Sex-Role Norms and Values in Reiyukai

Helen HARDACRE

PROBLEM AND DATA

"A woman's place is in the home." It is generally accepted that members of Japan's new religions tend to be conservative in their social attitudes and to support conservative politics as well. Reiyūkai, the "society of friends of the spirits," is a case in point.[1] Through field work, questionnaire research, and perusal of its publications, I have found that Reiyūkai members tend toward social and political conservatism, especially with regard to the family system. Somewhat more pronouncedly than the general population, Reiyūkai members disapprove of the legal abolition of the stem household system and of the establishment of legal equality between the sexes. They further tend to favor the establishment of laws that would require children to be filial to their parents and to obtain parental permission for marriage.

With regard to women, Reiyūkai members tend to disapprove of married women's working outside the home. Leaders counsel married women in straitened circumstances to devise ways to economize rather than take outside employment. They fear the disruption of relations between husband and

Support for the research of which this paper is one result was provided by a joint grant from the Social Science Research Council and a Fulbright-Hayes Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship. I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for this support.

1. Reiyūkai began about 1925. It was founded by three people: Kubo Kakutarō (1892-1944), Kotani Yasukichi (1895-1927), and the latter's wife, Kotani Kimi (1901-1971). It has its headquarters in Tokyo, branches throughout Japan, and a reported membership of over 2,700,000 (Bunkachō 1979, p. 103).

   Reiyūkai doctrines center on the *Lotus sutra* and the efficacy of services for ancestors in order to escape misfortune and gain happiness.

   Several religious bodies got their start by breaking off from Reiyūkai. Among such bodies are Risshō Kōsei-kai, Myōchikai Kyōdan, and Bussho Gonenkai Kyōdan.

wife and between mother and children, and they see such disruptions as inevitable concomitants of a married woman's entry (or re-entry) into the labor force. It is taken for granted that a wife's earning power is threatening to the husband's ego and that the husband cannot be expected to help with housework or child care. The unalterable division of labor is such that the wife takes near total responsibility for household affairs and child raising. Consequently, a married woman who takes outside employment is regarded as shouldering that burden in addition to her other responsibilities. Since those responsibilities already constitute the equivalent of a full-time job, the physical strain alone would be formidable, say these counselors, not to mention the deleterious effect on family relations.

Reiyūkai leaders take a realistic view of the discrimination that married women must face on entering (or returning to) the work force after the age of thirty-five or so (by which time the last child will have entered school). They ask whether the small monetary remuneration available for the kinds of jobs these women can find actually outweighs the disruptive consequences in personal and domestic life. Concluding that this question requires a negative answer, they affirm the idea that a woman's place is in the home, not in the labor force.

The fact is, however, that many couples cannot readily achieve economic stability without the addition of the wife's income. This state of affairs puts pressure on many married women to seek a job or start a business.

Under these circumstances, Reiyūkai leaders' ideas about married women's working outside the home would seem less than attractive to married, economically pinched female members. Nonetheless, the group seems rather successful in persuading members of the validity of these ideas. Thus arises the question as to how it does so. In general terms, the question is one of how members acquire the conservative

attitudes characteristic of the group as a whole. This paper will focus on Reiyūkai norms and values relating to sex-roles. I hope to explain both what these norms and values are and how members acquire them.

Nature and role of testimonies. In treating this problem, the Reiyūkai *taiken* or "testimonies" provide invaluable data.

Taiken typically tell a story of how a member came to realize that he or she was at fault in some situation, was able to rectify the mistake through the help of Reiyūkai, and consequently was enabled to redirect the course of his or her life, thus gaining some important spiritual or material benefit. One benefit frequently reported in *taiken* is cure of disease. Most of the *taiken* I have heard or read were stories of healing.

The giving of testimonies before other members of the group is a standard practice. Ideally, every member attends a circle meeting *(hōza)* where *taiken* are presented at least once a month. Presentation of testimonies is one of the group's most effective means of acquainting members and prospective members with the group's representative attitudes. Through the *taiken,* novices are taught the norms and values approved by the group. Moreover, novices are strongly encouraged to experience for themselves how Reiyūkai can change the quality of their lives and to present the story of their experiences before the group. Leaders stress that the giving of *taiken* is crucial to the novice's understanding of Reiyūkai teaching.

From the standpoint of the one telling the story, the telling is an act in which the speaker places himself in a vulnerable position, offering his experience to the group, trying to create a momentary bond with the audience by telling the story in a way that will gratify the listeners as well as himself, hoping to find approval for a job well done. Rewarded by applause and camaraderie, speaker and audience are edified by the performance, and the individual's resolution and

conviction are strengthened. Thus he becomes even more strongly motivated to conduct himself in future in accordance with norms approved by the group.

A testimony. The text that follows is a translation of a testimony given in 1976 by a woman named Mrs. Ono, age thirty-two, of the city of Kurashiki. The occasion was the completion of Reiyūkai's new headquarters, the Shakaden, in Tokyo, and the audience consisted of about five thousand people.

> Thirteen years ago I got married at the age of nineteen. My husband was three years older and had the reputation in the neighborhood of being a dutiful son – so dutiful that he didn't know the meaning of having fun.
>
> Since he had just entered his twenties, his salary wasn't very large, so I opened a small, nighttime restaurant (*chazukeya*) to help out. I liked the work, but felt more than anything else that we wouldn't make ends meet unless both of us worked.
>
> But even so, we were in the red by the end of each month. I went to my mother just about every month to coax money out of her. I thought it was only natural for parents to do that much for their children, so I asked for her help without any sense of restraint.
>
> Before long my eldest daughter was born, and later another daughter. I'd been married five years by then and had two children. I was so wrapped up in the children, my housework, and running the restaurant that my husband hardly mattered to me. But life wasn't a bit more fun, and since the cost of raising the children increased, we stayed in the red as usual. All I could think of was money, money, money. When my husband came home tired from work, I'd leave right away for the restaurant to lay in supplies for the night's business. After serving my customers until late into the night, I'd drag my leaden feet home to find my husband and children sound asleep. Conversation between me and my husband came to an end, and we became like strangers.
>
> Well, you can't expect a situation like that to turn out well. My husband, who had such a fine reputation before we were married, had learned somewhere to play the pinball machines and bet on the

boat races. He was wasting his time. And that's not all. He became completely addicted to a certain woman and stopped coming home for nights at a time. From my point of view, even though I was working hard every night to supplement our meager income, he betrayed me by being unfaithful with another woman. I had no intention of forgiving him. We fought over and over again. Then one day he suddenly disappeared.

I grumbled to myself, "Humpf! Off with that woman again. . . . " I started looking into my heart, wondering why I wasn't more upset. The love between us had withered and crumbled like sand, and what remained was lifeless. Making up my mind to separate from this person for whom I felt neither jealousy nor lingering affection, I didn't even cry.

"I've got the restaurant and that's enough to raise the two children. I'm still young – just twenty-four." Muttering to myself, I filed for divorce, and having resolved to get it, I felt my heart was clear. There was someone, though, who worried about me: the old lady next door. "Divorce? Don't say such a thing! Try to change your mind. I'm a member of Reiyūkai, and we have a leader who always gives good advice. Why don't you try going to her? She can give you wisdom."

She strongly urged me to go. I really didn't think there was any chance that our dried-up love could be revived, so I wasn't inclined to listen to what she said. But I wanted someone to complain to about my husband's infidelity which had tattered my youth and dried up the love between us. So I visited the house of this leader who was called a *shibuchō* ("branch leader"), hoping to be comforted as I told my sad story.

Onishi *shibuchō* said this when she saw my face, "You – you're young and pretty now, but in two or three years you're going to have a face like a pig! You bring that husband you want to get rid of over to see me. I've got something to tell him that'll make him understand whether he ought to get rid of the likes of you!"

The blood rushed to my head, and I screamed until my hair stood on end and then flew out of her house. Why would she say an outrageous thing like that to me? I had thought that since she was a woman she would understand my wounded feelings, but her words only tore the wound open again. Could any one I'd barely met

understand my pain?

Feeling this way, I lamented and wailed over what had happened until it seemed my heart would break. But when night had passed and I felt more calm, I felt a strange, deep emotion. I began to wonder why she had said such a thing to me. Usually you don't tell people the first time you meet them that they have pig faces. I'd gone to her in the first place to hear about this religious group, Reiyūkai, and things like that. Common sense alone would make you think that she should have said, "You'll be happy if you practice this religion," that she should have invited me sweetly with comforting words. So why did she fling those terrible words in my face?

After a while I began to want to talk to her once more, quietly, to find out what she meant. I went to Onishi *shibuchō*'s house again, and this time she spoke to me seriously. "Mrs. Ono, the face expresses the heart. Actually, the face *is* the heart. Even if you ornament it beautifully on the outside, when you look on the inside, you'll find that the world is full of people of unbelievable ugliness."

It was as if I'd suddenly been struck in the head. I thought I was going to pass out. I knew I couldn't lie to this person who so clearly pointed out the ugliness of my heart.

After that, I went to see her again and again. Hearing what she said, I realized that when husband and wife get into this kind of situation, it has such a terrible influence on the children that at least one of my own children would probably end up like me.

It was then I realized that I was really unfilial (*oyafukō*). I had had no consideration for my mother, but cajoled money from her as if it were the natural thing to do – all the time just making her worry. And as for my husband, I'd only made him unhappy, what with my losing all feeling of respect for him and taking it for granted that we couldn't make a living without *my* work. When I realized that this was the cause of our present unhappiness, I resolved to join Reiyūkai.

From that day on, I prayed for my husband to return. I wondered if my prayer would get through to him. On the tenth day after his disappearance, he suddenly showed up. I'd never been so glad. I wanted to jump up to meet him, but the strength of my old feelings got the better of me. I couldn't express my feelings meekly, but arched my eyebrows and shouted at him harshly, "Who's there? Oh! It's you, is it? What can I do for you, now that you've decided

show your face?"

He yelled back at me, "I don't have any use for you! I only came back because I'm worried about the children. Even if we get a divorce, I'm taking the children!"

Maybe it was woman's intuition, but in that instant I knew that he still cared for me.

For three days he stayed with the children. He didn't say a word to me – just glared at me with an ugly feeling. But the children followed him around, and he was kind to them. It looked like they were having a good time. On the third day, I finally spoke to him.

"Dear, if you feel like making up, please go with me to meet Onishi *shibuchō*. Please listen to what she says so we can clear up this ugly feeling between us."

"Unnh . . . if you say so . . . ."

He gave in so much more easily than I had expected that I was thoroughly confused. When the two of us went to see her, she said, "When a husband and wife are continually fighting, this influence will definitely appear in the children." At that point, my husband slumped in his seat as if realizing the error of his ways. Then the *shibuchō* spoke severely to me.

"The cause of all this is you, you who are the wife. You were probably angry when your husband was unfaithful, stolen by another woman, but you have *got* to realize that this was *your* fault and you must repent! And fixing things up between you is going to take a lot more cooperation than you've shown up to now!"

It was as if her words had pierced my chest. My husband and I returned home thinking our separate thoughts. After that, he started coming around to the restaurant about closing time to talk about one thing or another. "From now on, I don't want to hurt my parents or the children any more – or you either. If this can be patched up, I want to make a new start," he said.

I felt the same way. I realized it had been a mistake to have a small restaurant like that and to be so busy all the time. For that reason, I vowed to resign myself to closing down the restaurant and giving myself over completely to my husband.

Eight years have passed since then. My eldest daughter is a sixth grader, and my next daughter is in fourth grade. I also have a three-year-old son. We're caring for a nephew, too, so altogether there are

six of us in the family, but our ancestors' altar is the center of the household.

My husband and I are very active in *michibiki* (proselytization), and in just one year we became associate branch leaders (*jun shibuchō*). We really feel now that life is splendid. Our bitter experience of eight years ago now seems like a bad dream. To look back over our lifetime together is a wonderful recollection for us.[2]

DISCUSSION

Analysis. Although this testimony is an unusually vivid one, it illustrates seven stages commonly seen in Reiyūkai testimonies, stages that mark the process through which conservative norms and values are acquired.[3]

The first stage is that of close contact with a leader during a period of distress. Onishi first puts Ono in a submissive position by undercutting her perception of herself as an innocent, wounded party in her conflict with her husband.[4] It is significant that Onishi refuses to give Ono the solace she seeks until Ono acknowledges her authority by returning after having been humiliated. At this point Onishi delivers a verdict on Ono as a human being: she is someone whose heart is ugly. And she speaks with such authority that Ono accepts the verdict as true. In accepting this evaluation of herself, Ono submits to the leader, acknowledging her authority to redirect the course of her negotiation of the problem. In stage one the client puts herself in the leader's hands.

A second stage is the allocation of increasing amounts of time to the organization and to contact with its leaders. Ono starts going back again and again, repeating her original submission to the leader.[5] As the individual spends more time

2. Okazaki 1976, vol. 1, pp. 142-147. This material appears here through the kind permission of Reiyūkai Kyōdan. The translation is mine.
3. This classification has been constructed on the basis of reading some three hundred testimonies and observing oral presentations of roughly half that number.
4. In rejecting Ono's interpretation of the situation, Onishi refuses to grant Ono the sexual solidarity she originally sought.

surrounded by the personnel, opinions, and values of members, he necessarily spends less time with people who do not hold those values and opinions, and who may hold alternative, conflicting views that contradict or undercut the leader's emerging interpretation and solution of the individual's problem. Thus this tentative *entry* into the group network entails a partial *withdrawal* from ordinary society. The negative connotations of the withdrawal are compensated for by rewards of friendship and encouragement within the group.

Third, we see that Ono comes to accept an interpretation of her problem in terms of religious notions linked to social norms. Onishi makes much of the notion that if Ono continues on her course, at least one of her children will "end up like her." According to Reiyūkai, karmic burdens (*innen*) can be inherited through blood ties. More than a mere accumulation of burdens inherited from one's own past lives, karmic burdens are also inherited from all one's ancestors, both paternal and maternal. Furthermore, the inherited portion is not a static quantity that remains unaltered after birth. The child's karmic burdens continue to be influenced by its parents throughout eternity, even after the parents have died and become ancestors.[6] *Innen* has a bearing, of course, on the type of rebirth one will have. One may be reborn, for example, as an animal. But more important, *innen* inherited from a living parent influences the course of a life already in progress. This influence is thought of not simply as good or bad; it is said to be like a mirror reflecting from parent to child. To illustrate, one can speak of "divorce *innen*": the child of divorced parents is more than

5. This repetition constitutes a kind of training in submission which in turn appears to function to some extent as a strategy that Reiyūkai women use to manipulate and control men.

6. This is the idea behind Reiyūkai's assertion that parents are "one type" of ancestor and thus should be shown the same type of worship accorded the dead variety.

likely to experience divorce. Once Ono accepts this notion, she starts to seek ways to avoid the fate forecast for her on the basis of this view.

It should be noted that Onishi, representing Reiyūkai teaching, says that the children's futures are jeopardized when their parents are not living in harmony. That is to say, what endangers the children is the worsening relationship between their parents. That relationship too is thought of in terms of *innen*. According to Reiyūkai belief, there is an *innen* bond or karmic connection between husband and wife, and it is the disturbance of this bond that Onishi designates as the real source of Ono's problems as well as of the problems liable to befall her children.

The bond between husband and wife has been breached in a conspicuous manner by the husband's gambling and infidelity, but Onishi is not concerned about those matters. On the contrary, she is willing to concede Ono no comfort whatever in those connections. Instead, Onishi puts the blame on the wife, going so far as to say that she is the sole cause of the family's trouble. This rather incredible analysis of the situation is to be understood in terms of the karmic bond between spouses. A basic norm of that bond, according to Reiyūkai, is that the husband is the sole breadwinner. He supports the wife, not vice-versa. Even if the husband is injured or chronically ill and the wife is forced to become the major breadwinner, it is recommended that she apologize to her husband for having usurped his role. Gainful employment, in short, is seen as a moral lapse on her part, the repercussions of which will be visited on future generations. If a wife does take a paying job, the karmic bond between her husband and herself is badly damaged, and the responsibility for restoring it falls on her, no matter what the extenuating circumstances. This view of female employment stems from sex-role conceptions that derive from more fundamental ideas of separate spheres of moral responsibility and

divisions of labor that will be summarized below.

It should also be noted that the *shibuchō*'s interpretation of Ono's problem is one that incorporates norms and values. Ono is faced with a gloomy prognosis that motivates her to act in accordance with norms and values taught her by the *shibuchō*. Needless to say, she will also continue to repeat gestures of deference, self-effacement, and submission to the leader's authority.

The fourth stage is that of acceptance of blame for the problem. In Reiyūkai testimonies, the notion that one must accept blame for whatever is wrong is heard again and again. That goes for poverty, sickness, and domestic discord – the major problems dealt with by Reiyūkai. All are eventually interpreted as moral failings on the part of the individual and/or his or her ancestors. That being the case, there is no justification for blaming the problem on society or other people. Thus Onishi never even hints that part of the blame might fall to the husband. In fact he is vindicated, as if he were well within his rights to gamble and be unfaithful. Onishi speaks of his actions in the passive voice, saying he "was stolen" by another woman, thus charging the wife with the entire responsibility. To employ a biblical motif, when the leader's message amounts to "Take the beam out of your own eye before you try to take a mote out of someone else's," it is always implemented in accordance with the status hierarchy of the traditional *ie* or stem household: when mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are at daggers drawn, it is always the daughter-in-law who is told to yield; in the case of conflict between husband and wife, it is always the wife; and in general, a woman is always supposed to yield to a man.

Acceptance of blame is accompanied by feelings of guilt. A direct concomitant of guilt is the feeling that one has incurred a debt (*on*) that must be paid back through personal sacrifice: one feels that he ought to suffer. The debt incurred pertains not only to the injured party (Ono's husband, on this

view) but also to the *shibuchō* for having alerted the person to his error and shown the way to a solution. Furthermore, one frequently encounters the notion that the "guilty party" has incurred a debt toward Reiyūkai as a whole for its role in bringing him or her back to the straight and narrow.

A fifth stage is that of repentance and apology. Ono does so and resolves to take a position that will make her totally dependent on her husband for economic support by relinquishing her restaurant. Reiyūkai members speak of repentance as *sange*, a practice found in many new religions that can be traced back to the primitive Buddhist *uposatha*: a monthly meeting at which members of the monastic community confessed any violations of discipline in the presence of the assembled monks (Nakamura 1962, pp. 201-202). In Reiyūkai, repentance is a form of public self-humiliation and submission to the group's authority, often being performed in the presence of Reiyūkai leaders and members as part of one's testimony. Acknowledging his debt to the organization, the person announcing his repentance typically vows to "return the *on*" through proselytization.

Sixth is cessation of activity inconsistent with the norms accepted in stage three. Ono carries out her vow and closes the restaurant. The rest of the story is highly abbreviated, but from that point on, it seems that she and perhaps her husband too became very active in Reiyūkai and proselytized some two hundred people in one year, thus qualifying for the rank of associate branch leader. Here the individual demonstrates his or her acquisition of approved norms and values.

The seventh and final step in the acquisition of conservative values comes when Ono assumes a leadership role and begins proselytizing people from that position. In this activity she will typically give her testimony over and over again, being rewarded by the group for her "success" with approval, friendship, and rank. This motivates her to internalize the group's norms and values even more thoroughly,

and to do her best to persuade other people to do the same.

Synthesis. The sex-role related norms and values evident in this text are based on the assumption that there should be a clear division of labor and moral responsibility by sex. Women are responsible for everything that affects the domestic sphere: housework, child care, finances, and human relations. Men support the family financially. This division is supported by ideas about a karmic bond between husband and wife. This tie, which we may speak of as horizontal, is what holds the male and female spheres together so children can be raised. There are also karmic bonds between parent and child, which we may refer to as vertical. A breach in the horizontal bond endangers the vertical bond as well. The breach in the former is "reflected" in the latter in such a way that if the bond between husband and wife breaks, the child (and future generations of descendants) will in all likelihood experience a similar breach of the horizontal bond with his or her spouse after marriage. On the other hand, when labor and moral responsibility are clearly and rightly divided, there are rewards. If husband and wife maintain their separate spheres correctly, the karmic influence transferred through the vertical tie will be beneficial. Parents can then expect their children to be healthy, happy, and reasonably prosperous. When a domestic problem arises, this scheme of ideas may be applied diagnostically. The source of the problem is traced to a violation of the karmically legitimated normative division of labor and moral responsibility.

In the realm of values, of particular importance is the reciprocal pair "male dominance/female submission." Of the two, the female side is considerably more elaborated than the male. Women are urged to be meek and submissive (*sunao*, *onnarashii*, etc.) and to build up the husband's ego (*shujin o tateru, shujin o sūhai suru*) by performing a number of gestures that indicate not only deference and respect vis-à-vis

the husband but also self-effacement and humility vis-à-vis themselves.[7] These gestures are supported by a number of notions about female pollution that have been given Buddhist coloring and terminology. As if intended to support a theory of symbolic dualism, the notion that women's bodies and inner natures (*konjō*) are polluted by female sexuality, childbirth, menstruation, child care, and the various kinds of dirt involved in housework is taken to mean that men, by contrast, are pure and unpolluted. This dualistic notion, too, is expressed in terms of karma: by virtue of the duties that fall to them because of their sex, women accumulate *goshō* or bad karma.

In a familiar inversion of the value attributing dominance to the male and urging submissiveness on the female, Reiyūkai also gives evidence of the pollution-power paradox (cf. Rosaldo 1974, p. 38).[8] Though female pollution is regarded as axiomatic, members also attribute greater spiritual power to women than to men. The power side of the paradox is best seen in the female branch leader. The novice will typically be told that the branch leaders are living buddhas, that they have the power to see the individual's true nature behind whatever mask he or she may use to delude society, that they have extraordinary wisdom with which they can help the compliant client solve personal problems. It is said that this power stems from the merit (*kudoku*) the branch

7. In describing ideal feminine qualities, Reiyūkai members employ the emotionally laden symbolism of full heads of rice bending with the breeze. In like manner, women are advised to be passive and submissive toward men in all things. When sending the husband off in the morning and welcoming him back in the evening, or when welcoming any male guest into the home, Reiyūkai women are expected to perform a bow from the kneeling position, inclining the torso completely to the floor and extending the arms full length and crossing one hand over the other. In at least one branch of the organization, this gesture is performed not only in one's own dwelling but also in the group's worship halls, crowded conditions permitting.

8. This paradox is found among many of Japan's new religions and outside Japan as well.

leader acquired through proselytization of five hundred people (the basic requirement for advancement to this rank) and from the hardship and suffering she successfully endured thanks to her faith in Reiyūkai. In addition the individual learns that he too may hope to acquire such power and insight by following the branch leader. The example of Onishi is typical of the female branch leader group. When a client comes to her, she shocks the client, putting him or her in a passive, submissive position paradigmatic of the submissiveness women are ideally supposed to show their husbands. She produces a coherent interpretation of the individual's problem and its likely outcome. She then leads the client to a solution that incorporates the group's notions about appropriate sex-role norms and values. Thus the interaction between novice and female branch leader not only exhibits the superior spiritual power of the female leader but also enacts in miniature the group-approved set of norms and values the novice is led to accept via the seven stages.

The pattern of seven stages exemplified by the testimony presented in this paper is by no means invariant. Shorter testimonies may omit one stage or more. Interviews and sustained associations with individual members suggest, however, that this pattern is sufficiently general to provide at least an outline of the process through which the group's conservative sex-role related norms and values are acquired.

REFERENCES

Bunkachō 文化庁 [Agency for Cultural Affairs]
1979 *Shūkyō nenkan* 宗教年鑑 [Religions yearbook]. Tokyo: Bunkachō.

NAKAMURA Hajime 中村元, general ed.
1962 *Shin · bukkyō jiten* 新・佛教辞典[A new dictionary of Buddhism]. Tokyo: Seishin Shobō.

OKAZAKI Toshimasa 岡崎利直
1976 *Shakaden kara no shuppatsu* 釈迦殿からの出発 [Starting from the hall of the Buddha], 2 vols. Tokyo: Hotoke no Sekaisha.

ROSALDO, Michelle Zimbalist
1974 Women, culture, and society: A theoretical overview. In *Women, culture, and society*, Michelle Zimbalist ROSALDO and Louise LAMPHERE, eds. Stanford: Stanford University Press.