Inose Yuri 猪瀬優理

Gender and New Religions in Modern Japan

This article considers the characteristics of gender in modern Japanese new religions. I analyzed these through three types: "Sex Complementarity," "Sex Polarity," and "Sex Unity." As examples, I take up Soka Gakkai, Reiyūkai, and Nippon Kaigi. Many Japanese new religious groups have adopted the andro-centric "Sex Complementarity" type. This characteristic has reflected the gender of the whole of Japanese society, and gender within new religions has also transformed with the times. There is a need to rethink gender in Japanese society from the perspective of gender among the new religions.

Inose Yuri is an Associate Professor at Ryukoku University.

I N GENERAL, it is difficult to pinpoint the nature of the religious classification of "New Religions" because the groups within it possess diverse characteristics and reflect different social phenomena. The most important common denominator is that they are relatively new religious groups or religious phenomena.

Since when did emergent religions become "new"? There are various theories, but in this article I rely on the *Shin shūkyō jiten* 新宗教事典, which adopted the theory based on the Meiji Restoration (1853–1877). The basis of this theory, according to Tsushima Michihito and others (Tsushima et al. 1979), was the idea that there was a time when Japan's new religions commonly shared the characteristic of having a "vitalistic conception of salvation" (*seimeishugiteki kyūsaikan* 生命主義的救済観; Tsushima et al. [1979] and Shimazono [1990, 6–8]).[1]

From the 1970s onward, scholars began to distinguish between "New Religions" and "New-new Religions" (*shinshin shūkyō*; Nishiyama 1979; Shimazono 1992). The adherents to the "New Religions" of the 1970s joined these religions because they were poor, sick, and came from broken homes. Once they became followers, there was a tendency to form a community of worshippers that engaged in relations of mutual aid. Examples include Tenrikyō 天理教, Konkōkyō 金光教, Ōmoto大本, Reiyūkai 霊友会, Seichō no Ie 生長の家, Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教 (Church of World Messianity), Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, and Myōchikai 妙智会 (Shimazono 1992).

On the other hand, for many followers the affiliation with "New-new religions" was triggered by a concern with futility (*munashisa* 虚しさ), and therefore these religions were individualistic in nature. Whereas in the past it was common for "New Religions" to embrace the laity, "New-new religions" idealized the withdrawal from the present world and placed high value on the spiritual world. "New-new religions" include Shinnyoen 真如苑, Sūkyo Mahikari 崇教真光, Cosmomate コスモメイト (Worldmate ワールドメイト), Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教

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1. [Editors' note: according to Tsushima et al. (1979, 139) the "vitalistic conception of salvation" includes the following characteristics: "an idea of a primary religious Being who bears and nurtures all things, confidence in the inherent goodness of the world, exhortations to thank the deity for its beneficial bestowal of life force, and an optimistic view of a salvation easily attainable in this world."]

(Now known as Aleph アレフ and Hikari no wa ひかりの輪), as well as foreign religions such as the Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses (SHIMAZONO 1992).[2]

Gender in "New Religions"

New Religions emerge from different religious backgrounds and include many groups that vary in size. The consideration of gender within the groups is also multifarious. For example, there are religious organizations that reject sexual difference, those that demonstrate a clear hierarchy between men and women, and also those that ignore hierarchical relationships while highlighting the distinct qualitative difference between men and women.

Many new religions are known as "evil heresies" (*inshi jakyō* 淫祠邪教) because of their history of being persecuted and criticized. Nowadays too, there are cults that endure social criticism. In Japan, some of these groups are known to carry out illegal acts. For instance, the Unification Church is known for its fraudulent business practices, Hō No Hana Sanpōgyō for swindling people by practicing solestry ("foot reading"), and Aum Shinrikyō for perpetrating the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway. However, the criticism leveled at New Religions is not limited to their engagement in illegal activities.

The reason New Religions are easily subject to critique is threefold: 1) their tendency to safeguard information (their closed nature); 2) their disproportionate development, that is, their sudden expansion; and 3) their aggressive proselytizing (INOUE 1992, 11–13). When considering gender, it is interesting to note that the mass media deliberately include elements of sexual scandals as their subject of criticism (INOUE 1992, 47–72). For example, from the beginning, Tenrikyō was tied to sexual scandals, as reported in newspapers (INOUE 1992, 56–62). The founder of Tenrikyō, Nakayama Miki 中山みき, preached about gender equality, saying, "There is no discrimination between a male pine and a female pine" (*omatsu mematsu ni hedate nashi* 雄松雌松に隔てなし), a teaching that included a reformation of the then prevalent notion of gender. However, at that time such a reformed concept of gender in these religious groups caused alarm and misunderstanding among newspaper journalists.

The teachings of New Religions created and endorsed relationships that diverged from the previous convictions about the state of being of men and

2. Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholars have shifted their focus to religions that emphasize individualism even more than "New-new religions," few of which are clearly organized, and they involve activities that emphasize incantations, mysticism, and spirituality. These kinds of phenomena cannot be entirely separated from the term "religion," but are referred to as "spirituality" (スピリチュアリティ in *katakana*, rather than *seishinsei* 精神性; see ITŌ et al., eds., 2004).

women in that they present a reformed concept of gender. It is possible that the criticism of the general public may reflect a negative reaction to this reformed concept of gender. Gender in New Religions has constituted an opportunity to question the common perceptions of gender.[3]

Patterns of Gender in Religious Organizations

It remains to be asked what sort of patterns of gender existed within the New Religions. To answer this question, I will rely on Susan Palmer's typology of a threefold pattern of gender formation based on her analysis of worshippers in new religious movements in North America. These patterns are divided into Sex Complementarity, Sex Polarity, and Sex Unity (Palmer 1994, 9–12).[4]

According to the Sex Complementarity pattern, there is no hierarchical order between men and women, but since they both possess distinctive qualities they share a need to complement each other. Husband and wife become whole once together and the importance of the household is stressed. Men and women are equal but their roles are different, claims Palmer. She argues that even though the structure of religious organizations in this case is spearheaded by a male figure, it does not contradict the ideal of gender equality. Palmer provides The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a concrete example for this pattern (Palmer 1994, 10).

Sex Polarity asserts that men and women possess bipolar natures. It emphasizes the distinction between men and women and the fact that men are superior to women. The soteriology of such religious groups upholds that "women are defiled," and they are strongly inclined to claim that it is much more difficult for women to attain salvation. It is most likely that Sex Polarity will be considered negative in a society that is governed by norms of gender equality, whereas it will be valued in an androcentric society. Examples for religious groups in which Sex Polarity prevails are the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the movement of the figure Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, better known as Osho (Palmer 1994, 10).

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3. However, the doctrine and the organization of New Religions often emphasize the absolute hierarchical order between the leader and the group. In particular, the stronger the group's tendency to safeguard information, the higher the risk that women believers will experience sexual abuse (Jacobs 1984).

4. [Translator's comment: It is important to note here that although Palmer uses the term "sex," the author of the article understands the term not to mean biological sex, but rather to refer to gender, the cultural practices, and expectations that are assigned to sexed individuals in society. Palmer did not understand "sex" in a narrow sense, and her understanding is probably closer to that of today's gender, but at the time the word "gender" was not used as often as today. Therefore, in her discussion, Inose employs the same definitions as they are presented in Palmer's book, but relies on the notion of gender as a more suitable analytical category.]

Sex Complementarity	Men and women are different but they complement one another. Emphasis on marriage.
Sex Polarity	Since men and women are different they are divided along different poles. Men are superior.
Sex Unity	Men and women are originally of the same nature. The difference is nothing but superficial.

TABLE 1. The Gender of New Religious Movements (based on PALMER 1994, 9–12).

Sex Unity describes a gender structure where men and women differ from one another on the surface, but they are very much the same on a spiritual level. There are many religious groups that fall into this pattern and place importance on the world of spirits. These groups reject relationships, marriage, and households/families that take part in this present world. It is possible that they will develop a reformed understanding of gender, but it is difficult for society in general to accept it. Although there is no doctrinal discrimination between the sexes, it is more than likely that the social organization will allow for the sexual abuse of women. Scientology and the Raëlian Movement can be named as examples (PALMER 1994, 10–11).

Gender in the New Religions of Japan

The new religious movements of Japan are characterized by a dual leadership comprised of an expressive leader who often carries out a shamanistic role and an instrumental leader who consolidates the organization. As Tsushima observes,

> First, when it comes to the point of who cooperates with whom when forming relations, the trend becomes clear from the perspective of a sexual division of labor. It is not simply the fact that men and women are combined to form a group; women take the roles of prophets, shamans, and saviors, whereas men are usually oracle interpreters (*saniwa* 審神者), teachers of doctrine (教義家), and organizers. This sexual division of labor is expressed clearly.… In addition, in many cases pairing is formed by members of the same family. Among these the most common are the cases in which husbands and wives align in pairs as leaders. In the case of husband-wife pairings, which reflect the general situation of the Japanese family, it is common for the husband to take the leading role. (TSUSHIMA 1990)

Moreover, it is common for these groups to adopt lay Buddhism and advocate the importance and sacrality of the family. In an essay that reconsiders the concept of "vitalistic soteriology" (*seimeishugiteki kyūsaikan*) as suggested by Shimazono Susumu, Terada references the concrete teachings of multiple religious groups while also claiming that,

Many religious groups try to correct their state of mind, domesticate their teachings, and prioritize first and foremost the harmonization of the household. Further, their world view holds that by making many households happy, it becomes possible to diffuse and impregnate places such as the working place, regional community, the state, and the world with harmony and peace.

(Terada 2014, 147–48)

Similarly, Okada Mokichi 岡田茂吉, the founder of the Church of World Messianity, advocated for "the discourse of intertwined rights for men and women" (*danjo gōken ron* 男女合権論), according to which men and women (husband and wife) possess different qualities, but join hands in supporting a male-centered world view (Komatsu 1995). Tenrikyō (Kaneko 1995), Reiyūkai, Myōchikai, and Konkōkyō assign different roles to men and women. When it comes to gender, the characteristic of these groups fall under Sex Complementarity.

On the other hand, many New Religions do not simply originate discretely; their teachings and rituals have their foundations in Japan's religious traditions. When it comes to gender, they are also influenced by older religious traditions. Such is the case with religions from other cultural spheres, but Japan's traditional religions carry with them misogynistic values that regard women as different from men on a spiritual level and inferior to them, as seen in the Buddhist "five obstacles" (*goshō* 五障) and the Shinto idea of defilement or *kegare* (Tanaka and Kawahashi 2007). This type of thinking aligns with Sex Polarity.

Sex Unity refers to a reformed concept of gender that is different from the conventional gender category in Japan. However, it is inappropriate to mention the pattern of Sex Unity as a characteristic of New Religions, since many of these religions' activities are centered on the household, such as the emphasis on ancestral worship and the division of labor by gender.

Thus, Japanese New Religions are influenced by a conception of misogyny in traditional religion and folkways,[5] they stress the importance of ancestral memorials and the family, and they often affirm the gender roles of men and women. I argue that in most cases the concept of gender in New Religions can be identified as lying between the patterns of Sex Polarity and Sex Complementarity. In my mind, solely through rejecting the hierarchy between men and women, the concept of gender in the New Religions of Japan is sufficiently reformed. However, even though the teachings reject gender hierarchy, by emphasizing the different qualities between men and women as well as a gendered division of labor,

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5. Palmer's empirical study shows that in groups who possess the Sex Unity pattern there is not supposed to be a doctrinal sanction of gender discrimination, yet, at the level of the organization men are still regarded as superior. Since religious groups characterized by the Sex Unity model exist within an androcentric society, the role of women as occupying subservient gender roles in society as a whole is reflected onto the structure of the movement (Palmer 1994, 152–87).

religious groups that possess a substantially androcentric structure and activities continue to flourish. In addition, although they advocate for gender equality, the notion that women are less likely to be saved than men is deeply entrenched. There are cases when men are emphasized as superior to women and take the leading role. These can be more accurately described as the Sex Polarity model, rather than the Sex Complementarity one.

A Sex Complementarity Pattern: The Case of Soka Gakkai

Soka Gakkai is a good example of a New Religion characterized by a Sex Complementarity pattern. Soka Gakkai is a huge religious movement that claims membership of over eight million households. The group is known for having its own political party, Kōmeitō. Its origins date back to 1930, when Makiguchi Tsunesaburō 牧口常三郎 established a Nichiren sect movement of lay worshippers known as Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai. During World War II, the president, Makiguchi, and the rest of the leadership were imprisoned for charges of lèse-majesté and the group was shortly after disbanded. In the postwar period, the second president, Toda Jōsei 戸田城聖, reconstructed the organization, and the third president, Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 (currently the honorary president of Soka Gakkai International), further cemented the foundations of the movement. During Toda's time, the group gained attention for its slogan of "The Great Shakubuku March" (*shakubuku daikōshin* 折伏大行進) under which the movement engaged in intense proselytizing. Under Ikeda, the movement is known for shifting gears towards a more peaceful path, although nowadays Soka Gakkai is still very enthusiastic about religious propagations and support of its political candidates in elections.

The writings and speeches of Ikeda are frequently published in the group's official publication, *Seikyō shinbun* 聖教新聞. Ikeda also participates in round-table discussions that provide opportunities for learning. Followers expect to be taught by the leader of the group, and so Ikeda is very influential. Here we will examine the kind of teachings regarding gender disseminated by Ikeda. He writes in his *Joseishō* 女性抄 (1976),

> Men have the path of men, women have the path of women. Both parties extend their own special characteristics, and moreover, when they combine forces and help each other, one is presented with the form of the original human society. I have no desire to object to the social progress of women. On the contrary, I agree to it.… I even think that when women will have hegemony in the country and in the whole world, it will bring forth a period of world peace. However, shouldn't wives persistently fulfill their duties as wives?
>
> (IKEDA 1976, 60)

He adds that "the husband is an arrow, the wife is a bow" and quotes Soka Gakkai's fundamental principle as taken from Nichiren's teachings: "The

extent a husband can soar to the heights of society and put up a good fight in society depends entirely on the strength of his wife" (Ikeda 1976, 61). However, he stresses that in domestic life "it must not be the way it was under patriarchy when the husband acted like a tyrant and wives and children were forced into submission," insisting on the equality of family members (Ikeda 1976, 106).

As we have seen so far, the doctrinal understanding of gender in Soka Gakkai consists of a tolerant approach that acknowledges the diversity of women and their ways of life. While it also permits gender equality, this conception assumes that men and women have fundamentally different qualities and roles, a qualification that suits the Sex Complementarity pattern.

Let us turn to the organizational structure of Soka Gakkai. The structure is pervaded by a "traditional power structure in which the man is at the top, and the Women's Division perseveres in its activities under his leadership" (Usui 1995, 171–72).

In Soka Gakkai, men below the age of forty belong to the Young Men's Division (*danshibu* 男子部) and men above forty are part of the Men's Division (*sōnenbu* 壮年部). Whereas the males are clearly distinguished by age, women are arranged by their marital status as either married or unmarried, in the Young Women's Division (*joshibu* 女子部) or Women's Division (*fujinbu* 婦人部) respectively. Unmarried women above forty enter the Women's Division. The basic organizational structure assumes that the most important duty of a woman is her domestic role. The activities of Soka Gakkai are carried out based on such structural divisions of gender, age, and marriage. Soka Gakkai encourages women to proactively engage in religious activities. Yet, even though the organization provides women with opportunities, social positions, and a significance that would be otherwise hard to obtain, women cannot serve in the upper echelons of the leadership. For example, leadership in the regional lower branch is comprised of heads for each of its units such as head of the prefecture (*kenchō* 県長), head of the ward (*kuchō* 区長), and general manager (*honbuchō* 本部長), but all of these positions are occupied by those from the Men's Division. Women can only serve in leading positions marked by the female gender such as the "Head of the Prefectural Women's Division" (*ken fujin buchō* 県婦人部長) and "Head of the Prefectural Young Women's Division" (*ken joshi buchō* 県女子部長).

I was able to collect data for the investigation of salaries of female workers in Soka Gakkai. Even today, Soka Gakkai carries out "marriage retirement." Women who work in Soka Gakkai often marry other men from the organization, and are later likely to become head members of the Women's Division. While it is expected that "retired" women will become housewives, women are also assigned to the "work" of regularly attending daily meetings of Soka Gakkai as members. Levi McLaughlin (2009; forthcoming) explores this topic

and argues that women who frequently participate in Soka Gakkai activities are unable to sufficiently fulfill their female duties in the household, and this leads to contradictions and crisis among family members (especially between parents and their children).

Meanwhile, the honorary president Ikeda frequently praises women in his speeches, and makes statements that energize women. Encouraging women, he announced that, "The twenty-first century is the century of women," and "I place importance on the Men's Division and the Women's Division [equally]." The remarks towards women show that he is leading in a selfless manner. However, one might also say that this type of commendation of women is an expedient means for leading an organizational operation that centers on men uninterruptedly.

While the Sex Complementarity pattern possesses an ideal of gender equality, the organizational structure is commonly headed by a male figure. On this point one might explain Sex Complementarity as a condition wherein men and women have different qualities, and for that reason, each and every one of them capitalizes on these qualities and can mutually collaborate from the standpoint of equality. Therefore, it does not explicitly contradict the ideal of gender equality.

A Sex Polarity Pattern: The Case of Reiyūkai

Reiyūkai has its origins in the 1920s. The leader of the group was Chairman (*rijichō* 理事長) Kubo Kakutarō 久保角太郎, and the spiritual leader was Kotani Kimi 小谷喜美, who served as president when the religion was officially inaugurated in 1930. Later on, this group gave birth to Risshō Kōseikai, Myōchikai, Bussho Gonenkai 佛所護念会, and many other religious denominations. According to their official publication, *Shūkyō nenkan* 宗教年鑑 (2015), the number of followers is estimated to be about 1.3 million people. Its doctrine is a form of lay worship based on the *Lotus Sutra* that includes rituals for the bilateral line of ancestors. This is not the more prevalent ancestral worship that only follows the patrilineal (unilineal) line, but rather the group initiated a new formula of ancestral rites in which lines of both husband and wife are connected. Another important component of their teachings is that one should alter his or her own mental attitude and behavior on a daily basis.

Since Reiyūkai advocates for bilaterally-orientated ancestral worship and places importance on equality, one might say that the group is characterized by the Sex Complementarity pattern. However, in this section I would like to primarily inspect examples of Sex Polarity in New Religions during the prewar and wartime periods (Hibino 2003; Watanabe 2007). Hibino (2003) claims that patriarchy in modern Japan is "the sum of relations and patterns in which power is distributed to male superiority based on sex, and fixed roles are allocated to its

members" (Sechiyama 1996, 45, quoted in Hibino 2003, 3) and it is this sort of patriarchal system that Hibino attempts to find in Reiyūkai.

The leadership that Kubo Kakutarō bestowed upon Kotani Kimi was expressed in symbolic patriarchal male-female relations. Kubo Kakutarō was the husband of Kotani Kimi and fifteen years her senior. He was the disciple of Kotani Aki but when he saw his brother's marriage suffering because of poverty and illness, he ordered Kimi to carry out Buddhist practices. During these practices, Kakutarō and Aki revealed to Kimi their understanding of male-female hierarchy by proclaiming that, "The karmic hindrance (*gōshō* 業障) of women is deep" and thereby confirming their approach of androcentrism. Their aim was to correct her deviant behavior and reform her as a "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*ryōsaikenbo* 良妻賢母)[6] which was in keeping with patriarchy. They did so through forcing Kimi to kneel down on the ground and use honorific expressions, and criticizing her using the words "unyielding spirit" (*kachiki* 勝気) and "overbearing wife" (*kakaa denka* カカア天下; Hibino 2003, 3–5). Kimi was opposed to it at first, but subsequently she publicly accepted the position that although men are heads of the household, women take the helm by faithfully assisting their husbands as housewives (*naijo no kō* 内助の功; lit. "the merits of helping from within"; Kubo 1972, 65–66; 1983, 49).

Hibino argues that the starting point of the religious customs and conduct of Reiyūkai is found in the couple's practice of "deferring to one's husband" (*sagaru* 下がる), establishing a gender division of labor whereby women perform feminine behavior (*onna rashii furumai* 「女らしい」振舞い), which allows for the social legitimization of women, and in the strategy of establishing privileges within the patriarchal system (Hibino 2003, 5).

Reiyūkai emphasized the wartime regime's gender division of labor by urging women to follow their appropriate teachings and demonstrate "Extreme Alignment with the Demands of the State" (*kokka no yōsei ni kajō dōchō* 国家の要請に過剰同調). This served a mediating function, or "bridge building" that enabled adaptation to drastic and long-term changes in social control (Watanabe 2007, 205–206). Thus, "Reiyūkai nurtured exemplary people during the state-controlled wartime era" (Watanabe 2007, 206), especially women. The religious movement emphasized that, "self-sacrificing and devoted mothers should rear loyal and

6. [Translator's note: the notion of *ryōsaikenbo* 良妻賢母 was coined by the Japanese intellectual Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 and informed by Confucian and European ideas alike. The idea transformed into a heterosexist and nationalistic ideology that was prevalent in female education during the latter half of the Meiji period. According to this view, women had to receive proper education in order to perform the tasks of caretaking and childrearing more effectively. For the Meiji government, the slogan proved useful for perpetuating the role of women as caretakers of the household and was deemed crucial to Japan's modernization and the project of nation-building.]

brave children that are useful for the state." In order to become an exemplary mother one has to overcome the "evil disposition of women" (*josei no warui sei-heki* 女性の悪い性癖) and put a household in order that is useful for the state. It asserted that this could be achieved when women correct the defect of harboring discontent and reforge their own spirit (WATANABE 2007, 196–200). Therefore, it is thought that women's ways of being during wartime was tied to Reiyūkai's frame of mind.

The sacralization of motherhood was an ideology that befell wartime Japanese society in general. Nevertheless, in Reiyūkai it was remarkably conspicuous: "One of the basic elements of the Reiyūkai belief system was ancestor veneration. In spite of a non-familial ancestor world view consisting of the veneration of both the husband and wife's families, this view was integrated with the worship of the 'state family' with the emperor at the top" (WATANABE 2007, 203). Within such a view, the mission and role of women on the homefront was emphasized. The underlying logic that legitimized this role was the adoption of the ideology according to which, "the karmic hindrance of women is deep" (*josei no gōshō no fukasa* 女性の業障の深さ; WATANABE 2007, 205). The teachings of Reiyūkai were completely based on a gendered division of labor, and were reflected in an organizational structure where women were supernatural and thus served as propagators, whereas men followed the principles of law and as such were aligned with the organization (USUI 1992, 76).

Therefore, it is apparent that while Reiyūkai preached for equality and ancestral veneration of both the husband and wife's families, by pushing the view of "the karmic hindrance of women is deep" they embraced a Sex Polarity construction of gender. Reiyūkai's value system of "extreme alignment" with the state, which was widespread in Japan during the prewar and wartime era, left a mark on Japanese society that persists today. I would like to touch upon this point in the next section.

The Problem of Gender in Japan's New Religions: The Case of Nippon Kaigi

On the 16 December 2012, the casting of ballots of the forty-sixth general election for the Lower House resulted in the comeback of the Liberal Democratic Party (*jimintō* 自民党) as the leading party in the coalition. The LDP joined forces with the Kōmeitō (公明党) party which guaranteed two-thirds of the parliamentary seats, allowing them to recapture political power from the Democratic Party (*minshūtō* 民主党). During the election, the LDP leader Abe Shinzō campaigned with the slogan "Take back Japan!" (*Nippon o torimodosu* 日本を取り戻す). Abe continues to serve as the prime minister and the head of the cabinet government today.

The term "take back" refers to the fact that something valuable used to exist but now it has been lost. What exactly is this valuable thing? That very notion is

informed by an idea that can be illuminated by examining the well-known group Nippon Kaigi 日本会議.

Abe has been, for some time, deeply connected to Nippon Kaigi. In 2013 a general assembly of Nippon Kaigi was held. In the greetings at the outset of the meeting, President Miyoshi Tōru 三好達 said that the Liberal Democratic Party's win in the forty-sixth election of the Lower House of Representatives and the birth of Abe's administration was "one of the great achievements of our movement [Nippon Kaigi]" (Yamazaki 2016, 19–20). Moreover, after the cabinet reshuffle of 2015, more than half of Abe's third term cabinet ministers were affiliated with the "Discussion Group of Nippon Kaigi Diet Members" (Nippon Kaigi kokkai giin kondankai 日本会議国会議員懇談会; see Sugano 2016, 20–21; Tawara 2016, document 13; Yamazaki 2016, 18). Since three hundred Diet members belong to this social gathering (42 percent of all of parliament), the group's effect on governmental policies is considerable (Yamazaki 2016, 27).

According to their official website (http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about /mokuteki), the goals of Nippon Kaigi are as follows:

1. The national character of a beautiful tradition for Japan's tomorrow (美しい 伝統の国柄を明日の日本へ).
2. A new constitution befitting of the new era (新しい時代にふさわしい新憲 法を).
3. Politics that protect the reputation of the country and the lives of the people (国の名誉と国民の命を守る政治を).
4. Creating education that fosters a sense of Japaneseness (日本の感性をはぐく む教育の創造を).
5. Contributing to world peace by strengthening the security of the country (国の安全を高め世界への平和貢献を).
6. Friendship with the world bound by a spirit of coexistence and mutual prosperity (共生共栄の心でむすぶ世界との友好を).

A sense of Japaneseness is "[t]o love the country, and to have a spirit of devotion to the public," and it is said that "the overzealous education system which attaches too much importance to rights, the masochistic education of history that judges the history of our country unfavorably, and gender-free education are all rampant. These forms of education paralyze the vibrant senses of our children, who carry on their shoulders the next generations, and dispossesses them of pride and a sense of responsibility towards the country."

These comments communicate a sense of impending crisis on the part of the organization. Nippon Kaigi laments that "pride and a sense of responsibility towards the country" is being taken away. In order to rehabilitate the situation, "Prime Minister Abe and Nippon Kaigi would like to 'take back' a 'glorious' Japan. This Japan is the Japan of the Showa period, the Japan of the prewar

and wartime era" (YAMAZAKI 2016, 110). "In regards to that, the aspiration to return to a prewar state, that is, to a national polity in which the emperor is at the center, continues to thump like a *basso continuo*" (AOKI 2016, 154). At the basis of the notion of a return to the prewar and wartime era lies a world view in which exercising the power of the state was superior to the protection of the rights of individuals. For example, the same can be said about the direction the amendment of the Japanese constitution is headed, which is a main objective for Nippon Kaigi. It is quite symbolic that the constitution amendment bill that the LDP proposed is ideologically continuous with Nippon Kaigi. Article 13 of the Japanese constitution, the basic clause referring to the respect for fundamental human rights, states "All of the people shall be respected as individuals," but the LDP's amendment omits the character for individuals (*ko* 個) and leaves the phrase simply meaning "people." Scholars interpret the omission as a rejection of the idea that each of us are born with "individual rights" (HIGUCHI and KOBAYASHI 2016, 65–77).

At the basis of this world view, naturally, there is a rejection of feminism that aims to expand the rights of women, as well as gender sensitive values. The movement of Nippon Kaigi deals with a couple of issues that are directly related to gender. Nippon Kaigi is against husband and wives' selective retaining of their own family names for the sake of protecting the "bonds of the family" (*kazoku no kizuna* 家族の絆). They are also against sex education or education that considers gender in public schools for the purpose of suppressing the discourse on "individual rights," which they feel went too far. Finally, Nippon Kaigi denies the problem of Japan's historical involvement in wartime sexual slavery as epitomized by the establishment of the institution of comfort women. The denial is an effort to transmit what they perceive as "correct history." It is reported that various areas in Japan experienced a backlash in the form of grassroots movements supporting these values (YAMAGUCHI, SAITŌ, and OGIUE, eds., 2012; MITSUI and ASAKURA, eds., 2012; SEOK 2016; YAMAGUCHI, NOGAWA, and MORRIS-SUZUKI et al. 2016).

At any rate, what is the connection between this problem and Japan's New Religions? First, present-day Nippon Kaigi is supported by the great force of religion, with many organizations involved. The vice president is also the secretary general of the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja honchō 神社本庁). Moreover, its representative officials are comprised of members from Shinsei Bukkyō Kyōdan 新生佛教教団, Nenpō Shinkyō 念法眞教, Sukyo Mahikari, Gedatsukai 解脱会, Atsuta Jingū 熱田神宮, Kurozumikyō 黒住教, Bussho Gonenkai, Reiyūkai, Mt. Hiei's Enryaku-ji 比叡山延暦寺, Yasukuni Jinja 靖国神社, Meiji Jingū 明治神宮, OISCA International オイスカインターナショナル, The Institute of Moralogy モラロジー研究所, Taiwa Kyōdan 大和教団, and Rinri Kenkyūsho 倫理研究所. Among forty-seven of its representative officials, eighteen (38.3 percent) are religious officials (TSUKADA 2015, 73–74).

Second, many figures that played a crucial role at the time when the organization was formed were influenced greatly by the New Religion Seichō no Ie (Aoki 2016; Sugano 2016). The founder of Seichō no Ie, Taniguchi Masaharu 谷口雅春, thought that the chaos of the postwar era was the result of the new Japanese constitution and so he advocated that Japan should return to the formulation set in the Meiji Constitution of the Empire of Japan. In order to realize his plans, he formed "the Political Alliance of Seichō no Ie," known as Seiseiren 生政連, in 1946. During this time Taniguchi utilized the entire organization to compete in the election. However, after 1983 Seichō no Ie quit politics. The official website of the religious movement has come to officially proclaim that "The followers of Moto seichō [former followers of Seicho no ie], certainly during the current post-Cold War era, adhere to the idea that our historical role is already over, as was preached by the founder in the Cold War era." The same source (Sugano 2016, annotated by Inose) shows that, in contrast to conducting secret activities, "Nippon Kaigi's political agenda is truly overwhelmed with shame … and is completely different from the dogma and methods of present-day Seichō no Ie. Put bluntly, it is anachronistic" (official website of Seichō no Ie 2016a).[7]

Taniguchi Masaharu had nationalistic values that recognized the special worth of the Japanese state and the imperial household. During the war he praised the supremacy of the Japanese people, the belief in the emperor system (*tennōsei* 天皇制), and the significance of the Pacific War (1941–1945). In the postwar period, Taniguchi championed the ideas of the emperor system and the household (*ie* 家) as "Japanese things" (*Nihonteki na mono* 日本的なもの) and criticized ideas such as democracy, individualism, and other "ideals established by foreign people" (Terada 2008, 187–202). There is a tendency among mainstream Nippon Kaigi members to make these claims a reality.

7. The website of Seichō no Ie reads, "We do not support 'The Initiatives from Osaka Party (Ōsaka ishin no kai おおさか維新の会)' who hasten to reform the constitution, and the parties that support Japan's right to collective self-defense (LDP, Komeitō, Nihon no Kokoro o Taisetsu ni suru Tō, Nihon o Genki ni suru Kai, Shintō Kaikaku) and their candidates" (Seichō no Ie 2016b). As the debate concerning the legislation on these issues grew heated, the public relations department of Soka Gakkai (indeed an unusual case) proclaimed that if the bill on the right to collective self-defense is approved, one must also reform the constitution (*Sanken shinbun*, 17 May 2014). However, a cabinet decision later approved the bill. On this point, Soka Gakkai's president Harada answered in a *Mainichi Shimbun* interview that the bill passed because of the efforts of Komeitō to include in the constitution articles within the framework of pacifism and non-aggressive defense policies. Regarding Nippon Kaigi, he said that "they are incompatible with Soka Gakkai." But while he warned that "one should maintain the sovereignty of the people and the respect for fundamental human rights," Harada added that although Prime Minister Abe feels an affinity for Nippon Kaigi and is a "revivalist," he was not worried that this will lead directly to policies such as revising the constitution.

Third, traditional religions such as the Association of Shinto Shrines and Enryakuji, which are often the source of Japan's New Religions, participate in Nippon Kaigi. As mentioned beforehand, the values shared by Nippon Kaigi disavow the exercise of rights by individuals, for they disrupt the traditional order of the state and of groups. They cherish the supremacy of men and emphasize that men and women possess distinct qualities and roles. Thereby, they harbor values that are conspicuous elements of a Sex Polarity pattern.

The redefining of gender is, according to Nippon Kaigi, the "destruction" of the "traditional order" of the family, an institution sustained by women's performance of housework, childcare, and nursing. This redefining of gender is a target for attack for Nippon Kaigi. Scholars have pointed out that Nippon Kaigi and Prime Minister Abe do not use the term "gender equality" (YAMAZAKI 2016, 161–64). People fear that groups like Nippon Kaigi, who maintain a reactionary and an anachronistic set of values, will exert a large influence on the contemporary political administration that will result in the revival of totalitarianism. It is in this context that Japan's New Religions play a major role (NAKAJIMA and SHIMAZONO 2016). Their fulfilling of such a role is a grave problem that is related to gender in New Religions.

New Religions as a Mirror of Society

The fact of the matter is that the New Religions of Japan have many female founders who preach for gender equality and often advocate for other ideas that fall under the notion of a reformed concept of gender. However, after the second generation, the leadership of religious movements shifted, and the concept of reformed gender ebbed, resulting in the group's male-centered structure. To reform gender is a very difficult task for New Religions even though they themselves emphasize novelty.

All in all, despite the fact that the gender formation of New Religions in modern Japan is androcentric, many female devotees zealously engage in religious activities. One wonders, what do the women adherents who participate so vigorously in New Religions find charming about these movements?

When I asked this question to a woman affiliated with the Jehovah's Witnesses, she answered "Even if I rear my children and do housework, nobody compliments me. But when I make progress in my research (doctrinal study) of Jehovah's Witnesses everybody praises me." "You're remarkable!" "You're doing great!" "When I work as a housewife I normally have a difficult time studying. However, Jehovah's Witnesses came from afar and taught me all kinds of things for free and for that I am grateful." These types of stories come up often (INOSE 2007).

The situation is different from one religious group to another, but many women find their purpose in life through participating zealously in New

Religions. At the same time, however, society at large does not offer women social roles that give them purpose in life.

While feminism channels women towards rejecting (desacralizing) the authority and power of the modern gender division of labor, New Religions sacralize the motherhood of housewives and the gender division of labor through their teachings and practices. As Igeta notes, housewives are "those who take the course of intensifying modern power structures and order structures" (Igeta 1992). Tsushima observes that New Religions "preach on equality among people, affirm the role of women and youth, and provide them with positive activities" (Tsushima et al. 1979). One charming aspect of these New Religions is that women can be given a place to carry out activities without destroying modern power structures and the existing order.

On the other hand, many New Religions regard women as inferior to men. This contradiction can be explained by Reiyūkai's logic of "once you defer, you benefit" (*ittan sagatte mi o toru* いったん下がって実を取る), whereby the assumed role of women is that of a housewife, a fact emphasized by many New Religions (Inoue 1991). In other words, this way of thinking assumes that when wives observe modesty and behave obediently, they will be cared for by their husbands, provided stability in their position as wives, and be able to gain their own perseverance vis-a-vis their husbands. This form of gender construction intensifies the oppressive structures that perpetuate the existing structure of gender roles. However, it is also a realistic and affective means to be accommodating to an extensively androcentric Japanese society (Inoue 1991). Beyond Reiyūkai, the strategy of "deferring" is used widely in New Religions, for example, in Hito no Michi and Seichō no Ie, where the roles of married couples are sacralized and the gender roles of women are thoroughly enforced (Usui 1992).[8]

One wonders what kind of problems arise in Japanese society when one does not adopt the strategy of deferring. For example, in a divorce suit of a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the husband alleged that since the wife left the house in the middle of the night to participate in the group's religious activities she did not sufficiently fulfill her duties as a wife, and for that reason he wished to divorce her. The Jehovah's Witnesses are characterized by the Sex Polarity pattern, for

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8. According to a study on the social activities of Japanese women affiliated with Shinnyoen, Risshō Kōseikai, and the Catholic Church, through participating in such activities, women's participation in social activities is enhanced in all kinds of ways (Cavaliere 2015). Cavaliere argues that "the life-stories and the survey data analyzed in this book prove that it is worth challenging the paradox of linking empowerment and social change with religious settings that tend to be connoted by conservative gendered practices" (Cavaliere 2015, 231). Within a limited framework of gender, women find their momentum and as a result they have the possibility to bring about social changes. However, this is in a sense related to the fact that Nippon Kaigi has many female followers.

they attach importance to the notion that a wife should do her husband's bidding. But, because in some cases the husband is a nonbeliever and the religious group precedes him (since the group accords to divine will, which is superior to the will of the husband), conflict arises between the gender roles of the husband and wife (INOSE 2007). As a result, the marriage, supposedly important in terms of doctrine, becomes dysfunctional.

In order to avoid such a problem, many Japanese New Religions have come to adopt the Sex Complementarity model, which has mass appeal in society. The things that New Religions offer and that they bestow to their adherents are perhaps the very things many people in society wish for.

Importantly, the gender formation offered by New Religions is by no means detached from the gender of society at large. Often, New Religions cherry pick some characteristic that is emphasized by society. Much like the vitalistic conception of salvation in New Religions has transformed with the changing times (TSUSHIMA et al. 1979), the gender conception in New Religions was also supposed to have shifted. By observing the situation in Japan, whose value system of restricting individual rights holds sway, and where efforts to question the gender system have been unsuccessful, it is clear that there is a great need to question once again the current state of affairs of gender in Japanese society as a whole.

The phenomenon of religion is not an issue restricted to a few unique people who become religious devotees, but rather it provides significant points of view to all of us who live in modern society. When we realize religion is a mirror of society, then the concept of gender in modern society will rise to the surface.

[Translated by Or Porath, University of California, Santa Barbara]

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