

## Some Observations on the Sociology of Religion in Japan

YANAGAWA Kei'ichi and ABE YOSHIYA

An overview of the sociological study of religion in Japan was given by Professor Morioka at the Seventh World Congress of Sociology in 1970. His paper, together with a well-selected bibliography of Japanese works on the sociology of religion, has been reprinted in his *Religion in changing Japanese society* (1975a). The present paper, accordingly, will attempt to be analytical and suggestive rather than descriptive.

It may be relevant, however, to begin by mentioning those academic institutions and societies where work on the sociology of religion is being done.

Although there is no specific chair in the sociology of religion at any academic institution in Japan, a considerable amount of research is being done at the University of Tokyo, Tokyo University of Education, Tsukuba University, Kyushu University, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Sophia University, Keio University, etc., either in departments of religious studies or in those of sociology or anthropology. Among research institutes, the National Museum of Anthropology at Osaka, the Southeast Asia Area Studies Center of Kyoto University, and the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (Nagoya) are worthy of note.

Among academic associations, the Japan Sociological Society (founded in 1923 with a present membership of 1,500) organized a Division of the Sociology of Religion three years ago with the participation of about twenty members. Approximately fifty researchers of the Japanese Society of Ethnology (founded in 1934 with a present membership of 1,200) and ten of the Japanese

---

Reprinted by permission from pp. 365-86 of the *Actes [de la] 14ème conférence internationale de sociologie des religions*, exclusively on sale at the C.I.S.R. Secrétariat (39, rue de la Monnaie—59042 Lille Cedex—France). The version presented here is slightly emended.

Association of Religious Studies (founded in 1930 with a present membership of 1,000) are concerned primarily with the sociology of religion.

In addition, the Association for Sociology of Religion, formed two years ago by a group of fifty young scholars, has been actively engaged in monthly meetings and has been carrying out several field work projects.

*Characteristics of the sociology of religion in Japan.* There are traditionally two aspects to the study of religion in Japan. The first involves the attempt to understand non-native theories of the sociology of religion — especially those of Western Europe and the United States. The translation and interpretation of the theories of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim began before 1945 and has continued up to the present. Japanese scholars are extremely sensitive to recent European and American trends in the sociology of religion, as is indicated by the fact that works by Western scholars are translated in rapid succession: Thomas O'Dea's *Sociology of religion* (1966) in 1968, Bryan Wilson's *Religious sects* (1970) in 1972, Robert Bellah's *Beyond belief* (1970) in 1973, Clifford Geertz's *Islam observed* (1968) in 1973, Thomas Luckmann's *Invisible religion* (1967) in 1974, Talcott Parsons's *Social system* (1951) in 1974, Victor Turner's *Ritual process* (1969) in 1976, etc.

The second aspect falls within the domain of empirical research into Japanese religion. In this Japanese scholars have made an effort to be true to European sociological theory and, further, to apply it to their analysis of Japanese religious phenomena. They continually ran into difficulties, however, relating to the point that there was, within the European theories, an aspect they found difficult to deal with: the classical subdivisions of (western) religious sociology, *church* and *sect*, clearly do not apply to Japanese religion. Thus it was in the handling of these fundamental concepts that the difficulties presented themselves.

What is the origin of the difficulties? First of all, there has

never developed a "church-type" institution comparable to the Catholic Church of Europe at any time in Japanese history. The established religion during the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) was nominally Buddhism, but it was far from monolithic in nature. Some thirty distinct hierarchical orders or *shūha* (roughly equivalent to "denominations") existed in parallel. These Buddhist orders, furthermore, were in competition, each seeking the patronage of the shogunate, a desire that made them subject to political influence and authority.

During the period between the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the end of World War II (1945), State Shinto may appear to have been the established religion. But State Shinto did not claim even to be a religion; thus, there was no established "church" during this period either. As there was no church as such, there was no development of sects in the Japanese social setting.

If the lack of a native "church-type" institution as an object of research was one stumbling block in the development of the field, another was the attitude of Japanese sociologists toward the field itself.

The intellectual legacy of Tokugawa Confucianism has been the neglect of religion among Japanese intellectuals. Confucianism expresses no belief or even interest in the supernatural. Its intellectual descendants, among them social scientists, find their concern lies more in questions of social class. Marxism has exerted considerable influence in this connection.

Thus sociologists as a whole neglected the sociology of religion. What interest they had in western theories of the sociology of religion did not lead them to examine the religious systems of their own nation. The tendency to be rather intellectually cool to religion is not a reflection of any modern trend toward secularization. It represents, rather, a continuation of the Confucian intellectual legacy in Japan. The few social scientists who dealt seriously with questions of religious belief were Christians, among them Ōtsuka Hisao, Morioka Kiyomi, and Ikado Fujio.

Japanese religion does not place great emphasis on belief. The same person can be at the same time both Shintoist and Buddhist, a phenomenon that is constantly encountered. The total number of adherents to the various religious organizations, according to the statistics reported to and tabulated by the Religious Affairs Section of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (1972), is roughly double the total population of Japan. Little emphasis is placed on faith or dogma. Religion in Japan may be regarded as the sign of the social group to which an individual is affiliated. In place of the prayers of Christianity, rituals, in the form of Shinto festivals (*matsuri*) or Buddhist funeral services (*sōshiki*), identify and characterize an individual's religious affiliation. It is clear, then, that Japanese religion is built on a foundation very different from that of the west, especially of Europe and the United States, which stress belief to a high degree.

Given this difference, Japanese religion cannot be explained in terms of western theory. In the face of this, there have appeared two approaches among those engaged in empirical research.

One is the intensive sociological study of new religious movements. Works representing this approach include those of Oguchi Iichi, Saki Akio, Takagi Hiroo, Murakami Shigeyoshi, and Ikeda Akira, all of whom explain the new religions against their social background, under the strong influence of Marxism. While focusing research on new religious movements, Ikado Fujio and Fujii Masao interpret the phenomena in terms of urbanization and organization theory. The popularity of new religions as objects of empirical research may be attributed to the fact that here the western theories of "sect" can be applied with relative ease.

The second approach identifies the religion of the common people with primitive religion and studies traditional religious practices of rural areas while applying the methodology of anthropology which western scholars had used in their studies of

primitive religions. Among this group we can count the works of Furuno Kiyoto, Hori Ichirō, Takenaka Shinjō, and Yoshida Teigo. These works tend to give weight to shamanism.

Thus the areas in which western theories of the sociology of religion were employed in empirical research into Japanese religion have been limited to the emergence of new religions and to the phenomena of the primitive level, with the use only of sect theories and anthropological analysis.

Now let us look at Professor Bellah's phrase "civil religion" (1970) and Professor Luckmann's phrase "invisible religion" (1967). Since 1970, at the annual meetings of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, there have been several papers dealing specifically with "civil religion" and "invisible religion." Most papers express affirmation and even sympathy with these views, primarily because the authors find in them much in common with the religious situation in Japan.

There certainly are various interpretations of the phrase "civil religion," for example, as the ideal or model religion, or (though it was criticized in the United States on this point) as a kind of "natural religion" which could be interpreted as akin to Japanese Shinto. Within Japan there have been several conflicting interpretations of this concept. One reason for this is that "civil religion" cannot be understood in terms of such existing concepts as church or sect, even though it has its own myths, rituals, and fundamental supporting convictions. Furthermore, even in the United States, which was thought to be at the forefront of modern society, "belief," whether in civil or individual religion, was not clearly defined.

Nonetheless, the impact made by redefining religion to include "civil religion" and "invisible religion" was considerable. And whatever the case regarding specific redefinitions, the fact that these concepts wielded such influence and caused such a shock in Japan illustrates the dependence of Japanese scholars on western models.

Ikado Fujio, influenced by this reconceptualization, has classified Japanese religion according to four levels: cultural, institutional, organizational, and individual (1974).

Cultural religion, according to Ikado, remains in the form of social customs. For example, on New Year's Day, according to the statistics of the National Police Agency, more than fifty million people (about one half of the total population) pay visits to Shinto shrines. At *Bon*, the Buddhist All Souls' Day in August, millions of urban workers rush back to their native villages on the pretext of paying homage to their ancestral spirits. Thus one might assume that the sacred cosmos inherent in Japanese culture has been woven into social customs and social order. Ikado claims that his concept of cultural religion approximates the civil religion concept of Robert Bellah and that it reflects the primitive cosmos of the native Japanese.

Be that as it may, cultural religion is invisible, and it appears to function to maintain the solidarity of society. It may, however, function to challenge the established order of society at critical points in history. Thus, for example, at the time of the Meiji Restoration (1868), nativism exhibited such energy that it reintegrated the nation by sentencing to death the then corrupt established authority of the state.

The characteristics of institutional religion are found in its function of maintaining identity and keeping people conservatively settled in an orderly system. Institutional religions in Japan, according to Ikado, include the parish system of Shinto and the household ties established between traditional Buddhist temples and families. These institutional religions direct men's activities within the set framework of society by means of festival roles and the symbolic practices of funerals conducted according to set rules. Institutional religion is synonymous with "church" in the west. Although it is recognized that occasional movements within institutional religion revive its function as a challenger of the establishment, the quintessence of institutional religion is found in its function of maintaining social stability.

Whereas institutional religion is a system into which one is born and in which he exists, organizational religion is a system in which individuals, in accordance with personal concerns, choose to participate. Typical examples of organizational religion in Japan are the so-called "new religions"—Sōka Gakkai, Risshō Kōseikai, etc.—most of which grew up rapidly in the process of urbanization during the post-World War II period. The existence of fluidity in society is a prerequisite for the formation of organizational religions. As organizational religions approach individuals with emphasis on personal needs and concerns, they tend to make up an association of people from the same social class, thus becoming associational religious bodies.

The concept of "individual religion," formed perhaps under the influence of Bellah, Luckmann, Boccock, et al., is based on the assumption that in diffused contemporary society, broken off from the closed traditional communities, religion loses the integrating function it had in traditional society. A religious body then becomes merely one of many ideological associations in a situation in which participation in any form of religious activity is guaranteed as "individual religion" under the system of separation of church and state. In the absence of any established church which forcefully integrates a particular community, religious culture has a bearing only upon the individuals who voluntarily submit to a particular religion. These individuals may seek after the meaning of life and show intellectual interest in the religions, rather than devotion to a particular religion. The fact that millions of people read *PHP* (*Peace, Happiness and Prosperity*), a monthly magazine running articles on moral guidance and expressing political opinion and economic criticism, or *Innā Torippu* ("inner trip"), another monthly which tends toward articles dealing with the meaning of life, attests to this. *PHP* is published under the sponsorship of the owner of the National Panasonic Electric Company and *Innā Torippu* by a publisher strongly under the influence of a new religion in the

Nichiren Buddhist tradition, but even the latter espouses neither religious dogma nor an evangelical campaign. Thus Ikado recognizes the existence of religious phenomena that do not conform to previous views of religion.

Ikado's four-fold approach to Japanese religions appears to cover all the main issues of sociology of religion in Japan, but using a framework developed in the west. However, it cannot escape a few criticisms.

First, he does not clarify whether those themes are peculiarly contemporary or whether they represent a historical constant. Second, one cannot be sure if he is gearing his analysis solely toward the Japanese context or if he is tackling a universal problem. In short, he has classified the problem but failed to present an integral principle whereby one can explain the peculiarly Japanese sociology of religion with a focus on contemporaneity.

*Ancestor worship: Key concept in the sociology of Japanese religion.* While Ikado presents institutional and organizational religion as the visible part, cultural and individual religion as the invisible part of Japanese religion, these classifications do not help explain the remarkable increase of academic research on festivals, shamanism, and ancestor worship in recent years. With the possibility in mind of a little contribution from the Japanese sociology of religion to the enrichment of sociological theory in the west, this paper will hereafter focus upon ancestor worship, a point where a contemporary and uniquely Japanese problem reveals itself.

We do so on the assumption that the integration function that the "church" exercised in western societies has never been performed either by "institutional" or "organizational" religions in Japan. Simply stated, the influence on society of the institutionalized religions in Japan has never been dominant. Rather, the counterpart in Japan of the "church" in western societies in terms of the core structure of society has always been and will remain the *ie* or "household" in its peculiarly Japanese setting.



Thus the religiosity of the Japanese household comes to the fore of discussion and, accordingly, questions relating to ancestor worship and its symbolic expression.

Take the example of Buddhism. After it was introduced to Japan, it lost most of its universalist tenets and became closely tied to ancestor worship. Historian Tamamuro Taijō aptly calls Japanese Buddhism the Buddhism of funerals (1963). In the Japanese Buddhist structure, all members of the household are tied to a family temple through the medium of ancestor worship. The relationship of all the temples to their *shūha* resembles a family structure. That is, the structure of a *shūha* is maintained through the medium of instructional lineage among the priests. Hence in Japanese Buddhism the principle of renouncing this worldly order, represented by the household, has given way to an alternative cultural form based on the household system.

There has been much dispute concerning the origins of ancestor worship, whether it is native to Japan or was imported from China. But leaving this aside for the moment, let us broadly define what we mean by Japanese "ancestor worship." In accordance with Nakane Chie's characterization of the Japanese household, ancestor worship may be defined as those beliefs held and rituals practiced by the living concerning the disposition of the spirits of dead members of a household community related by the right of succession and the belief in perpetuity. It is less dependent on blood ties than the ancestor worship of China and elsewhere (1973).

One must realize that as a sociological concept, the *ie* or Japanese household represents a particular social system and not a universally applicable concept like "family." The Japanese household is a particular and peculiar institution based upon Japan's traditional social structure. Its peculiarities are marked, according to Itō Mikiharu, by emphasis on the legitimacy of genealogy and on its perpetuity (1974).

The Japanese household is of course no more devoid of blood

ties than the family. But while blood ties are essential and unavoidable elements, even more crucial is genealogy, which consolidates the particularity of the household. Legitimate genealogy is the basis on which the perpetuity of a household is secured. Unlike a family where total changes take place with the shift of generations, a household is trans-generational and continues to exist from past to future generations. A household is identified by various symbols, such as peculiar ways of doing things (*kafū*), household name (*kamei*), household rules (*kaken*), and, above all, its ancestors. These symbols, particularly the ones related to ancestors, reflect the religious character of the household and, in conjunction with the genealogy and perpetuity of the household, form the structural core of ancestor worship.

Ancestor worship, on the other hand, is made tangible through the enshrinement of memorial tablets (*ihai*) in the ancestral altar (*butsudan*) of each household. Ceremonies are held on specific days—the spring and autumn equinoxes, Buddhist All Souls' Day, the memorial days of the ancestors' death, etc.—and they confirm symbolically the relation between the living members and deceased ancestors of the same household. The household thus provides the institutional structure of Japanese ancestor worship.

*Research on ancestor worship in Japan.* Ancestor worship has been one of the major themes of debate among politicians and political ideologues. For those involved in the making of the Civil Code in the late nineteenth century, establishment of the Japanese concept of the household community was of fundamental importance in representing the traditional Japanese value system. The Civil Code of 1896 stipulated that the right of succession to a house consists of ownership of the genealogy, ceremonial utensils, and tombs. At the time of this law, there was already a serious confrontation between the proponents of the traditional household institution and champions of westernized individual

rights. This provision is no less than a pennant for the victory of the traditional view, and it is a legal acknowledgment of the religious character of the household. When the Civil Code was totally revised after World War II under the influence of the American Occupation, the household lost its place as a legal institution in favor of the family. Nonetheless, the revised Civil Code of 1947 retains a provision stating that the ownership of genealogy, ceremonial utensils, and tombs is inherited by the person whom custom designates as the sponsor of ancestor worship. It can be said that although the revision of the Civil Code during the postwar period abolished the household as a legal institution, it could not deny the household as a religious institution. Rather, lawmakers thus made it clearer that the household and ancestor worship were inseparable.

While lawmakers and lawyers were forced to become aware of the religious character of the household, they refrained from involvement beyond the boundary of religion and law. Anthropologists esteemed religious traditions closely related to households and accepted them as a matter of course, but failed to question the intrinsic religiosity of the household. Sociologists, as stated earlier, did not pay much attention to religious matters and generally lacked a religious perspective. Only in recent years has some noteworthy sociological research on ancestor worship been done.

In sociological research on ancestor worship, two contrasting trends are evident. One may be called comparative and the other nativistic.

Typical of the former type is the research of Nakane Chie and Morioka Kiyomi. They have a common tendency to observe Japanese social institutions in the light of western sociological theories and find the domain of Japanese values in the household system.

Nakane, for example, with her "vertical society" theory (1970), compares the household structure and ancestor worship of the Japanese with those of the Chinese, Koreans, and Indians. She

identifies its uniqueness as the emphasis on genealogical line of succession rather than on blood lineage. She points out the uniquely Japanese characteristic that almost all religious activities including ancestor worship are tied up closely with the household. Such religious symbolism, she feels, filled the need for group identity in a society that failed to form patrilineal descent groups. Hence the context in which the Japanese household relates to a larger village community and then to a pseudo-family state, while in societies where patrilineal descent groups exist (as in India, Korea, and China), households relate only to another level of larger households.

Meanwhile Morioka, in his renowned research on Shin Buddhism and the household system, developed the "household community" model (1962). He notes that, following the lead of the reform process of Japan's polity during the Meiji Restoration and the American Occupation, the familial and religious institutions of the Shin sect organization had changed direction from identification with one another to structural and functional separation. This change notwithstanding, the extension of the household system into the sphere of religion was a general characteristic of all Buddhist sects in Japan and a reflection of the basic sociological pattern common to all of them. The coincidence of these two institutions is peculiarly Japanese and in Morioka's view is "one of the principal drawbacks of Shin [= Japanese] Buddhism as a possible world religion" (1975a, p. 97).

In both Nakane's vertical society theory and Morioka's household community model, the idea is evident that through the household institution, Japanese religious bodies, up to and including emperor worship, have been created and established as social and religious systems. It is clear that the Japanese concept of household community is of fundamental importance in the Japanese value system, and that while continuing comparison with foreign systems is worthwhile, the household community should be studied with the special nature of the ancestor

concept in mind.

The second trend is based on the idea that the ancestor worship model the west provides does not adequately cover Japanese ancestor worship. The principal proponent of this view was Yanagita Kunio, who expressed his own original ideas (1970). He focused his research on ancestor worship as based on the household, and thus his works may be credited as a contribution to the sociology of religion.

If ancestor worship is a socio-religious phenomenon based on the relationship between the ancestors who founded a household and the offspring who can claim legitimate genealogy from the ancestors, and on the presupposition of the formation and perpetuity of these households, the following three conditions need to be established. First is the household as a social institution. From this it naturally follows that the concept of ancestors must differ between a society where the formation and perpetuity of households is established as an ideal type and another where it is not, such as a society based on the nuclear family. Yanagita's view here is empirical, and he recognized the constant rise and fall of households in actuality while denying the once popular politicized platform of the unified family state under the imperial household. Second is the religious foundation which supports ancestor worship. Only with the presence of belief in ancestral spirits, and through the medium of this belief, can offspring relate themselves to ancestors. Whereas Japanese belief in ancestral spirits has much in common with that of other East Asian peoples under Confucian influence, a distinct difference is observed in the frequent formation of new households in Japan. Simple and straightforward observation of the actual situation distinguished Yanagita's approach from that of traditional scholars as well as from that of western-oriented scholars. Third is the importance of household analysis from the perspective of social conditions, because in practice specific individuals and the households concerned cannot avoid collective and social relations. In this connection the relation

of ancestor worship to the several households and to the local village communities presents a subtle problem. Ancestral worship has a private character, as it is primarily a household affair, but it cannot remain isolated from community life. Thus it is that villages come to have Shinto shrines enshrining the founder of the village. Also, the fact that many local governments customarily observe public holidays on the equinoxes, Buddhist All Souls' Day, etc., proves that ancestor worship has now acquired a public character in addition to its originally private character.

In short, Yanagita's approach to ancestor worship is empirical and participatory. In his own statement: "Imagining that my spirit will remain on earth after death is very pleasant for me. Perhaps it is because I am a Japanese. If possible I would stay in this land for eternity and hope to observe from some humble hilltop a little more growth of culture and a little more contribution of learning to this society" (1969, p. 561). Yanagita's posture is thus nativist and particularist. At the same time, being participatory, he was able, we can say, to transcend the spell of the theories of western sociology of religion.

Delving into Yanagita's approach more theoretically, Sakurai Tokutarō (1977) recognizes three types of Japanese ancestor images. (1) *Directly experiential and concrete images of ancestors*. When the head of a household dies, in some parts of Japan people refer to him as having become an ancestor. In the days when establishing a new household was strictly controlled and when the responsibility of the head was high, the authority of the household head was such that contact with him could prepare the way for the formation of a concrete image for ancestral worship. (2) *Indirectly experiential and idealistic images of ancestors*. Images of ancestors older than the great-grandfather, persons with whom physical contact was not feasible, can be formed only through diaries, portraits, clothes, genealogy, related documents, etc. The spirits of these ancestors, already pacified by repeated ceremonies, are by definition divine beings. After the process of

transformation from dead spirit to ancestral spirit to ancestral divinity, the image of the ancestral spirit, as its directly experiential and concrete image diminishes, becomes only indirectly experiential and idealistic. (3) *Ideological and abstract image of ancestors*. In local communities there are often formed clan groups based on the link of common family divinities, though historical claims as to the actual founder of the clan are not necessarily clear. The ancestral images of directly or indirectly experiential formation now recede in importance as abstracted and alleged mythology become dominant. Typical examples include the myth in many households of descent from the imperial household and the more recent ideology of a household state invented and enforced by the political establishment for the sake of indoctrinating the populace in the legitimacy of imperial rule. That is, the household state thesis related the ancestral deity of the imperial household to people's household ancestors by means of an abstract and ideological ancestral image.

Sakurai's view, in summary, is very much like that of Yanagita. Through the interrelationship of the three ancestral images characterized above, ancestor worship integrates, on his view, the entire system of Japanese cultural traditions.

*Ancestor worship and social crisis*. If ancestor worship is the most fundamental element in the integration of Japanese society, what is its relation to social change? Some insightful observations concerning this matter are to be found in the works of Robert Smith, Morioka Kiyomi, and Fujii Masao.

In the light of the remarkable transformation of the Civil Code and the consequent approval of the nuclear family concept since the end of World War II, the mode of relationships between the living and the dead appear to have changed considerably. Robert Smith's unique survey of memorial tablets (*ihai*) discloses a fairly recent and increasingly common trend, namely, that of venerating nonlineal tablets. He believes this practice constitutes the opening wedge of family-centered as opposed to

household-centered ancestor worship (1974).

Morioka, on the other hand, finds a functional relation between urbanization and ancestor worship. The number of household members radically declined after 1955 while, simultaneously, the number of households increased sharply, particularly in the three major metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. According to Morioka, whether a household possesses a Buddhist altar is closely related to whether it has experienced a funeral, as indicated by the results of his 1967 survey of Tokyo suburbs (see table 1).

TABLE 1  
BUDDHIST ALTARS IN SUBURBAN TOKYO HOUSEHOLDS

Type	% with Funeral Experience	% with Buddhist Altars
Local multigenerational	89	97
Local nuclear	54	73
Neolocal multigenerational	43	100
Neolocal nuclear	9	38

SOURCE: Data adapted from Morioka (1975b, p. 102).

An extreme case of the adaptation of ancestor worship is revealed in the construction of Buddhist statues made out of human ashes. At Isshinji temple in Osaka and several other places, hundreds of thousands of urns containing cremation ashes are dedicated. Many hold about one-third of a given person's remains, the main portion being buried in the household tombs, but some two-thirds are urns offered to the temple as the final and only resting place of the remains of the dead. When the number of urns reaches about 50,000 (or 200,000, depending on the time involved), the temple has their contents crushed into powder and used to make Buddhist statues. This practice exists at several places in urban areas of the Kansai district.

This way of dealing with the remains of the dead reveals the belief that the dead always need a place to rest, but not neces-



sarily in the same household in which he or she lived. As proven by the fact that many of those who bring in the urns cannot be reached afterwards, the dead become anonymous upon being crushed and pasted into a bone statue. This is exactly the opposite of being enshrined in the household Buddhist altar with a specific memorial tablet and with daily service by living members of the family.

As Fujii observes (1974), this practice may symbolize one effect of urbanization, namely, dissolution of ancestor worship through the religious uprooting of people from their native households. One could equally well regard this practice as another form of ancestor worship, one that retains perpetuity but abandons genealogy. It is important to note, first, that such practices started before the end of World War II and, second, that urbanization began much earlier than ordinarily claimed.

With Herman Ooms (1975) it may be possible to affirm that "ancestor worship has always been a particularly malleable phenomenon, flexible to the extreme." We had better not, then, expect a fixed form in ancestor worship, for it is amenable to all kinds of challenges and reactions posed by changes in society.

Given that ancestor worship is deeply imbedded in Japanese society and at the same time responsive to social changes, it is no wonder that ancestor worship has repeatedly become a focal issue among Japanese intellectuals at the peak of each social crisis.

When the first step was taken toward westernization and modernization in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was an explicit value conflict. The Meiji leaders proclaimed the ideal of "western learning, Japanese spirit" (*wakon yōsai*), but this slogan already contained a contradiction between universalism, which in sociological application led to individualism, and particularism, which maintained traditional community ethics based on the institution of the household and ancestor worship. The invention and sponsorship of emperor

worship by the government may be regarded as an attempted compromise between these conflicting principles under the umbrella of a new nation state.

The promulgation of the Meiji Constitution (1889) was an act of fitting to the Japanese social system a standard agreeable to the west. It was, in other words, an enactment of supreme law that codified the principle of universalism. The counteraction to this enactment was the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education (1889). This Rescript, from the person of the emperor, ordained that the Confucian order of household ethics be observed by all subjects, with the implication that the emperor himself was supreme head of the symbolic household that encompassed the entire nation. Thus particularism rooted in the traditional household institution was established as the guiding principle of social ethics. The preeminence of particularism over universalism in Japan is demonstrated by the fact that a pronouncement of the emperor, though without legal binding power, exerted a much stronger influence on people's thinking than the codified supreme law of the state.

A sense of crisis was heightened even further when the framing of the Civil Code was undertaken. Though the first attempt at making the Civil Code followed the principle of introducing French law almost by direct translation, it could not gain public consent. The second attempt, an endeavor to introduce French law systematically under the guidance of Boissonade, also failed. The counterattack of the nativists is well summarized in a statement by a former Tokyo Imperial University professor, Hozumi Yatsuka: "With the making of a Civil Code, the virtues of loyalty and filial piety must decay" (see Takeda 1976, p. 176).

It is no exaggeration to say that the subsequent ideological crises in the modern period almost always gave rise to arguments for strengthening household solidarity through revitalizing ancestor worship. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when industrialization reached a level where a substantial

flow of population from rural villages to industrial cities took place, the corruption of traditional morality and the spread of Christianity were much feared. The arguments of such nativists as Hozumi Nobushige, law professor of Tokyo Imperial University, prevailed and became the doctrinal basis of ethics curricula in public school education. Hozumi argued in 1899 at the International Congress of Orientalists at Rome: "We Japanese subjects descend from a single and great household, where we gather together in the practices of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is derived from the adoration and veneration of parents and grandparents and, subsequently, from... extension to those with whom we are distantly related" (1912).

In the 1930s, virtually on the eve of World War II, the influence of Marxism in Japan was at its height. Contending with it were the emperor system and ultranationalism. One of the representative theorists of this period was Watsuji Tetsurō, who viewed belief in a universal religion like Buddhism as leading to the destruction of the national religion of ancestor worship. In an essay on the Japan of the 1930s Watsuji states that "utilitarian individualism" (to use Bellah's term [1976]) was the motive force in the building of modern Japan, but it is here, as noted before, that he sees the great crisis point of the modern period. Further, he sees the growth of disregard for the spirit of self-sacrifice as an expression of the sense of crisis (1935).

In the chaotic situation after World War II arguments championing ancestor worship were again revitalized. The works of Yanagita are typical products of this period. And now again in the 1970s we are flooded with a great many arguments on ancestor worship, for example, by Sakurai, Morioka, Fujii, et al. The academic concern for ancestor worship that has recently arisen in Japanese sociology of religion circles is significant, we believe, precisely in this connection.

*Some concluding remarks.* There is one school of thought which states that Japan has not yet reached the stage of secularization.

There is another which holds that Japanese religion was in a sense secularized from the very outset and thus that the current "secularization," being redundant, has no actual effect. Whichever the case may be, the "secularization of institutional religion" was not of great consequence in Japan.

From the point of view of the sociology of religion, the current problem of ancestor worship in Japan parallels, we believe, the growth in importance, in Europe and the United States, of the theme of "secularization."

Problems relating to ancestor worship were extensively discussed from the start of Japan's westernization. However, the problem was handled by political ideologues, ethnologists, and philosophers, not so much by sociologists of religion. Only in recent years has the issue become an object of serious research by Japanese sociologists of religion. It almost seems as if research on this particular problem, so deeply rooted in Japan's cultural tradition, needed a maturation period before any sociologist of religion could tackle it.

In research on a society in which "churches" and "sects" are difficult to identify, problems of a fundamental nature cannot be explored merely by the use of such data as the number of church members, the attendance rate at weekly services, or the amounts of donations to the "churches" or "sects." What we have attempted to suggest in this paper is simply that, when it comes to sociological research on a society in which there are no religious institutions comparable to those regarded as central in the west, one needs: (a) to identify target institution(s), and (b) to construct a theoretical framework appropriate to the object(s) of study.

If there is any socio-religious phenomenon in Japan comparable to secularization in the west, it certainly is not the commonly studied institutional religions of Buddhism, Shinto, or Christianity. It is something else, and as a matter of convenience we chose to focus here on ancestor worship. If the analysis and observations presented in this brief paper offer any sugges-

tions to sociologists of religion in the west, we will be more than gratified.

REFERENCES

- Agency for Cultural Affairs  
 1972 *Japanese religion: A survey*. Tokyo: Kodansha International.
- ARUGA Kizaemon 有賀喜左衛門  
 1956 Introduction to the family system in Japan, China and Korea. In *Transactions of the third world congress of sociology* 4:199-207.  
 1962 Maki to iwajinkō マキと祝い神講 [Lineage groups and their religious festivals]. *Shakaigaku kenkyūka kiyō* 社会学研究科紀要 1: 105-15.  
 1967 Senzo to ujigami 先祖と氏神 [Ancestor and patron deity]. *Minzokugaku kenkyū* 民族学研究 32: 175-84.
- BELLAH, Robert N.  
 1970 *Beyond belief: Essays on religion in a post-traditional world*. New York: Harper and Row.  
 1976 New religious consciousness and the crisis in modernity. In *The new religious consciousness*, Charles Y. GLOCK and Robert N. BELLAH, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- FUJII Masao 藤井正雄  
 1974 *Gendaijin no shinkō kōzō: Shūkyō fudō jinkō no kōdō to shisō* 現代人の信仰構造～宗教浮動人口の行動と思想 [The belief-structure of contemporary Japanese people: Behavior and ideas of the religiously floating population]. Tokyo: Hyōronsha.
- HOZUMI Nobushige 穂積陳重  
 1912 *Ancestor worship and Japanese law*. Tokyo: Maruzen.
- IKADO Fujio 井門富二夫  
 1974 *Kamigoroshi no jidai* 神殺しの時代 [The era of god-killing]. Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha.
- ITŌ Mikiharu 伊藤幹治  
 1974 Sosen sūhai to ie 祖先崇拜と家 [Ancestor worship

- and household]. In *Kōza kazoku* 講座家族 [Family studies series], vol. 8:12-27. Tokyo: Kōbundō.
- LUCKMANN, Thomas  
 1967 *The invisible religion: The problem of religion in modern society*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.
- MORIOKA Kiyomi 森岡清美  
 1962 *Shinshū kyōdan to "ie" seido* 真宗教団と「家」制度 [The Shin Buddhist orders and the *ie* system]. Tokyo: Sōbunsha.  
 1975a *Religion in changing Japanese society*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.  
 1975b *Gendai shakai no minshū to shūkyō* 現代社会の民衆と宗教 [People and religion in contemporary society]. Tokyo: Hyōronsha.
- NAKANE Chie 中根千枝  
 1967 *Kinship and economic organization in rural Japan*. London: Athlone Press.  
 1970 *Japanese society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
 1973 *Kazoku, shinzoku* 家族・親族 [Family and kinship]. In *Shūkyōgaku jiten* 宗教学辞典 [Encyclopedia of religious studies], OGUCHI Iichi 小口偉一 and HORI Ichirō 堀一郎, eds. Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai.
- OOMS, Herman  
 1975 Review of Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan*. *Japanese journal of religious studies* 2:317-22.
- SAKURAI Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎  
 1977 *Reikonkan no keifu* 靈魂觀の系譜 [A lineage of theories regarding the spirits]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- SMITH, Robert J.  
 1974 *Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- TAKEDA Chōshū 竹田聰洲  
 1976 *Nihonjin no "ie" to shūkyō* 日本人の「家」と宗教 [The "house" and religion of the Japanese]. Tokyo: Hyōronsha.

- TAMAMURO Taijō 圭室諦成  
1963 *Sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教 [Funereal Buddhism].  
Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku.
- WATSUJI Tetsurō 和辻哲郎  
1935 *Zoku nihon seishinshi kenkyū* 続日本精神史研究 [More  
studies in Japanese intellectual history]. Tokyo:  
Iwanami.
- YANAGITA Kunio 柳田国男  
1969 Tamashii no yukue 魂の行く方 [Where spirits go  
after death]. *Yanagita Kunio shū* 柳田国男集 [Col-  
lected works of Yanagita Kunio], vol. 15, pp.  
553-61. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- 1970 *About our ancestors: The Japanese family system*,  
Fanny Hagin MAYER and ISHIWARA Yasuyo,  
translators. Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promo-  
tion of Science.