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Spirituality and Women in Japan

This article examines the issue of spirituality for women in today's world based on interviews with twenty-two women who are involved with spirituality or healing in Japan. I show that from these interviews, they make the effort to navigate their encounters with spirituality and healing productively and to positively attribute significance to their lives. They sense in spiritual ways of life a power with the ability to activate collective energies capable of achieving global social change that is motivated not by anger but by joy, and that is capable of envisioning a better world. These women have found ways to live outside established, organized religions. They can have human relationships that are not limited by the norms of their families, and where they live by connecting online with like-minded people and sharing ideas with them. They are profoundly involved in living their own lives. The actions of women such as these are bringing about a transformation in views of gender in Japan.

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IN THE JAPAN of today, which is considered to be economically prosperous, why do so many women turn to spirituality rather than to traditional religions? Women are involved in many kinds of healing, including Reiki, hypnotherapy, energy work, past life therapy, lomilomi massage, card reading, Aura-Soma, poetry reading, energy art, aura reading, focusing, *qi gong* massage, tarot reading, and so on. Among them are women who use multiple healing methods in combinations that they devise for themselves, and who find in the ways of thought behind these methods origin stories that account for their purpose in life with world views that also extend to life after death.

I conducted interviews with women who have found ways to live outside established, organized religions. This article is based on interviews I conducted with twenty-two women who are involved with spirituality or healing¹ in Japan, and through these interviews, I will examine the issue of spirituality for women in today's world.

Spirituality and the Condition of Women

Together with the terms “spiritual,” “world of spirit” (*seishin sekai*), and “healing” (*iyashi*), in recent years we have witnessed the spread of a new spirituality that can be characterized as aiming for the awakening or transformation of consciousness of the individual. This emphasis on the individual has been cited as evidence of a decline in the influence of organized religion and, in conjunction with that, as a subjective turn (HEELAS and WOODHEAD 2005) in which the individual gradually faces the sacred directly. There is also a notion that in a society becoming secular, religious values are being lost. On the other hand, there are those who say this only means that individuals today are capable of making

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1. The age groups of the twenty-two women interviewed (as of 2016) are as follows: one in her eighties, one in her sixties, three in their fifties, thirteen in their forties, and four in their thirties, for a total of twenty-two. Of these, fifteen are or have been married and eight have been divorced, eight have children, and seven are unmarried. In addition to the women's interviews, their web pages, blogs, and other such sources were also referred to. The women are referred to here by arbitrarily assigned letters rather than by their names.

interpretations for themselves so they no longer need an external authority, and individuals are maintaining their religiosity within themselves.

Studies of religion up to now have tended to focus on religious institutions, doctrines, or attendance rates and other such relatively tangible aspects that can be measured quantitatively. Consequently, when the concept of the secularization or individualization of religion arises from a view that centers religious behavior on belief systems or religious institutions, that concept appears to be out of touch with ordinary people's world views and their sense of what is religious. People may feel a need for answers from a greater power, or a desire to establish connections by means of prayer, but those feelings and desires do not necessarily have to be linked to institutions or doctrines. When women feel estranged from any religious organization, they may first experience their sense of the religious in immersive experiences in moments of ordinary everyday living, such as when preparing food or sitting alone in their rooms or cleaning up around a grave. This point is made by Meredith McGuire and Nancy Ammerman in terms of "lived religion" (MCGUIRE 2008; AMMERMAN 2013), and it is a perspective that demands our attention.²

The expression "lived religion," however, must not be taken to indicate a lack of depth in religious feeling. There is a tendency to describe women as nothing but the consumers of a spiritual industry (ARIMOTO 2011), or to depict women as though they are caught in a flow of inarticulate ambivalence in which they decide nothing for themselves (ISOMURA 2007). And if women are distancing themselves from traditional religion for no more reason than that they are finding religion itself to be questionable (KASAI 2003; HORIE 2011), then the question of what it is that women are pursuing when they involve themselves in spirituality becomes moot.

The Present Circumstances of Women

Japan passed the Act on Securing Equal Opportunity and Treatment of Men and Women in Employment in 1985, and enacted the Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society in 1999 and the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace in 2016. It appears, therefore, that gender equality is being promoted in the workplace and in society. As it happens, though, the notion of gender roles dating from Japan's period of high economic growth in the 1970s—which assigns women to the home and men to the workplace—remains deeply entrenched. Now that the economic situation has grown so harsh, there is talk of having women take active roles in the labor market, but this is not something women have chosen independently for themselves. Rather,

2. Ammerman states that it was through her research on "lived religion" that she first became able to make the religion practiced by women in their lives visible to her (AMMERMAN 2013).

it is being forced on them as a policy that utilizes women. The number of women who go into politics and the percentage of women appointed to managerial status is so low, and the disparity in wages with men has continued so long without improvement, that it is easy to conclude that the strains and stresses of society have been foisted onto women. This is not unrelated to the trend toward women's participation in spirituality and healing.

As education on gender equality moves forward, both men and women alike are being subjected to the same employment pressures as well as to demands that they experience self-realization in their work. At the same time, women are also subjected to the additional demand that they have children, the earlier the better, and that they fulfill their role as mothers (NAKANO 2014). UENO Chizuko (2013a) has described this situation with the expression "the young woman's double burden." Even though both men and women are wage earners, once married, the wife does almost all of the housework, so the notion of division of labor by gender role is still very much in place. When the couple has a child, then childrearing is made the woman's job, along with the housework. The Act on Childcare and Caregiver Leave, the Act on Employment Insurance, and other such laws were enacted so that childcare leave can be obtained when a child is born. It should also be possible for men to take childcare leave, but the number who actually do so amounts to no more than about 2 percent. The notion that childrearing is mothers' work is still a strong presence in company organizations and in the consciousness of men. Fixed notions like these exert powerful pressures on women, who live under an imposed sense of guilt and frustration.³

In fact, one distinctive element in the interviews was the assertion that these women's experiences of work in Japanese society today left them feeling exhausted in both body and mind. Many of the women also described themselves as being depressed.

Ms. L., who is currently holding sessions in energy and what she terms "eros work," is one of the women who felt doubts about working under these circumstances. She worked in the textile industry in Gunma and then went to work at a kimono shop in Tokyo. Partly because the work kept her so busy, but also because of how the work was carried out, the workplace environment, and other aspects that made her feel that she was in a community dominated by men, she quit working when the kimono shop went out of business. She says that at that time she thought it would be impossible to make her way in a male-dominated society.

3. To use Butler's words, when a "group ethos" falls behind the times, it immediately turns violent. Even though it falls behind the times, the group ethos does not recede into the past but rather continues to oppress individual rights. In that state, the ethos can be said to become manifest in the maternal images imposed on women as well as in women's ways of life (BUTLER 2008).

Ms. O. became physically and mentally exhausted from overwork, and fell into a cycle of taking leaves of absence and then going back to work. Finally she ended up quitting her job. Seeking to cure a chronic bodily complaint, she turned to Western-style medicine, then went to numerous alternative medical treatments and in this way came into contact with healing circles.

Ms. F. stayed on in her work after getting married, and she says that she continued working even after having two children. Due to the nature of her work, and in order not to place a burden on her workplace, she returned to her job four months after each child was born. She even went overseas on assignment while her child was still in its first year. Since she planned all of this herself, she thought there was no problem with it. She now says, however, that she feels that she was damaged by it. Caught up in being busy with work, she never had enough time to spend together with the child she herself had borne. As Ms. F. expressed it, this harmed her motherhood.

These are all women who want to work and are capable of doing real work. However, since company evaluations take men's ways of working as the standard, in order to receive a commensurate evaluation, women have no choice but to sacrifice housework and childcare for that purpose. Therefore women are still being faced with the choice between work and childcare. If they choose childcare and quit their jobs, then this is taken to demonstrate that women just are not up to the job. If they continue to work while handling childcare, then they are blamed for treating work as a sideline. As for the job of taking care of the children, women have to take this burden squarely on themselves. Many of the women who agreed to be interviewed had therefore been hospitalized with depression. It could be said that these women experienced depression as a consequence of those social circumstances.

There is also the fact that childcare during the trend of a falling birthrate exposes women to excessive pressure, as Ueno Chizuko put it, of "childrearing that they absolutely cannot fail at" (UENO 2013a). Caring for children today, when families have only one or two, has come to be viewed as a form of work that does not allow for failure. It is assumed that women are capable of childcare, so they are charged with this responsibility even when they have no experience of it.

Ms. R. was starting an active musical career when she became pregnant. When they learned that she was going to have a child, her musician colleagues told her she should not work while pregnant, and so she had no choice but to give up music. About a year after giving birth, she wanted to return to her career but she was not welcomed back. The women who had gone on with their musical activities told her that it was greedy to want to care for her children and work, too. Ultimately she had no choice but to give up a career in music, but her feelings were not settled so easily, and she continued to feel that she wanted an active career as

a musician. She found herself thinking that she could have her career if only she did not have a child, and that thought was especially hard for her to bear.

After Ms. C. had her second child, she quit her job when both of her children caught influenza. Her own health declined after she quit working, however, and she says that she felt she had become someone different from the person she had been before. She found herself collapsing for almost no reason, and even getting on the train to go somewhere with her children became too much for her, to an extent that would have been unthinkable before. Whether they continue working or quit their jobs, the women who feel troubled in this way and who find themselves trapped between the demands of work and children do not have the resources to do battle with societal problems when they are in that state. Unable to achieve a balance in either direction, they tend to perceive it as their own personal problem rather than a problem that originates in society.

Many women feel pressured by the maternal myth that since they are women, they will naturally love their children unconditionally. The image of the woman who accomplishes both housework and childrearing to perfection oppresses them and they feel unable to unburden themselves of their distress. Ms. U., for example, could not get along with her eldest daughter and did not know what to do about it. Ms. C. became unable to relate to her husband or her eldest son. Both Ms. U. and Ms. C. therefore ended up suffering over their inability to love their children equally, and this made them feel that they were doing something wrong. They wondered if they were bad mothers. Another such case was Ms. S., who became depressed while caring for her children. Not only was she unable to discern in herself that image of the good mother and good wife that society demanded, but she also suffered because she was unable to find any women anywhere around her who could show her specifically the kind of childrearing that would fit the ideal.

With society in this state, women's movements could not acquire any substantive power. Kikuchi Natsuno found that the Japanese government's adoption of "gender equality" was taken by the public to mean that national policy had incorporated the conceptual approach of feminism. This conveyed the image that discrimination against women had been eliminated, and people ended up with the impression that feminism was a power that moved the government and the nation. Consequently, the notion that discrimination against women had been resolved was perceived as a result produced not by feminism, but rather as something that occurred in conjunction with vaguely defined larger developments such as economic growth, democratization, and the effects of education. Meanwhile, women who complained about gender discrimination came to be seen as selfishly ego-centric women who found fault with men while seeking their own self-interest, all the while receiving government support. A great deal of gender bashing has taken place because of this negative image (KIKUCHI 2015, 81). An indication of the magnitude of the gender bashing that has taken place under these circum-

stances is the opinion piece by the author Sono Ayako, who is famous for her conservative views, that was published by the major weekly magazine *Shūkan Gendai*. Under the title “Spoiled Women Employees” [Amattareta josei shain tachi] (31 August 2013 issue), Sono wrote, “The maternity leave system is an imposition on the company. When women have a child, they should quit their jobs.”

In the face of such intense bashing, most women were forced to declare that they were not feminists. This is illustrated by the words of Matsui Hisako, who made a film documenting the activities of women in transition from the liberation movement to feminism during the 1980s: “For a long time, we either held feminism at arm’s length or took an attitude of disinterest, so there was a glass wall separating ‘ordinary women’ and ‘feminists.’” In order to avoid being smeared by the label of feminism identified as “the hysteria of ugly, unlovable women” that was current in society, most women kept a distance from feminism, Matsui says, retaining the misunderstanding of feminists and the biased view of them as “women who make men their enemy” (MATSUI 2014, v–vi).

Encounters with Healing and the Spiritual

The workplace modality referred to as male-centered employment practices does not merely mean that the organizations known as companies impose the values of male-dominated society so that work is made difficult for women. It is a world in which companies make all their employees join in reciting the company policy on a daily basis, where becoming imbued with the company’s one-track mindset is equated with becoming a responsible adult, and in these and other such ways, it is a world where company employees are not recognized as independent human beings and where diversity is rejected. In contrast with this, women who encountered spirituality and healing find ways of affirming their own selves, their own acts of interpretation, and their being women. It is precisely these activities that present the feminist perspective in seeking mutual recognition by those women of the diversity of their identities.

SELF-AFFIRMATION AND SELF-CHOICE

Ms. F., one of the interviewees, found herself unable to affirm her own womanhood. Through her experiences in various sessions of reiki, card reading, channeling, and other such practices, however, she says that she became able to enjoy being herself not as a wife or a mother, but as a woman. In this way she became able to construct her own explanations of situations, and she gained the ability to interpret the meaning of her own anger, which until then she had only endured stoically. By becoming aware of what was within herself, she became able to examine herself in depth. She came to realize that the problems she experienced in balancing her marriage and childcare with her work had their origins in

herself, from the impatience of her mother and her own impatience to get married due to the marriage of her younger sister. As a result, she became able to choose for herself what her present needs were. Ms. F. thereafter went through a divorce and left her job. Today she works in a public relations capacity, making use of her job experience, while engaging in healing by means of reiki, channeling, and other such approaches.

Ms. D., who operates a healing salon, said that going through the experience of lomilomi and hypnotherapy convinced her that her present way of life was something she had chosen herself. Ms. S. underwent hypnotherapy, which she says relieved her of her neurotic anxiety about childrearing. Until then she had lived a life without a sense of being her own self in it, suffering from a fear of contact with other people and an inability to understand what ideal childrearing would be. Now she is at the point of wanting to live her own life.

A common thread among most of the women who agreed to be interviewed is that up until then they had been trying to live up to somebody else's expectations, or they were painfully constrained by notions of the way things "ought to be." After taking part in various spiritual sessions, however, these women experienced a sense of liberation and they became able to deal with their own circumstances. Spirituality provided these women with ways of affirming themselves and positively accepting that they are women.

PAST LIVES AND PRESENT LIVES: GIVING MEANING TO LIVING

A common element among many of the interviewees was their experience of past life therapy. Some of the effects of hypnotherapy and past life therapy on relationships with children and spouses are of particular interest. Typically, people who are their husbands and children in their present life were found to have been their lovers in another lifetime, or to have been older rather than younger than them, or vice versa, or to have been a different sex, while being in a relationship of some kind with them. This change in circumstance made the women feel as though they could look at the people they have relationships with in the present, including themselves, as people who have an identity other than who they are now, and who can therefore be viewed more objectively.

One such case, for example, was of a woman whose daughter had been very sensitive as an infant, and so had been very difficult to bring up. In past life regression, this woman saw a life in medieval Europe when her daughter had been an older person who the woman, a callow youth in that past life, had been greatly indebted to. The woman perceived that in her present life it was her turn to pay back her debt of gratitude to that person, who was now her daughter. Her narrative thus embodied a reversal because what she had thought was a problem

in her daughter actually originated in something she had done in a previous life. Past life therapy can therefore be viewed as enabling reversals in this sense.

Even women who did not have such a specific experience of a past life found themselves moved to tears in their final sessions. One woman was released from the feeling that her mother had disliked her, while other women found that some change had occurred in themselves since returning to their homes. One woman found that tears would suddenly come to her eyes, or she would start to weep when she heard a character say something in a television show, and after a while she realized that she had been lonely. After that, she became able to apologize fully to her child for something hurtful she had said.

The women who related their experiences with past life therapy were not particularly concerned with whether or not past life regression was real. In fact, some of them insisted that they were only using past life therapy as a tool. Through their past life experiences, the women acquire a point of view other than their own, so that, for example, they could conceive that their relationships with their children were different in a different lifetime, and they were therefore able to perceive their children as individuals distinct from themselves. When a woman sees that her own role and purpose in her present life are things she determined for herself in the course of living in this very world, it gives her the strength to live more affirmatively for her purpose. To have one's values undergo a change in this way is valuable in itself, so the question of whether or not the reality of past lives can be substantiated by lessons learned or perceptions achieved is beside the point. One reason that great emphasis is not placed on past lives is because of concern over a tendency to think that everything in a person's present life was determined by that person's past lives. If people have plans for their present life that were decided on before they were born, then they can live their lives according to those plans or they can revise the plans. What is important is that they can decide either way for themselves, and that realization constitutes a maturing of the individual.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH ESTABLISHED RELIGIONS

Established religious orders did not fulfill the desire these women felt to affirm their own existence as women. One-third of the people interviewed either subscribed to the faith of a religious group or had tried to do so but experienced disappointment in the group.

The women who had childhood experiences involving Christian churches related how they had suffered over such negative elements as sin and God's punishment. They related their specific accounts, some feeling that the women in the church were only fulfilling their assigned roles, so that there was no model of a

happy woman to be found in the church. Some felt as though they were being forced into something, and they sensed that they were not being accepted.

In Buddhist groups, people were going to psychics for consultation when they were ill or had problems. The priests in the temples were almost without exception unaware of how to relate to people. They had no idea how to talk with people or be with people, so the women said they felt there was no point in consulting a priest.

In one of the new religions, there was a woman whose health collapsed after she quit working and devoted herself to her family. The woman found certain elements of that particular religion's teachings unconvincing, and she said they would not help her with her feelings of despair. Another woman who belonged to a different new religion said that although she started out participating actively, she eventually grew increasingly disillusioned with the organization, which was rigidly fixed in a male-centered hierarchy. She also felt doubts about the way the group attributed the causes of problems to ancestors and to karmic connections with particular places. Another woman whose mother was a believer in a Shinto-based new religion recalled how surprised she was when she saw that the believers' auras were all the same, and how she felt that she herself could never join in their belief.

One woman's case serves as an example of someone who experienced involvement with multiple religious groups. From her junior high school days, she was involved with Christianity. After her child was born, she tried joining two new religions, but in both cases she was troubled by the organization and its regulations, so she left. She summed up her disappointment with established religions with these words:

They claim to have thousands and thousands of years of history, but then I wonder why they are so attached to matters of religion, ethnicity, nations, traditions, and so on.... When there is a sense of such gratitude circulating through me and heaven and earth that it makes tears come to my eyes for no particular reason, then I don't need doctrines. In fact, they strike me as more annoying than anything ... gratitude that people feel because they are told it will not lead to true joy, and then when they are unable to experience the real thing, it makes them feel guilty.

She found something very different during a visit to Findhorn, which can be considered a sacred site for the spiritual movement. The sharing attitude that she experienced during her week's stay there gave her a sense of security so that she no longer felt the need to conceal herself. She felt she could express herself openly there. She said this was because people were not being judged there. Many of the women also talked about the discomfort they felt when the members of a faith gathered together in the name of a single doctrine, all of them thinking in the same way.

This does not mean, however, that these women are rejecting traditional religion in its entirety. Although these women have no interest in organized religious communities, they do engage in religious acts, such as visiting churches and listening to hymns, taking part in observances at shrines and temples, and worshipping at shrines and temples. They at times combine various different faiths and philosophies, mixing them together. In this they are not pursuing the same kinds of practice as people in the traditional religions, so what they do may appear shallow and superficial, but within themselves, these women integrate what they are doing in a meaningful manner. This new behavior of women is referred to by Kristin Aune as feminist spirituality as lived religion, which she finds is characterized by a kind of do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to spirituality (AUNE 2015).

RELATIONSHIPS RATHER THAN ORGANIZATIONS

One other distinguishing feature of women's spiritual activities is their emphasis on relationships. In the healing and spiritual sessions held by the women, for example, the positions of the practitioner and client are not as distinctly divided as physician and patient typically are. When a healer provides a healing technique, for example, it is up to the client to decide whether that technique is accepted as a solution or not. Past life therapy, as another example, employs hypnotic induction, but it is up to the client to interpret what is experienced while in a hypnotic state, and the healer accepts that interpretation just as it is. This is very different from someone who uses psychic powers to provide answers to questions. By contrast, the action here does not represent a one-way movement of the healer giving a solution to the client, but is rather a more involved interaction between healer and client. The healer is not always on the side that dispenses healing. She relates her own narrative, too, as a participant in the interaction. Clearly, this is what in current terms is referred to as consciousness raising. The act of relating one's own narrative is a rebellion against the sense of guilt imposed by old values (BAUMGARDNER 2011, 70). When people feel secure enough in themselves that they are able to share their respective narratives, they broaden their own world view and also deepen their human relationships. The acts of people who relate their own narratives already constitute a movement.

There is also the new technology of computers, email, the internet, Facebook, and other such tools that are used to create and disseminate ideas. This has made it possible to have contact with many more people than ever before. By connecting online with like-minded people and sharing ideas with them, people can form human relationships that are not limited by the norms of their families and where they live. Now we see people traveling to distant places to work as volunteers after a major earthquake, taking part in protest movements against nuclear

power plants, and joining in demonstrations against security treaties. This kind of freedom to move and act is also characteristic of this new era.

The Spiritual as Work

Women who have experienced healing, past life therapy, and body restoration find that their activities have much to do with the problem of making a living in present-day Japan.

Approximately half of the women who were interviewed engaged in work in spirituality or healing as their main source of income. One woman said that after her divorce, she had to work to pay for her children's day care, and the spirituality-related internet sales she had started at that time became her livelihood. A woman who was conducting childcare seminars and hypnotherapy sessions found that she could support herself that way. Another started a healing room and became financially independent. Many of the women described how they put their own experiences into the healing methods they acquired and developed their own unique variations on those methods. Their clientele is made up of 90 percent or more of women, and there are still few men among them, though the number is gradually increasing. Clients are mostly found through word of mouth, and after people come one time, the connection with them tends to continue.

Frequently the work they do actually consists of various kinds of different but related work. Since these women always consider themselves to be in learning mode, they commonly participate in workshops on subjects they are interested in. As a result, it is characteristic of this group that the content of the work they do regularly changes and evolves. In time, they also find themselves in a position where they can join in training other healers, dispense advice, or help in other ways.

On the other hand, there are also women who do not engage exclusively in spirituality and healing, but they also hold ordinary jobs. Since things spiritual are already part of their lives, some of them choose more down-to-earth work for the pursuit of independence, while others feel unsuited to spirituality as an occupational specialty.

These women are also concerned with seeing how much they have grown, and some of them feel they will not be able to sense this if they are always engaged only in spiritual matters. Working in the world and meeting people from outside their circles gives them a more objective perspective. These women therefore take a very positive view of engaging in other work that is unrelated to healing.

Up to now, the function of caregiver in Japan has been assigned solely to women as a gender role. The labor market ranked it as unpaid labor and assigned it a low value. From the perspective of healing, however, care is something of value, and there is a steady demand for it, so work of this kind is viable as paid employment. There is also a major difference in the value assigned to work when

the desired outcome is the clients' smiles. This is work done only to follow the desire of one's own heart and soul, not out of a desperate need to earn money, for which one has no intention of commercial expansion, and one places more importance on caring than on earning.

There are of course complaints and warnings about how the spiritual and healing are being taken over by commercialism. There are concerns that, having been commercialized, spirituality and the cultural domain known as religion are being replaced by corporate imperatives, or that the healing boom does not only conform to consumer needs, but is a mechanism for creating consumer needs.⁴ This kind of commercialism and corporate manipulation exists in some regards. However, it has also become apparent that there is a certain advantage in commercialization and dissemination by the mass media. That is, with Japanese society in a prolonged economic downturn, businesses related to the spiritual are making a profit, and that has provided women with options for work. Commercialization has made spirituality more acceptable to the general public, and the way in which this has made related businesses more viable should not be overlooked.

The women interviewees are also cognizant of how the spiritual can be a fad. They are aware, as well, that people who seek answers from a psychic power, and who are fixated on spiritual things, are generally unable to let go of this dependency. Regarding the dependent kind of spirituality that lacks the initiative to seek out answers for oneself, these women would probably say, for instance, that this is not what they call spiritual, and regarding the kind of spirituality that identifies the spiritual (matters of the spirit or soul) as an unworldly sphere far removed from everyday life, they use the expression "soft, fluffy spirituality" to indicate that this is different from what they themselves are aiming for.

New Feminist Spirituality

In Japan, being a feminist makes one a target of ridicule. Even in Japan, however, people are beginning to speak out about problems they perceive in a male-centered society with disparities between men and women. The activist artist group called the Tomorrow Girls Troop says, "We think that anyone who believes in gender equality is a feminist," and they actively use the term "feminist" in an effort to dissolve the misunderstandings associated with that term.⁵ The group that operates

4. For example, see CARRETTE and KING (2005), MATSUI (2013), and so on.

5. However, the Tomorrow Girls Troop maintains anonymity. They explain that if their real names were publicized, there would be a strong tendency for the mass media to end up focusing on individual personalities or on their work so that attention would be diverted from social problems. See "Ashita shōjotai ga feminisuto o nanoru wake" [Why the Tomorrow Girls Troop call themselves feminists], Tomorrow Girls Troop, accessed 9 October 2016, <http://ashitashoujo.com/post/117166160510/feminist>. The Tomorrow Girls Troop is a socially aware art group of fourth-generation younger feminists.

the Angry Women's Club describes it as a movement with "a forum where people who want to change 'the politics of stereotypical middle-aged men' can get together in a real space and talk." As they put it "Everybody who thinks this makes sense is a member of the Angry Women's Club and is one of our organizers."⁶

The voices of the women in these interviews convey the effort to navigate their encounters with spirituality and healing productively, and to positively attribute significance to their lives. They sense in spiritual ways of life a power with the ability to activate collective energies capable of achieving global social change, one that is motivated not by anger but by joy, and that is capable of envisioning a better world. Conceptual approaches and practices that could be ascribed to this kind of new feminist spirituality can be found among the women who are involved with spirituality in Japan. These women do not actively use the term "feminism," so their feminist stances may not be immediately apparent. However, when the terms "spirituality" and "feminism" are released from the baggage that their limited societal and historical context has burdened them with, an understanding of how the activities of women involved in healing and spirituality are working to fuse religion and feminism can begin.

The spiritual boom in Japan took place over a decade ago, and movements have now begun to pass on the lessons learned from the acquisition of techniques and exercise of the imagination to the next generation. Male-dominated society, which tends to conflate institutions and the self, has excluded women's experiences. It is precisely for this reason that these women have found their inner spirit awakened by spirituality, and have begun to realize, with pride in themselves, that they are profoundly involved in living their own lives. The actions of women like these are bringing about a transformation in views of gender in Japan.

[Translated by Richard Peterson]

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6. They say that the stereotypical middle-aged men who are the objects of criticism here are people lacking in "imagination sympathetic to the vulnerable." As stated in writing by the attorney Ōta Keiko, the proposer of the term. See <http://wotopi.jp/archives/22522> (accessed 9 October 2016).

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