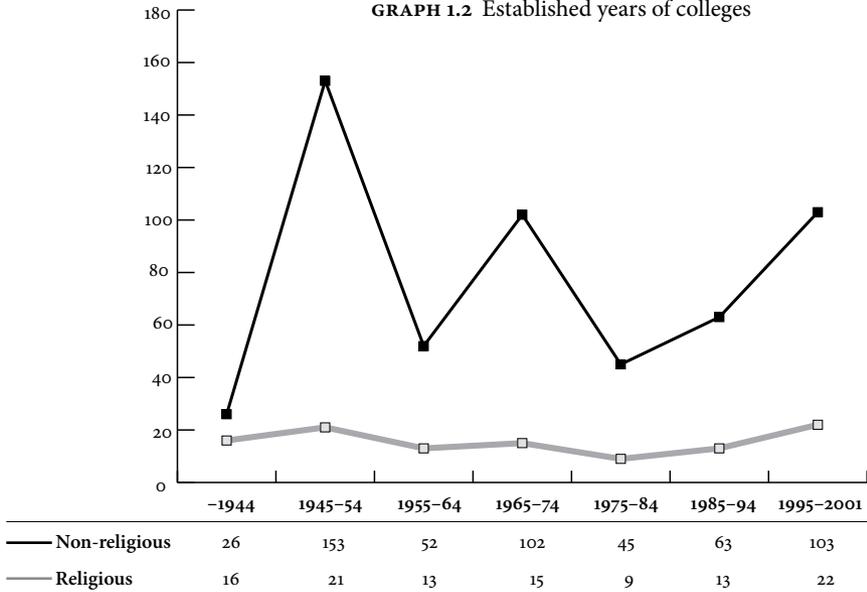
Graph 3.1 shows the total amount of courses in religion among the 100 sample colleges. These colleges consist of 20 liberal arts colleges, 20 colleges of science, 20 medical colleges, 20 universities and 20 practical colleges (special colleges are excluded).

Graph 3.2 shows the amount of courses in religion sorted by religious and non-religious colleges, with a further breakdown of the latter category into public and private categories. Of the 15 religious colleges among the 100 sampled, 2 are Buddhist and 13 are Christian. While the proportion of religious to non-religious colleges is 15% to 85%, religious colleges offer 47.2% of all courses in religion.

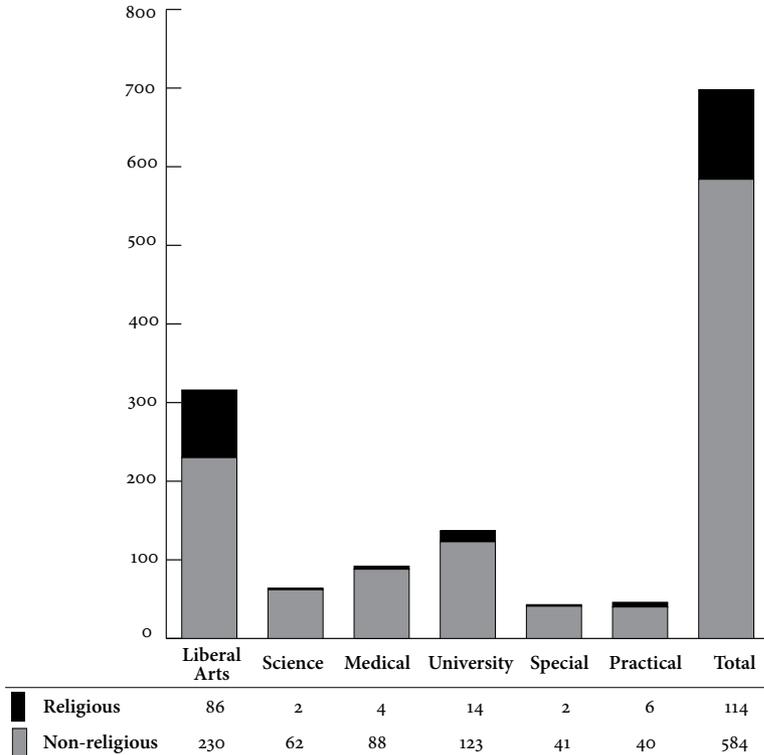
### 4. CLASSIFICATION OF COURSES IN RELIGION AMONG COLLEGES SAMPLED, BY 26 CATEGORIES OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND TOPICS

Graphs 4.1.1 to 4.2.3 show the classification of courses in religion among the 100 sample colleges, by 26 categories of religious traditions and topics. Among the 20 liberal arts colleges, 1 is Buddhist, 4 are Christian. For the 20 colleges of science, 1 is Buddhist, 1 is Christian. Among the 20 universities, 3 are Christian (2 of them have theology departments). Finally, the 20 practical colleges, 5 are Christian. All of the 20 medical colleges are non-religious. It is remarkable that practical

**GRAPH 1.2** Established years of colleges



**GRAPH 2** College classification and the proportion of non-religious/religious colleges



colleges offer less courses in religion than colleges of science do, though they include 3 more religious colleges. Practical colleges, which have been increasing in the past 15 years, are considered to reflect the recent trend of Japanese higher education.

#### 5. GENDER PROPORTION OF THE TEACHERS OF COURSES IN RELIGION AMONG COLLEGES SAMPLED

We compared the number of courses in religion taught by men and those by women. The result is shown in Graph 5.1. We could not make distinctions as to faculty positions. Both full-time and part-time teachers were included. 14.7% of all teachers are women, the rest are men.<sup>10</sup>

We also examined the gender proportion of the teachers of courses in the particular topic of “Gender and Religion (including feminist studies in religion)” (Graph 5.2). There are 101.5 “Gender and Religion” courses in total, and 17 (16.7%) of them are taught by women, 84.5 (83.3%) by men.

#### 6. PROPORTION OF COURSES IN “BIOETHICS/ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS” FROM RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES AMONG COLLEGES SAMPLED

We compared the number of courses in the topic of “Bioethics/Environmental Ethics” from religious perspectives with that of “Bioethics/Environmental Ethics” courses from entirely secular perspectives. Bioethics and environmental ethics are increasingly recognized as new fields where people expect the collaboration between natural sciences and religious studies.

There are 201 “Bioethics/Environmental Ethics” (1 course=2 credits) courses in total, and 74.5 (37.1%) of them are from religious perspectives, 126.5% (62.9%) are from secular perspectives (Graph 6.1). Among the 74.5 courses from religious perspectives, 51 (68.5%) are offered in religious (sectarian) colleges, while 23.5 (31.5%) are offered in non-religious colleges (Graph 6.2).<sup>11</sup>

### *Analysis*

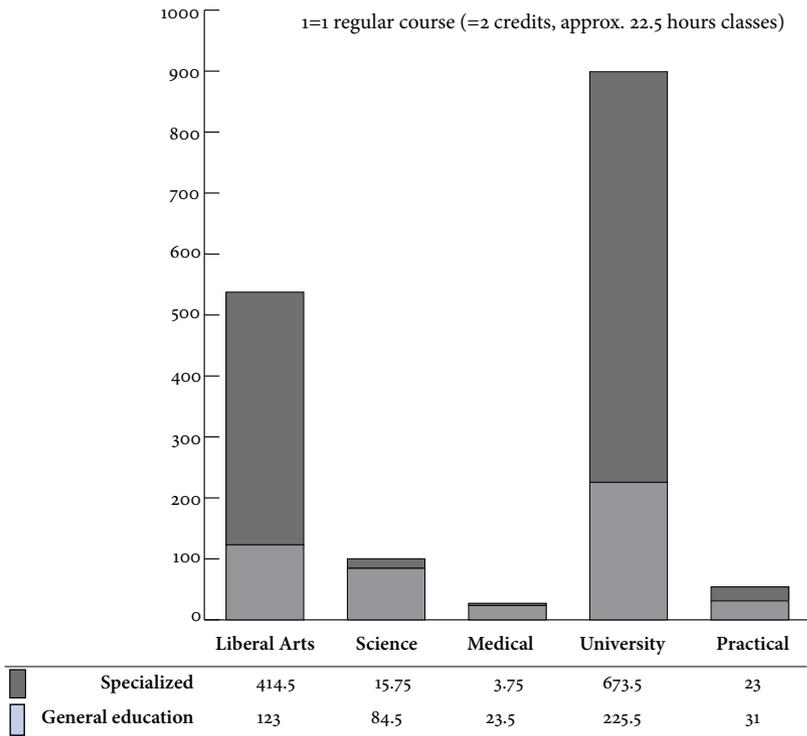
#### COLLEGE COURSES IN RELIGION AND INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

Although the XIXth IAHR Congress theme was “Religion: Conflict and Peace,” there are very few courses that focus upon the topic of “Inter-religious Conflicts and Dialogue” (including the topic of “Religion and Violence/Peace” and other

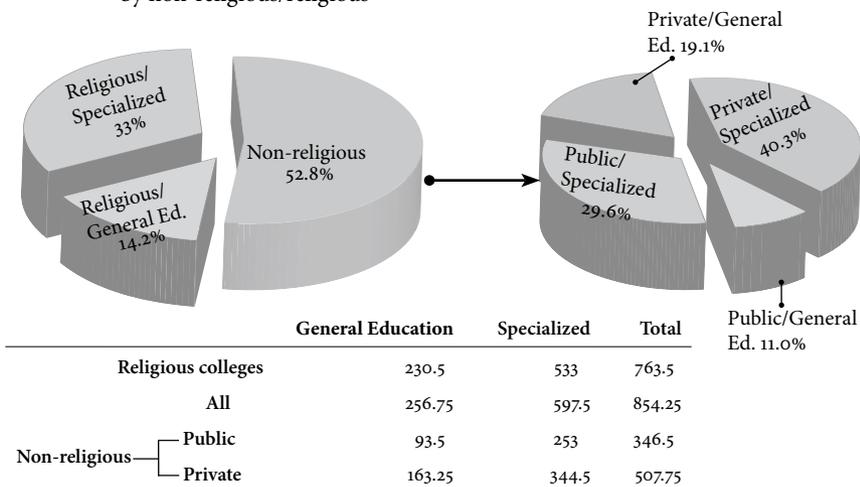
10. According to the survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2002, the proportion of women teachers in all fields is, on average, 12.6% among all 4-year colleges (MONBUKAGAKUSHŌ SHŌGAIGAKUSHŪ SEISAKUKYOKU CHŌSA KIKAKUKA 2002).

11. Graph 7 shows the classification of courses in religion among 33 colleges which place emphasis on religious studies. 8 of them are Christian (3 of them have theology departments), 9 are Buddhist (8 of them have Buddhist studies departments), 2 are Shinto, 2 are new religion-based, 6 are public, 6 are non-religious private colleges. I presented an analysis on the data in FUJIWARA 2005.

**GRAPH 3.1** Total amount of courses in religion among colleges sampled, classified by institutional types



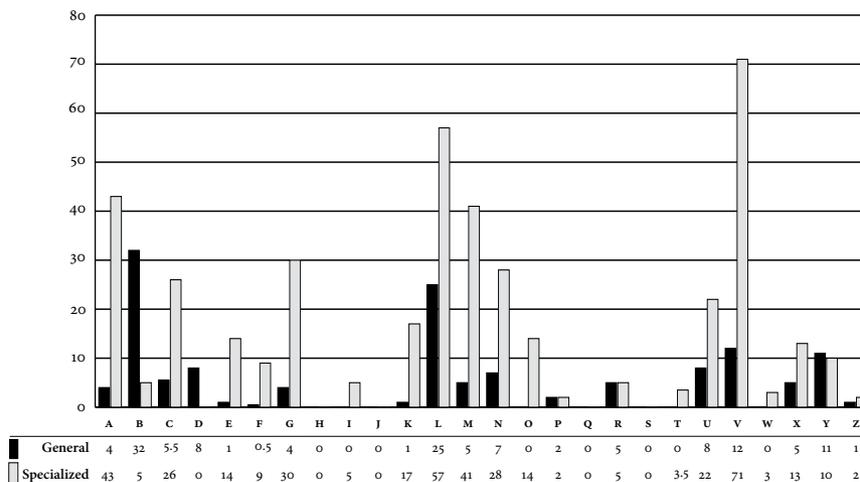
**GRAPH 3.2** Total amount of courses in religion among colleges sampled, classified by non-religious/religious



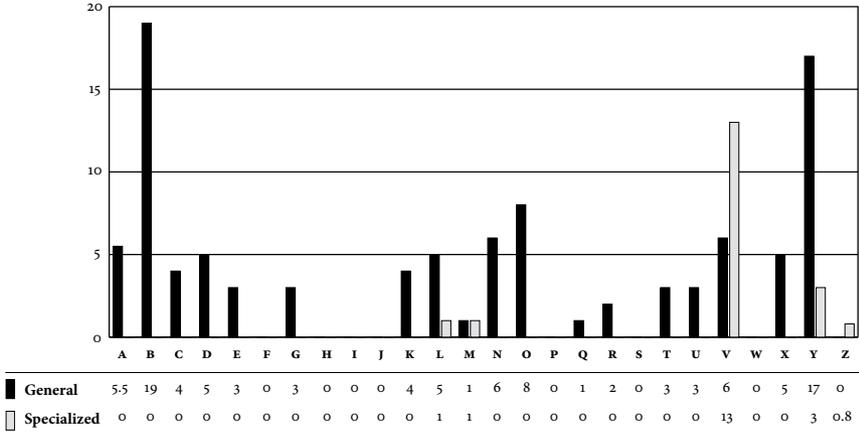
4. KEY Classification of courses in religion among colleges sampled, by 26 categories of religious traditions and topics (GRAPHS 4.1.1 to 4.2.3, GRAPH 7).

- |  |                                     |  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| A Christianity, Historical                                 | B Christianity, Theological         | C Buddhism, Historical                                 |
| D Buddhism, Theological                                    | E Confucianism/ Taoism              | F Hinduism   |
| G Islam  | H Judaism                           | I Shinto, Historical                                   |
| J Shinto, Theological                                      | K Comparative Religion              | L Japanese Studies/Ethnology                           |
| M Area Studies   | N Ethics/Philosophy of Religion     | O Bio/Environmental Ethics from Religious Perspectives |
| P Gender and Religion                                      | Q New Religious Movements           | R Introduction to the Study of Religion                |
| S Psychology of Religion                                   | T Sociology of Religion             | U Anthropology of Religion                             |
| V Arts, Literature and Religion                            | W Interreligious Conflicts/Dialogue | X Other Courses in Religion                            |
| Y Bio/Environmental Ethics from Non-religious Perspectives | Z Natural Sciences and Religion     |  |

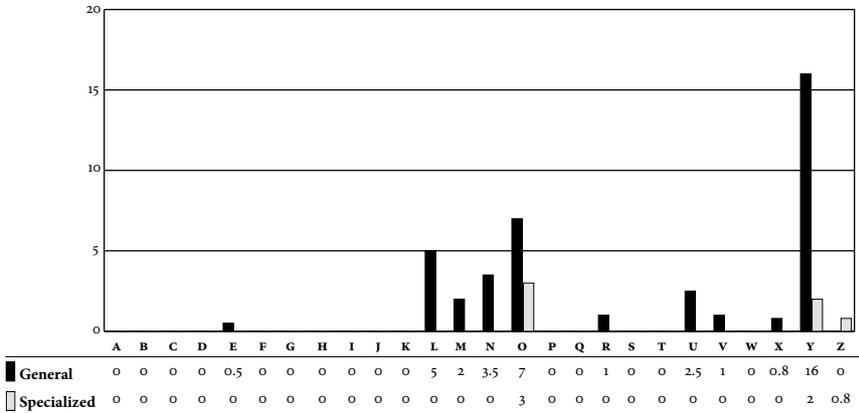
GRAPH 4.1.1 Classification of courses in religion among 20 liberal arts colleges



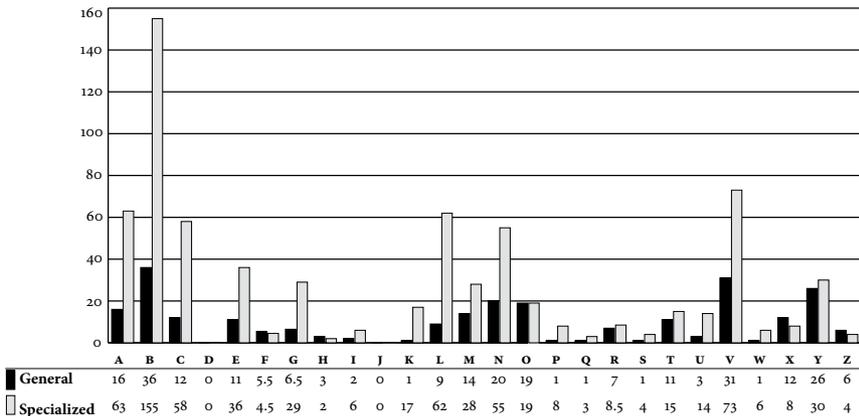
**GRAPH 4.1.2** Classification of courses in religion among 20 colleges of science



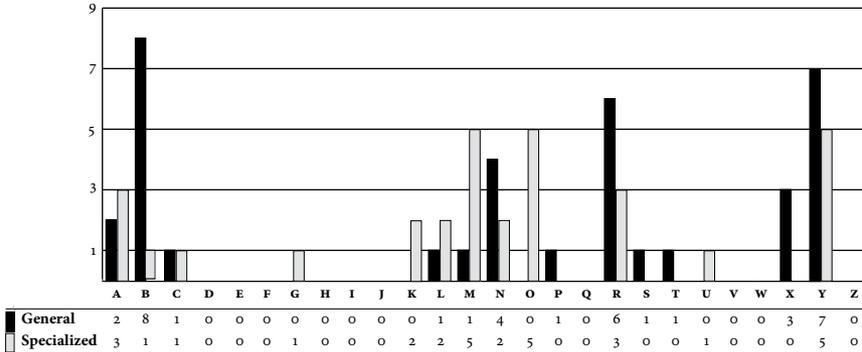
**GRAPH 4.1.3** Classification of courses in religion among 20 medical colleges



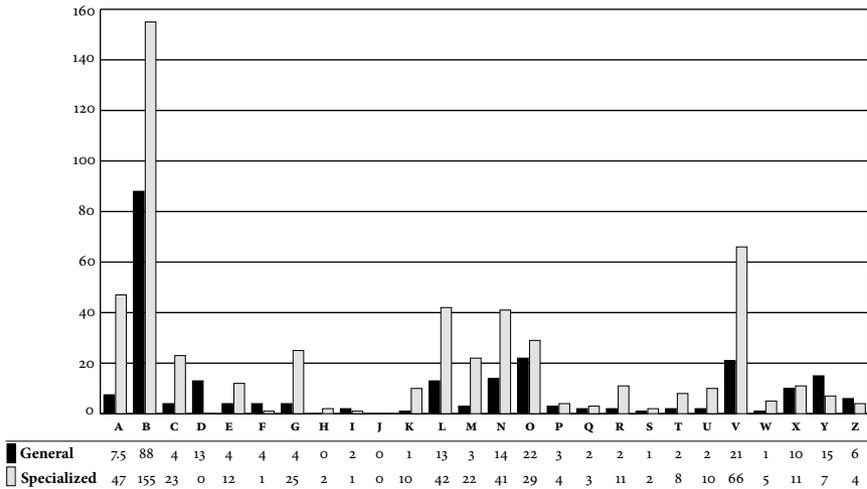
**GRAPH 4.1.4** Classification of courses in religion among 20 universities



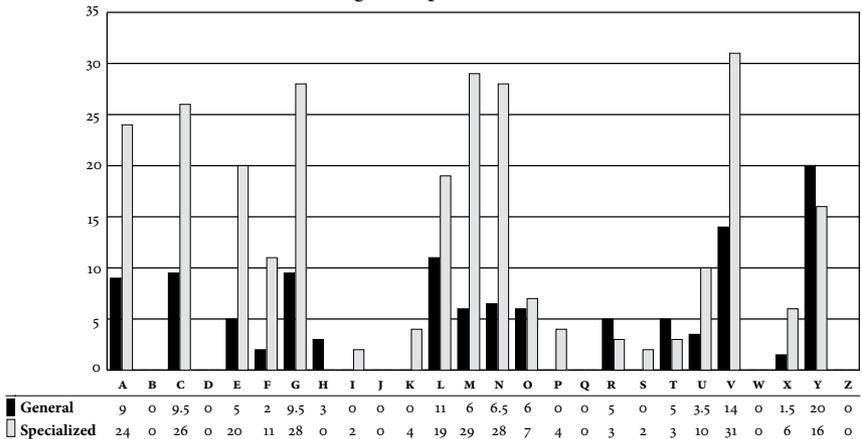
**GRAPH 4.1.5** Classification of courses in religion among practical colleges



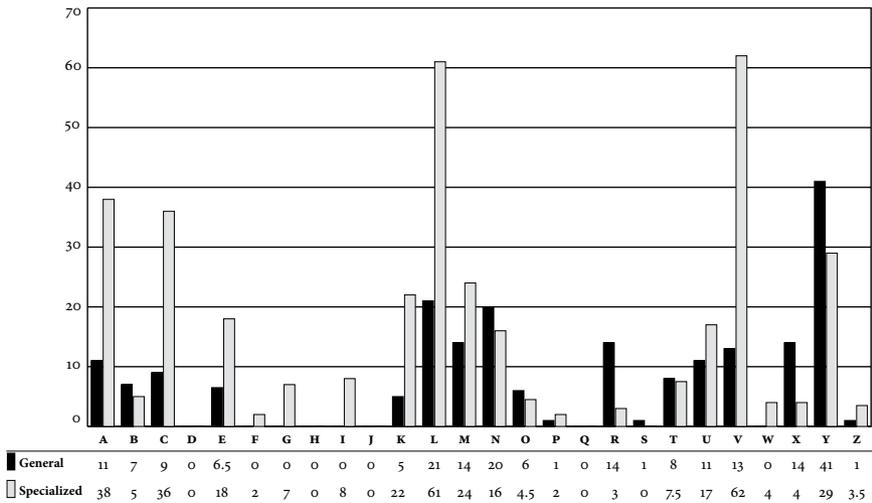
**GRAPH 4.2.1** Classification of courses in religion among the 15 religious colleges of the 100 colleges sampled



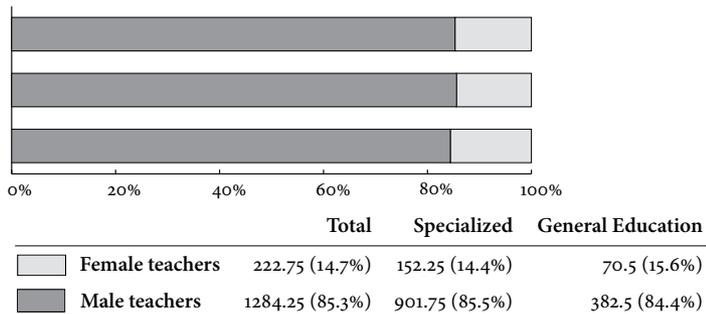
**GRAPH 4.2.2** Classification of courses in religion among the 30 public colleges of the 100 colleges sampled



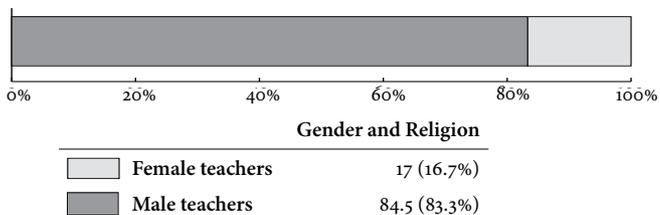
**GRAPH 4.2.3** Classification of courses in religion among the 55 secular private colleges of the 100 colleges sampled



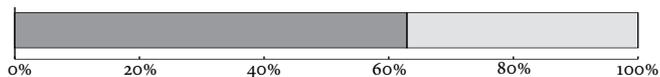
**GRAPH 5.1** Gender proportion of the teachers of courses in religion among the colleges sampled



**GRAPH 5.2** Gender proportion of the teachers of “gender and religion” courses (Category P in KEY for GRAPHS 4 & 7)



**GRAPH 6.1** Proportion of courses in “bioethics/environmental ethics” from religious perspectives



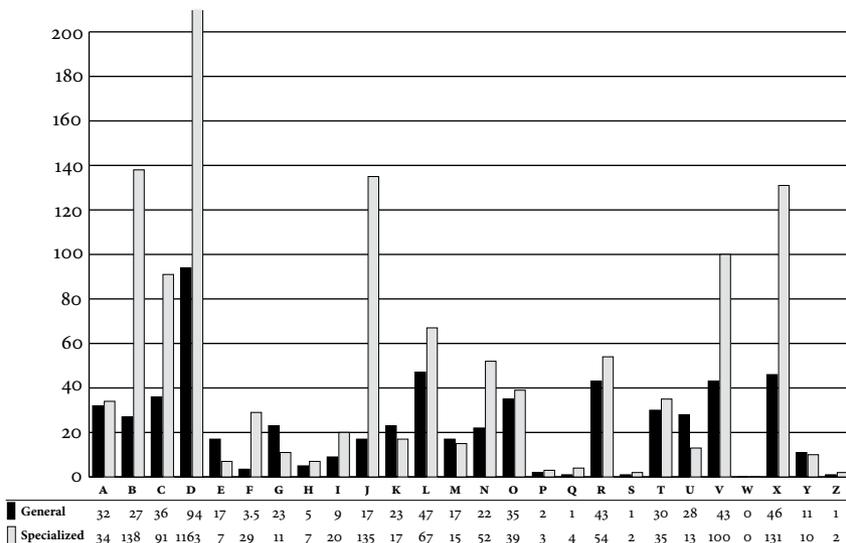
Bioethics/ Environmental Ethics	
■ Secular perspective	126.5 (62.9%)
■ Religious perspective	74.5 (37.1%)

**GRAPH 6.2** Proportion of non-religious/religious colleges among religious “bio/environmental ethics” courses



Bioethics/ Environmental Ethics	
■ Religious	51 (68.5%)
■ Non-religious	23.5 (31.5%)

**GRAPH 7** Classification of courses in religion among 33 colleges emphasizing religious studies



similar topics). This may be because it is uncommon for people to experience inter-religious tensions daily in Japan, and many students feel distant from such a topic. While society is actually becoming more multicultural with the acceptance of foreign workers, religious differences, apart from a few exceptions, have not yet surfaced in the form of social problems.

Accordingly, in the case of Japan, conflicts lie not so much between different religious groups as between those who proclaim faith and the non-religious majority. Among those declaring religious affiliation, there are the adherents of new religious groups. While scholars of religions tend to emphasize the problem of stigmatizing those religions as cults, the parents of students and university authorities expect them to teach students how to tell cults from authentic religions and stay away from them. Scholars of religion thus find themselves in a dilemma. On the other hand, in this survey we found that some scholars of other majors, particularly in the colleges of science, teach in their classes how to avoid being deceived by new religious groups, how to become resistant to mind control, and so on.

#### COLLEGE COURSES IN RELIGION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

One of the most popular courses falls under the category of “Japanese studies,” a study of general Japanese cultural traditions, including its religious aspects, from a largely ethnological perspective (See appendix 1 for an example a course syllabus of this category). It can be assumed that courses in “Christianity/Bible” in Western colleges correspond to courses in “Japanese studies” rather than those in “Shinto studies” (that is, the study of Shinto history, texts, and so on) in Japanese colleges.<sup>12</sup>

If the undergraduate curricula can serve as a blueprint for possible religious education in Japanese schools, a new kind of religious education that can most readily be introduced to school curricula would be something close to these courses in “Japanese studies.” In present Japanese schools, students do not have an opportunity to learn about Japanese folk religions and related traditional customs in classes. Japanese religions are mostly mentioned in history classes, where students overview the major Buddhist sects and their leaders in the Nara (ca. 710 to 794 AD) and Kamakura (ca. 1185 to 1333 AD) periods. The classes of religious education in sectarian schools, which are generally along the lines of “an introduction to the Bible” or “the life of Buddha,” are also apt to lack teaching about Japanese folk religions and customs.

12. See, for example, the data of “Census of Religion and Theology Programs (2001)” in North America conducted by the American Academy of Religion (*Religious Studies News*, Fall 2001, pp. i–iii). This census shows that Christianity/Bible courses are the most popular among North American colleges, regardless of the type of college. In contrast to this, Shinto courses are offered in very few colleges in Japan (Graphs 4.1.1 to 4.2.3, Graph 7).

While the “Japanese studies” kind of education thus may usher in a new phase to religious education in Japanese public schools, the ideological aspect of such education should be taken into consideration. Many of the “Japanese studies” courses in colleges bear the tone of *Nihon bunkaron* (*Nihonjin ron*)—literally, “the theory of Japanese culture”—which tends to overemphasize the uniqueness of Japanese culture and people based on methodologically arbitrary comparisons. Although such uniqueness does not always imply the superiority of Japanese people, it is often stereotypical. A number of scholars have pointed out the problem of Orientalism in such theories (IWABUCHI 1994 provides a concise overview on this issue in English). Some scholars of religion also argue that such theories have been offering Japanese people an opportunity to study their national identity and can be called “civil religion” in post-war Japan (DAVIS 1992, pp. 253–70; SHIMAZONO 2001, pp. 138–70). Whereas it is now generally agreed that public education should be based on students’ autonomy and multicultural value systems, the “Japanese studies” method of education may only serve to strengthen stereotypes and fail to develop critical consciousness. It is also easy to imagine that, when the society becomes more multicultural, this kind of education that stresses the uniqueness and homogeneity of the majority will create conflicts rather than enabling integration on the national level.

#### COLLEGE COURSES IN RELIGIONS AND OTHER VALUES

Here are two examples of general education courses that provide non-sectarian religious education as values education:

1. In one of the non-sectarian private medical colleges, there is a required course titled “The Philosophy of Life” (*Inochi no tetsugaku* 命の哲学) in which students read *Shi o mitsumeru kokoro* [My Spiritual Confrontation of Death], written by KISHIMOTO Hideo 岸本英夫 (1903–1964), a scholar of religion who chaired the department of religion in The University of Tokyo, after he was told that he had cancer.
2. In one of the non-sectarian private universities, there is a course titled “the study of moral education” that relates to religions to a large extent (see appendix 2 for its syllabus).

Through our survey we also found that the courses in “Bioethics/Environmental Ethics” are becoming popular, and in medical colleges in particular, many of the courses provide medical students with religious perspectives that they do not gain from other courses.

#### GENDER AND COURSES IN RELIGION

One of the results we least expected is the gender balance of teachers who offer “Gender and Religion” courses. Such courses are taught by five times more men

than women. Although there is a possibility that the “Gender and Religion” courses of the sample 100 colleges do not accurately represent those of the other 600 colleges, it seems to be safe to say that “Gender and Religion” courses may be taught more often by men than by women in Japan. The most likely cause of this inequality can be found in the gender balance of all the courses in religion, which are also taught by five times more men than women.<sup>13</sup> In general, courses in gender studies are supposed to increase employment opportunities for female teachers, yet in Japan this is apparently not the case.

### *Conclusion*

I would like to offer suggestions on how to foster religious studies in Japanese higher education. As Graphs 4.2.1 to 4.2.3 show, secular private colleges (55 out of 100 sample colleges) offer fewer courses in religion overall than both religious and public colleges. Public colleges (30) offer fairly balanced courses in religion, while religious colleges (15), on average, offer the greatest number of courses in many categories (though the fewest in R, “Introduction to the Study of Religion” in general education programs). In order to provide students with a more comprehensive study of religion, it would be most effective for private colleges to collaborate with public colleges so that students can take more varied courses. It has been customary among Japanese colleges to form such liaisons only between colleges that adhere to the same religion or philosophy. That is to say, Christian colleges have traditionally been affiliated with other Christian colleges, and the same holds true for Buddhist colleges. If these colleges become also affiliated with secular colleges, it will make a significant pedagogical difference. Such collaborations have recently become much easier due to the increasing prevalence of online education. It is now possible to audit courses offered in different colleges via the internet, without actually visiting their campuses.

As for school education, I would suggest composing sample textbooks of religion for schools. What lacks most in the present political debate over religious education seems to be concreteness. People talk for and against the idea of introducing religion into public education without considering more about what can be done in the name of religious studies on the school level. If a project team were organized by putting together teachers whose syllabi are most distinguished among the syllabi that I have collected so far, this would be a positive step toward changing the status quo.

13. As for the relationships between gender and religious education in Japan, feminist scholars have criticized religious women's colleges in Japan for idealizing the traditional role model of women (so-called “futoku kyoiku” 婦徳教育) (SUZUKI 2002). We now see the presence of feminist scholars of religion themselves as not being strong in Japanese colleges, and further investigation will be needed to find out how much this fact has to do with employment discrimination.

## APPENDIX 1

*Example of “Japanese Studies/Ethnology” course syllabus (Category J from KEY to course classification)*

College Type: Non-sectarian, private university

Title: The History of Japanese Culture

Purpose: This course investigates the various aspects of “culture,” in a broad sense, which have been created by the inhabitants of the Japanese Islands. The lecture will explore Japanese culture thematically. It will cover the ancient to the present age, while paying attention to both changed and unchanged elements. It aims to provide students with clues that will make them think over what kind of culture Japanese culture is.

Week 1	Introduction
Week 2—Week 3	The Formation of Japan and Japanese People
Week 4—Week 5	Kami and Hotoke (Japanese Gods and Buddha)
Week 6—Week 7	Religion and Traditional Performing Arts
Week 8—Week 9	Social Positions and Occupations
Week 10—Week 11	Men/Women and Young/Old People
Week 12—Week 13	Customary Laws, Manners and Folk Ways
Week 14—Week 15	Summaries

## APPENDIX 2

*Example of “The Study of Moral Education” course syllabus*

College Type: Non-sectarian, private university

Required for a teacher-training course

Purpose: In order to have a future prospect of moral education in changing school education, this course overviews the cross-cultural examples of moral education. It does not aim to facilitate students to understand everything in their own way. It rather expects them to admit unfamiliar, different values as they are.

Week 1	Introduction
Week 2	“Four Values” of Greek Philosophy
Week 3	Greek Philosophy and Indian Buddhism
Week 4	“Three Values” of Christianity
Week 5	Christianity, East and West
Week 6	Philosophical Anthropology and the Typology of Worldviews
Week 7	Compassion and Love
Week 8	Confucianism
Week 9	Taoism
Week 10	<i>Kyōiku chokugo</i> (Imperial Rescript on Education)
Week 11	Images of Prospective Persons (role models)
Week 12	Relationships between Persons of Character
Week 13	The Study of the Evil
Week 14	Existentialism and the Denial of Moral Education
Week 15	Summaries

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