

## *Jizoku* (Priests' Wives) in Sōtō Zen Buddhism An Ambiguous Category

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*Most modern Japanese Buddhist organizations, particularly the schools of Zen, continue to espouse the ideal of world-renunciation. This has led to a reluctance on the part of the Zen organizations to officially acknowledge the presence of the priests' wives (jizoku). The wives are thus left with no recognized place in the temple structure, despite the indispensable part they play in managing the temples' day-to-day affairs. The present article describes the diverse roles of the jizoku, shows something of the difficulty of their position, and suggests possible changes in the Buddhist organizations that might improve their status.*

ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH modern Japanese Buddhism is aware of the indispensable place of the priest's wife (*jizoku* 寺族) in the life of the local temple. With the exception of the Jōdo Shinshū sect, however, monastic celibacy continues to be the official norm for the Buddhist priesthood. Sōtō Buddhism, for example, still espouses the ideal of *shukkesbhu* 出家主義 (world-renunciation), and the concept of celibacy for both monks and nuns is cherished as a fundamental component of the institution.<sup>1</sup>

This, obviously, flies in the face of the reality of modern Japanese Buddhism, where marriage, at least in the case of the male clergy, is

\* This paper is based upon the author's three years of experience as a Sōtō priest's wife, a role that continues to the present day. I wish to thank my *jizoku* friends, especially Sugawara Ikuko, Watanabe Noriko, and Ukou Kikuko, who shared with me their rich insight into the problem of sexism in Japanese Buddhist organizations. I also want to express my deep gratitude to Seno Misa and Yugi Sogen of the Sōtōshū Shūmuchō for providing me with much valuable material, and to Prof. James Dobbins for his many excellent suggestions on the content of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> A few high-ranking temples/monasteries do in fact require that the head abbot be celibate, even if he was married prior to his appointment.

now taken for granted.<sup>2</sup> An interesting survey conducted by the administrative headquarters of Sōtō Buddhism (Sōtōshū Shūmochō 曹洞宗宗務庁) shows that only five percent of the parishioners preferred the celibate monk to the married monk, and that the vast majority were either explicitly in favor of clerical marriage or indifferent to the question.<sup>3</sup> The Buddhist clergy, nonetheless, seems to be averse to the official acknowledgement of clerical marriage. One striking indication of this is the absence in the past of any mention of *jizoku* as a category in the Sōtō Constitution (*shūken* 宗憲).

### The "Illegitimate" Jizoku

Buddhist priests were granted the right to marry well over a century ago, when in 1872 the Meiji Government issued the *dajōkanfukoku* 太政官布告. It was not until the spring of 1995, however, that the *jizoku* was accorded an official position in the sect with the adoption of an amendment to the Sōtō Constitution.<sup>4</sup> In the previous Sōtō Constitution both the priest (*sōryo* 僧侶) and the parishioner/supporter (*danshinto* 壇信徒) were present as categories, but not the *jizoku*. Thus until quite recently the priest's wife lacked a legitimate place in the sect's most fundamental set of rules.<sup>5</sup>

It is only recently that Sōtō Buddhism has begun to pay attention to the loosely defined status of the *jizoku*. In 1991 the former president, Ōtake Myōgen, adopted as his platform "human rights, peace, and the environment." Under his leadership, the New Research Group for Doctrinal Studies (Gendai Kyōgaku Kenkyūkai 現代教学研究會) established a subgroup specifically to discuss the disadvantageous and ambiguous status of the *jizoku*.<sup>6</sup> Although the discussions touched on many important issues, their tenor suggested that what most concerned the chairperson was reconciling the troublesome category

<sup>2</sup> More than eighty percent of the male clergy was married as early as the Taishō era (1912-26).

<sup>3</sup> Seventy-three percent preferred the married monk, while the remainder gave no response. See ODAWARA 1993, pp. 93-94.

<sup>4</sup> The amendment, adopted as Article 32 of Chapter 8 of the Sōtō Constitution, reads: "Those who are not priests, but believe in Sōtō Buddhism's teachings and reside in the temple, are called *jizoku*." The deceptive nature of this amendment will be discussed later, but mention should be made here of the fact that the term *jizoku* can apply to priests' daughters as well as priests' wives. It is, moreover, logically possible to extend it to cover a nun's husband and children as well, although the practice of marriage for nuns is not widely accepted.

<sup>5</sup> The sect has been working on the overall revision of the constitution and other regulations since 1986.

<sup>6</sup> The subgroup consisted of eight researchers, of whom only two were female: Kuroda Zuiō and Nakano Yūshin, both ordained nuns.

*jizoku* with orthodox Buddhist doctrine (GENDAI KYŌGAKU KENKYŪKAI 1993, pp. 1–67).<sup>7</sup>

At issue was whether to define the *jizoku* as part of the laity or as part of the clergy, for the temple wife is a bit of both. An attempt was made to resolve this categorical ambiguity through use of the term *upavāsa*, a concept borrowed from classical Indian Buddhism and ordinarily translated into Japanese as *gonjūnyo* 近住女. The category *upavāsa* is rarely included in the Buddhist order, which is usually considered to comprise the four categories of monk (*biku*), nun (*bikuni*), layman (*ubasoku*) and laywoman (*uba'i*). *Upavāsa* is a fifth division that stands somewhere between nun and laywoman; the word literally means “women who live close” to the sacred path, and refers to the exceptionally devout group of laywomen who choose to spend a certain period of time in the monastic order. This fifth category was considered applicable to the state of *jizoku*, and suitable as a basis for defining the status of the modern priests’ wives. However, the members of the subgroup saw the concept of *upavāsa* as an anachronism that served only to obscure the problem. The rejection of this proposal was indicative of the difficulties involved in finding a suitable place for the *jizoku* within orthodox Sōtō Buddhism.

Although the Sōtō sect, as an institution that espouses the principle of world-renunciation, has carefully evaded references to the question of clerical marriage in its Constitution, it does nevertheless possess various rules either binding on *jizoku* or providing them some form of protection and benefit. The documents these rules appear in are known as *kitei* (規程; regulations). Let us take a look at what kind of norms the *kitei* prescribe for the *jizoku*.

### *The Ambiguous Jizoku*

The Sōtō Regulations for the *jizoku* (*Sōtōshū jizoku kitei* 曹洞宗寺族規程), promulgated in 1952, define the role of *jizoku* as follows:

The *jizoku* must endeavor to assist the priest (*jūshoku* 住職) in furthering the prosperity of the sect, raising the successor [of the temple], and enlightening/teaching the parishioners. (Italics mine)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The New Research Group for Doctrinal Studies has been engaged in this project since 1989. Initially there were no female representatives included in the group.

<sup>8</sup> *The Bukkyō Times* (15 May 1992) has published a survey of the policies of twelve Buddhist organizations regarding the status of *jizoku*. All but two of the organizations mention the obligation of the *jizoku* to cooperate with the priest as an assistant. The Sōtō organization’s norm enjoining the *jizoku* to raise and educate the successor is not present in the

The vagueness of this regulation is immediately apparent. It is neither clear what the role of assistant (*hosa* 補佐) might entail, nor how the word enlighten/teach (*kyōka* 教化) is to be defined. Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the problematic nature of this regulation, I would like first to briefly sketch the social background that necessitated the involvement of *jizoku* in temple activities.

Even at the end of the Meiji era nearly all clerical marriages remained legally unregistered.<sup>9</sup> *Jizoku* were common-law wives, so to speak, and therefore excluded from the public dimension of temple life. During World War II, *jizoku* were on some occasions expected to play the role of surrogate minister, performing rituals and preaching to the parishioners in place of the priest, many of whom had been drafted into the military.<sup>10</sup> It was, however, the postwar land reform that finally led to a more permanent role for *jizoku* by drastically altering the mode of subsistence for the majority of temples. The land reform took away from some eighty percent of Japan's temples the farmland on which the temple's finances had formerly been based. Thereafter, except for a few privileged temples, the priests were obliged to take up jobs in addition to their temple duties in order to support themselves and their families. The absence of the priest led to an increased need for the wives' help in managing the temple (TANABE 1975, pp. 4-6). Thus the Sōtō institution, which had in effect ignored the priests' abandonment of celibacy, was now faced with the hard fact that the temples in their organization could no longer do without the *jizoku* as a supplementary labor force.

The year 1976 witnessed a turning point in the institution's position on the *jizoku*, where a new perspective was announced at an assembly of *jizoku* representatives held at one of the sect's head monasteries. In his opening address, the president, Tanabe Tetsugai, referred to the statement in the Sōtō Constitution's tenth article that "the missionizing activities of the sect must be carried out by every member of the sect," and encouraged the *jizoku* representatives to come to the forefront and actively promote the sect's teaching (*kyōka*) activities (TANABE 1976, p. 5). The headquarters subsequently started a new educational and training program with a trimester correspon-

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regulations of most other organizations. One does find, however, a norm stating that the *jizoku* must endeavor to practice the faith of the sect in such a way so as to become a paradigm for the parishioners.

<sup>9</sup> My husband's grandmother, who married and moved into the temple at the beginning of the Shōwa era, is in fact the first *jizoku* whose marriage was legally registered in the approximately 450-year history of our temple.

<sup>10</sup> For a concise overview of the Sōtō institution's policies regarding the *jizoku*, see UCHINO 1987.

dence course and a three-day seminar aimed at reinforcing the wife's role as missionary. Upon successful completion of this program she was given the license of subteacher.

This, however, did little to alleviate the aforementioned ambiguity in the assistant role assigned to the *jizoku*. This ambiguity causes problems for both wife and priest, since neither side has a clear understanding of the extent to which the *jizoku* is either obliged or entitled to participate in temple activities.

There is also the question of the specific activities in which the *jizoku* is to assist. The institution is not clear on this point, either. In reference to the regulation defining the duties of the *jizoku*, quoted above, a representative of the headquarters stated that there are three possible ways a *jizoku* might participate in the teaching activities of the temple: 1) by holding a position identical to that of the priest, including that of officiant in various rituals; 2) by performing a role similar to that of *fukujūshoku* 副住職 (subpriest as opposed to chief priest) and actively teaching; 3) by serving a more limited, secretary-like role in which she merely provides backstage services. Given these three choices, the second was designated as the most desirable. The first option, in the view of sect officials, is not only unacceptable but unrealistic, since the *jizoku* are not ordained. The third option, which reflects the conventional role of the *jizoku*, is no longer considered suitable in the face of rapid modernization and urbanization (SŌTOSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1975, pp. 8–11).<sup>11</sup>

The implications of the subpriest's role described in the second option are, however, far from clear. At a national meeting of *jizoku* representatives twelve years after the above statement was made, the president, KUWABARA Bison, admitted that the status of the *jizoku* is so loosely defined that no one is really sure how they are supposed to carry out their "supplementary" teaching activities (1987, p. 30).

Some observers suggest that the institution may deliberately be defining the role of the *jizoku* in ambiguous terms so as to keep their status unclear. By taking advantage of the ambiguity of the language, the institution can freely assign any meaning to the norms and regulations pertaining to the *jizoku*'s role. For example, during the opening address at a regional study seminar for the *jizoku* held in Nagoya in 1993, a priest affiliated with the sect's educational center stated that the *jizoku* are entitled to perform missionary activities as assistants (*hosa*) to the priest and suggested that one of the best possible ways

<sup>11</sup> An almost identical statement is found in the textbook for the correspondence course designed for the *jizoku*.

for them to perform such activities was by cleaning the temple. The *jizoku*'s role as an educator is thus presented as roughly equivalent to that of a janitor, and quite different from that of a priest. This is but one example of the often arbitrary interpretations given to the terms *hosa* and *kyōka*. I will return later to the inherently gender-specific assumptions made by the institution concerning the nature of the assistant's teaching role.

Another obstacle to full participation in temple activities by the *jizoku* is the fact that so much is left to personal initiative. The institution expects them to rely on their own resources (*jiriki* 自力) in establishing a career as an educator or missionary (SŌTOSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1976, p. 39). If the individual *jizoku* fails to establish her place in the temple as a teaching agent, it is assumed that this is entirely due to her own lack of ability or effort.

The institution's policy toward the *jizoku* appears almost deliberately designed to place them in a "double bind."<sup>12</sup> The institution seems to be saying, "Be a good missionary, but know that you are incapable of becoming one." There are other examples in which the institution's seemingly liberal and cooperative policies toward the *jizoku* are belied by their actual implementation. Needless to say, the ideal image of the *jizoku* as presented by male priests is often in conflict with the emotional and behavioral reality of women living in modern Buddhist temples.

### *Construction of the Ideal Jizoku Woman*

No matter how vaguely the *jizoku*'s role may be defined, from the Sōtō institution's point of view the position is in itself a "full-time occupation" (SŌTOSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1976, p. 40). The *jizoku* is a full employee of the temple, serving as assistant to the priest in matters of management and maintenance; these women face all of the problems connected with the balancing of a career and domestic duty that confront the working woman in contemporary Japan. The problem that faces the "double-career woman," as explained by Takie S. Lebra, is that a woman's career role is separate and distinct from her domestic role. The woman tries to be a perfect professional as well as a perfect wife and thus assumes too many responsibilities, giving rise to doubt and guilt regarding the compatibility of the two sets of demands (LEBRA 1984, pp. 247-52).

<sup>12</sup> The "double bind" is a situation in which a person is placed in a position where no matter what s/he does, s/he loses. See the pioneer work of BATESON (1972).

On the basis of this depiction, I propose that *jizoku* must deal not with a double role but with a triple one. *Jizoku* are expected to fulfill not only the roles of temple employee and temple wife, but also a third role unique to *jizoku*: raising the successor to the temple (*jūshoku no kōkeisha no ikusei*). Although hereditary succession to the Buddhist priesthood is now the norm in Japan, so that the successor is almost always the *jizoku*'s own child, the Sōtō institution seems to regard the raising of the successor/disciple as something distinct from ordinary child-rearing (TANABE 1975, p. 4). The institution has several times stressed that the *jizoku*'s motherly role is indispensable in the nurturing of successors to the Dharma. To explore these expectations further, I will analyze the "cult of motherhood" revealed in the sermons of several priests.<sup>13</sup>

### *Cult of Motherhood*

Motherhood is, needless to say, a cultural construct, since a wide variety of cultural meanings may accrue to the biological fact of having a child. Even motherly love, which may appear universal in its significance, needs to be interpreted within each culture in order to acquire relevance. In a comprehensive survey of Japanese motherhood, Lebra states that one of its striking characteristics is that the Japanese mother is intensely filiocentric, as manifested by the sense of inseparability between her and the child. LEBRA believes that this filiocentric identity results from the strong role investment in motherhood found in Japanese culture (1984, pp. 161–66).<sup>14</sup>

It is often pointed out that the Japanese woman enjoys a relatively high status within the domestic sphere as long as she fulfills her role as mother and wife.<sup>15</sup> The question can then be raised as to how the Sōtō institution utilizes this culturally-aided conception of motherhood in preaching to *jizoku*.

First of all, mention must be made of the fact that the Sōtō Constitution specifies that the priest (*jūshoku*) must raise the disciple. It seems, however, that in nearly every case it is the wife and not the

<sup>13</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the intricate symbolic meanings attached to the role of motherhood in Buddhism, such as the representation of the feminine principle of wisdom as being the mother of Buddhahood.

<sup>14</sup> Lebra also indicates that Japanese motherhood has its own dark side resulting from the heavy constraints placed on it. For example, the double suicide known as *boshi shinjū* 母子心中 (mother-child suicide) is apparently related to the nature of the intense mother-child bond that is rather characteristic of Japanese culture. See LEBRA 1984, p.164.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see TANAKA 1987.

priest who is held responsible for educating the child to become the next priest. The following passage exemplifies this point.

Whether or not one becomes a good religious specialist is largely dependent on one's character, so we may ask what constitutes that character. There are two things that are absolutely clear: One's character is not predetermined, and that character, whether good or bad, is determined in childhood. This is why mothers have an exceptionally important role....Our sect has a rule that one must be over ten years old in order to be ordained. The pre-ordination period, however, is the most important for the education of a good disciple, and if it is true these days that children raised in the temples are not performing well, it must be because their early childhood education has not been properly handled.... It is said that children are always watching their mother.... Motherly love is the most precious treasure women have. For you, the *jizoku* mother, however, this is not enough, since you must raise not an ordinary child but the disciple of the temple.... Therefore the *jizoku* mothers must have deep religious faith. It is entirely up to the mother's piety whether or not the child grows up to be a good priest. Therefore, the raising of the disciple is not a matter of technique, but a matter of each individual mother's piety.

(SŌTOSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1975, pp. 20-26)<sup>16</sup>

In another sermon, given by a high priest from one of the two head Sōtō monasteries, we see the following denunciation of *jizoku* who fail in the performance of their expected motherly role:

The best teacher at home is the mother. You know very well that if a student drops out of school, it is a dishonor to the teacher. If you have more than one male child and none of them become a priest, you are just like the bad teacher I have just described. I think anyone who wants to marry into the temple should have to go through a kind of qualifying exam.

(KIZAKI 1983, p. 19)

One can only wonder why the Sōtō organization would suggest that the development of the disciple's religious character is totally dependent upon the mother. It would seem self-evident that the priest, as father of the disciple and husband of the *jizoku*, should be held responsible for his share of the parenting. Moreover, if *jizoku* are to serve as assistant priests, as the institution desires, it should be clear

<sup>16</sup> Nearly identical discourse can be found in the textbook for the *jizoku* training correspondence course, which is still in use.



that they cannot bear the full load of domestic duties as well.

Apart from this, however, it seems highly doubtful that the institution is truly convinced of the centrality of the *jizoku*'s role in raising good disciples. For example, the Sōtō sect's census (*Sōtōshū shūsei sōgōchōsa* 曹洞宗宗勢総合調査), conducted every ten years, directs all its questions concerning disciples to the priest; the *jizoku* are asked only about their own educational background, place of birth, job record, and so on (TARAO 1985).<sup>17</sup> The child-raising responsibilities with which the *jizoku* is charged seem to bring no concomitant benefits—they guarantee her no authority and bring only criticism upon her if she fails to carry out her duties in a manner acceptable to the sect.

The cult of motherhood is used in other ways to discriminate against female members of the organization. At the seminars the sect headquarters provides for the *jizoku* the lecturers often employ the cult of motherhood in a derogatory way that seems to reduce the role of women to biological procreation. The following is an example from the talk of one of the lecturers.

If you think that men and women are equal, then you're a big fool. Do you think that I am capable of bearing a child like my wife? Of course not! The priest is a human being, just like the wife is a human being, but there is a distinction (*kubetsu* 区別) between men and women. Have any of you read the Japanese Constitution? I guess not. If you read it carefully you wouldn't maintain that men and women are equal. The constitution says that both men and women have human rights, but this does not mean that they are equals, because men and women are fundamentally different (*ishitsu* 異質) and distinct. So we don't have equality here—all we have is distinction.

(Itō 1987, pp. 8–9)

In another sermon, after a similar argument, it was maintained that the human rights of women are grounded in their reproductive functions, and that this is a privilege that women must cherish. This sermon was concluded with the sincere wish that the *jizoku* devote themselves to the raising of the disciple, even at the risk of their own lives.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> I have presented a similar critique of the institution's policy toward the *jizoku* in the official bulletin of the Sōtō sect. See KAWAHASHI 1994a.

<sup>18</sup> This sermon was delivered on 19 January 1995 at a seminar in the correspondence course for Sōtō *jizoku* held at the headquarters in Tokyo, and was part of a session on teaching and management in the temple. In the following section I will from time to time make further reference to the sermons of this lecturer as the focus of my criticism. This is not only because I myself was present for the lectures and am thus able to report accurately on their content, but also because the lecturer is regarded within the Sōtō organization as sympathetic to women. For a poignant critique of the lecturer's political bias, see NAKANO 1995.

The implicit ideology of this sermon is a kind of biological essentialism that defines the woman's role as that of childbearer. The talk exalts motherhood as a woman's most essential virtue, but the discriminatory nature of the statement is obvious. The sentiments expressed indicate a lack of awareness of the conceptual distinction between socially constructed gender and biologically given sex. Nor is this the only categorical conflation exhibited here. Equality is confused with homogeneity in an argument that uses the biological heterogeneity between men and women to justify social discrimination and inequality (*sabetsu* 差別) in the guise of "distinction" (*kubetsu*). This type of discourse reduces and limits the *jizoku's* primary role to that of procreator and caretaker of the disciple.

### *The Hierarchized Omote/Ura*

We have just seen that one of the elements of the *jizoku's* triple role is intertwined with an essentialist understanding of motherhood. What about the *jizoku's* role as the temple assistant?

Japanese society is known for its support of role polarization between the two genders. The principle of role specialization or division of labor normally assigns the public sphere (*omote*, the "front") to men and the domestic sphere (*ura*, the "back") to women. These two roles are held as complementary, but in fact they are not equal in status. Role polarization of this kind entails gender asymmetry. Lebra states that

the structural embeddedness of sex roles stabilizes and rigidifies the sex-based hierarchy. Social structure as a whole dictates that women be inferior, submissive, more constrained, and more *backstaged* than men.

(Italics mine; LEBRA 1984, p. 301)

This characteristic of Japanese society is intensified in Buddhist organizations. We have seen that the institution prescribes the role of assistant for the *jizoku*. This institutional prescription again shows a deliberate confusion of sex and gender in the sense that biologically given characteristics are construed as essential determinants of social abilities and roles. In brief, the institution has assigned the role of assistant to the *jizoku* in order to mobilize them for "backstage" services (*urakata* 裏方).

In almost all cases, the *jizoku* are encouraged to stay offstage. One popular analogy appearing in many sermons is that the priest is to the wife as the jacket is to its lining. The priest, in other words, plays a public role while the wife stays in the background complying with the

priest, just as the lining must always fit the jacket.<sup>19</sup> One lecturer, for example, repeatedly stresses that the priest is the primary teaching agent and the *jizoku* should maintain a less public role.

Before the end of the Meiji era the *jizoku* did not even exist. Then in Taishō, the *jizoku* started to live in the temple and help the priest. In Shōwa, the *jizoku* were allowed to take correspondence courses and get a license. They even appear in the temple's main ceremonial hall now. What do you think will be next? How far do you want to go? The next place for you to go is outside the temple gate. If you go too far in making public appearances, however, you won't be appreciated any more. Just be careful!

(Itō 1992, p. 58)

The same lecturer explicitly states that the priest is the only agent capable of teaching (*nōkeshu* 能化者; Itō 1992, p. 59). It seems to me that statements of this kind implicitly assume the existence of an ontological disjunction between the respective abilities of the male and the female to enlighten others. This view, which appears to be shared by many others in the institution, is used as a justification for relegating the *jizoku* to “backstage” services and the management of such miscellaneous chores as taking phone calls, weeding the gardens, serving tea to the parishioners, and so on.

Most priests do, in fact, bear their share of such custodial tasks as weeding the gardens and cleaning the ceremonial halls, but, interestingly, the sectarian headquarters stresses only the responsibilities of the wife in such work. This would seem contrary to the Zen Buddhist worldview, which is well known for assigning religious meaning to the activities of everyday life. Why is it, then, that only the female members of the organization are held responsible for carrying out these tasks? I suggest that it is the ambiguously prescribed status and role of the *jizoku* described earlier that allows the institution to assign a female-specific nature to this “backstage” service.<sup>20</sup>

The institution's preoccupation with keeping the *jizoku* offstage is further expressed in their attempt to distance them from responsible social roles and organized power. This is demonstrated by the following passage in a sermon delivered by a popular Sōtō preacher.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Itō 1987, p. 47. Another analogy I have heard is that “the frame is to the picture as the wife is to the priest,” meaning that if the frame is superior to the picture, the picture does not look that good.

<sup>20</sup> In Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism too, the *bōmori* 坊守 (“priest's wife” in Shin parlance) are expected to supply “backstage” services. MINAMOTO Junko questions this widely accepted practice and proposes that more wives should protest against this custom (1982, p. 36).

I'd like to give you my idea on the *jizoku's* social role, to see whether or not social participation means one needs to become a leader.... When you hear the words "*jizoku's* social responsibility," you may immediately think of some of your *jizoku* friends who, for example, teach piano or the tea ceremony, or who have taken a leadership role as representatives in the community's Women's Association. I find this a one-sided view, however. I don't think that one must become a leader in this sense to fulfill one's social responsibilities. Taking a leadership role is not the only way to participate in society. I believe that sometimes a role that is modest and reserved has a real importance for society, although not many people may take notice of it.

(UEMATSU 1981, pp. 21-22)

It can be argued that the intentions behind this statement are good, but there is no doubt that it discourages the *jizoku* from playing a public role in society. The institution seems inordinately concerned about the *jizoku* overstepping their assigned boundaries, and thus attempts to limit the range of activities open to them to the nonpublic sphere.

In order to accomplish this, skillful rhetoric has been employed to stress the complementarity of *omote* and *ura*, or the nonhierarchized relationship between the two. The two aspects are hardly seen as equal in value, yet we often hear such flattering remarks as, "It is the priest's wife who is actually in charge of the temple," or, "The temple's well-being is after all up to the priest's wife." Both remarks are based on the assumption that, although the *jizoku's* "backstage" role may not appear as important as the public role of the priest, she nonetheless possesses considerable authority and power. In this kind of discourse the *jizoku* is seen as the "domestic matriarch" whose role is complementary to the priest's role of "on-stage patriarch."

"Domestic matriarch" and "on-stage patriarch" are terms that have been coined by Lebra to describe the husband-wife relationship in Japan. Japanese housewives in general possess considerable control of—as well as responsibility for—the domestic domain, and this authority is symbolized by their monopoly of the household finances (LEBRA 1984, pp. 133-37). There are difficulties, however, with applying the concept of domestic matriarch to the *jizoku*, since a fundamental difference exists between the *jizoku's* relationship with the priest and the ordinary housewife's relationship with her husband. This difference concerns the very legitimacy of the *jizoku's* marital status.<sup>21</sup> At

<sup>21</sup> I have presented a paper voicing a similar critique to a group of priests, but have received no response. See KAWAHASHI 1995.

this point let us recall the institution's aversion to publicly recognizing the legitimacy of clerical marriage.

### *Fictitious Celibacy*

Earlier in this paper mention was made of the fact that the monastic rule of celibacy is still an important component of Sōtō ideology. Reference was also made to an amendment to the Sōtō Constitution that recognizes the *jizoku* as full-fledged members of the institution. Needless to say, there is a certain amount of tension between the two positions. The amendment is actually quite careful to avoid any reference to clerical marriage, stating simply, "Those who are not priests, but believe in Sōtō Buddhism's teachings and reside in the temple, are called *jizoku*." The deceptive nature of this definition lies in the fact that the *jizoku* are defined in a gender-neutral way, so as to cover up the undesirable reality of the priests' abandonment of celibacy. For this reason the amendment has been a disappointment to many *jizoku* and other believers. As a matter of fact, the New Research Group for Doctrinal Studies had proposed another version that included approval of clerical marriage, but their proposal was rejected.<sup>22</sup>

It remains true that, with the exception of Jōdo Shinshū (which explicitly acknowledges conjugal ties), a kind of ascetic misogyny prevails in Buddhist organizations.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the priests who abandon celibacy are not generally considered to be fully responsible. One gets the impression, instead, that the wives are being charged with bringing about their husband's "transgression."<sup>24</sup> I have on a number of occasions heard priests stress Sōtō Buddhism is fundamentally based on the principles of monasticism and world-renunciation. The most amusing remark addressed to the *jizoku* I have ever heard was to the effect, "Even if you hang your baby's diapers in the temple grounds, do not forget that our sect is not a lay Buddhism!" One cannot help sensing here the sectarian resistance to the *jizoku*'s presence.

This resistance to addressing the issue of clerical marriage is not only a factor behind the *jizoku*'s exclusion from the public sphere, but

<sup>22</sup> The amendment proposed by the New Research Group for Doctrinal Studies was as follows: "The priests are to practice Buddhist training through social activities, which may include marriage" (GENDAI KYŌGAKU KENKYŪKAI 1993, p. 20).

<sup>23</sup> For a lucid explanation of misogyny in Buddhism, see SPONBERG 1992.

<sup>24</sup> The headquarters has published, with the help of their own human rights commission, an excellent guidebook on the issue of discrimination. In the chapter on sexism, the text explicitly states that the burden for breaking the vow should be placed on the priest, but it is in fact the *jizoku* who have internalized the guilt still associated with priestly marriage (SŌTŌSHŪ SHUMUCHO 1992, p. 170).

also a major cause of the difficulty most *jizoku* have in feeling a sense of pride in themselves as a legitimate part of temple life. One of the highest-ranking priests at Eihei-ji has characterized the *jizoku*'s "degenerative" influence as follows:

Although the laity should be emulating the temple lifestyle, instead we find nowadays that temple people are foolishly adopting the lay style of life. This includes even the young monks who come to Eihei-ji for monastic training. I believe that this is clearly the fault of you mothers. No matter how seriously the priests practice in the monastery, you, the *jizoku* women, spoil the disciples. Since you have never undergone monastic training, you introduce the lay lifestyle into the temple. This is why our disciples are unable to do things properly.

(NARASAKI 1980, pp. 82–83)

Those who wish to maintain the ideals of world-renunciation and celibacy regard it as a sign of degeneracy that the temple family (*jitei* 寺庭) resembles more and more the lay family (*katei* 家庭). The proponents of a world-renouncing lifestyle do, of course, have their own quite valid standpoint, particularly within a tradition like Zen, which has its roots in contemplative monasticism. It makes little sense, however, to force this worldview upon the ordinary temple, where clerical marriage has been the norm for several generations now. Attempts to do so simply hinder efforts to come to terms with the reality of life in the vast majority of temples today.<sup>25</sup>

### *Dissenting Voices*

Thus far I have described how the Sōtō institution's attitude toward the *jizoku* has disempowered them, leaving the wives only a reduced role with little room for true subjectivity and self-fulfillment. This situation is aggravated by the tendency in various of the training and educational programs designed for the *jizoku* to define Buddhist doctrine in highly androcentric terms. This masks the egalitarian nature of enlightenment, crucial to the orthodoxy of Zen Buddhism—a case in which the "soteriological inclusiveness" of Zen has been submerged by

25 One example of the irreconcilability of the principle of world-renunciation and the existence of the *jizoku* is the matter of *jizoku* graves. Unlike the case of lay believers, where the wife and the husband are buried together, the *jizoku* has up until now been buried separately from the priest, as the priest is supposedly a world-renouncer. This issue was one of the concerns for the New Study Group for Doctrinal Studies. The institution is now showing a rather lenient attitude toward this restriction, as gradually more *jizoku* women are seeking to be buried with their husbands.

the “institutional androcentrism” of the organization.<sup>26</sup> An influential Sōtō *jizoku*, MUCHAKU Toki, criticizes Sōtō’s overall policy on gender roles by stating that “one wonders if most Japanese monks would really appreciate it if the true teachings of Buddha became readily accessible” (1994, p. 198).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it is rare to find reference in a sermon to, say, the *Raihaitokuzui* 礼拝得髓 chapter of Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, which presents the egalitarian teachings of Sōtō Buddhism.<sup>28</sup>

The anger and frustration felt by many wives have found expression in the proceedings of the annual convention of *jizoku* representatives (*jizoku chūōshūkai* 寺族中央集会) held by the headquarters. Here one can find many objections to the sect’s unenlightened policies toward the *jizoku*. For example, one *jizoku* criticized the headquarters in the following way:

You always tell us “work, work, work.” Then what have we got when our husband dies? Nothing is guaranteed for us, the *jizoku*. We are just like ordinary women with no special skills or training. There should be proper guidelines to assist us as *jizoku* women.

(SŌTŌSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1982, p. 43)

Yet another bitter criticism raises the issue of *jizoku* graves:

While we are alive we are made to help the priest. We are flattered by phrases like “it’s all up to you” or “we owe everything to your work.” But once we die, we are treated miserably. The priest has a marvelous grave for himself, but what about us? We only have a small and miserable-looking grave. We should get together and fight in order to make the temple a better place for us to live in!

(SŌTŌSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1979, p. 58)

Discontent is likewise directed at the institution’s unwillingness to provide a proper education for the *jizoku*. One finds several instances of requests from the *jizoku* for more opportunities to study Buddhist doctrine and sūtras.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in a recent survey the most frequent of

<sup>26</sup> See SPONBERG 1992. Bernard Faure is also correct in pointing out that in Zen/Ch’an “the equalization of the sexes in principle coexisted with the monopolization of authority by men” (FAURE 1991, pp. 231–57).

<sup>27</sup> Muchaku Toki is well known as perhaps the most influential Sōtō *jizoku*. She lives in a Sōtō temple in Chiba with her husband, Muchaku Seikyō, who is a popular social critic.

<sup>28</sup> An exception I found is a sermon by a distinguished preacher, Tsuji Jungen. His talk is well-balanced and aimed at encouraging the *jizoku* (TSUJI 1990).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, SŌTŌSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1980, p. 52. This type of request is partly motivated by their awareness that the laity are often better versed in the Buddhist scriptures than the *jizoku*.

eight possible responses to the question "What is your biggest worry?" was "Lack of knowledge of Buddhism," surpassing even "The problem of a successor." In addition, 95.6% of the *jizoku* answered "yes" to the question, "Do you want to study more about Buddhism?" (turned out that only 30.2% of them had actually had the opportunity to do so).<sup>30</sup>

The proceedings also contain calls from many *jizoku* for a more priestly role for themselves, as well as for more opportunities to participate in society.<sup>31</sup> At a recent seminar that formed part of the requirements for the *jizoku* correspondence course, I had the opportunity to speak with a number of *jizoku* women ranging in age from the early thirties to the late fifties. I was surprised at how many confessed to me that, if only they had the chance, they would like to spend a short period of time at a convent to familiarize themselves with Buddhist teachings and rituals. One explicitly told me that if she were more familiar with what the priests are doing as religious specialists, then she would no longer feel insecure vis-à-vis both the priests and parishioners. Others showed a high degree of interest in the Sōtō Sect Volunteer Association, which has been forming an active network of volunteers among both temple people and the laity. Their interest indicates a desire to establish a place for themselves as more responsible and full-fledged members of society, both in the temple and in the surrounding community.

Mention should be made here of an innovative project recently initiated by the Sōtō headquarters. The above-mentioned proceedings show that as early as 1974 *jizoku* representatives had requested publication of their opinions in the Sōtō sect's official bulletin, *Sōtōshūhō*. (SŌTŌSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1974, p. 37). At the 1992 meeting the same request was made, and in addition one representative pointed out that, in order to give a more concrete and legitimate status to the *jizoku*, the headquarters should include *jizoku* representatives on the various committees and assemblies associated with the sect (SŌTŌSHŪ SHŪMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1992, p. 45).<sup>32</sup> These requests were motivated by the way in which the various *jizoku* seminars and annual conventions had been organized. On these occasions the *jizoku* were

<sup>30</sup> Based on information gathered by the headquarters in 1994. Partial results are available in *Sōtōshūhō* 10 (1994), pp. 29-31.

<sup>31</sup> Kuroda Zuiō, a leading Sōtō sect nun, conducted a survey of the *jizoku* that showed their awareness of the need to undergo Buddhist training, learn more about the scriptures, and obtain certified recognition as religious specialists (KURODA 1994, pp.19-20).

<sup>32</sup> For example, the membership of the Sōtō Assembly (Sōtōshū Shūgikai 曹洞宗宗議会), the supreme decision-making organ of the sect, is monopolized by male priests. The Sōtō Nuns' Organization has succeeded only once in sending a representative to the Sōtō Assembly. See UCHINO 1987.



seldom given any decision-making authority and were expected to passively accept the directives of a few male priests representing the headquarters. Although some, as we have seen, dare to challenge the institution, there is little exchange of ideas, and the hierarchized relationship makes it difficult for the *jizoku* to speak up.

In 1994, the headquarters' publishing division decided to publish several special issues of the sect's bulletin on various problems faced by the Sōtō organization. As part of the project a "Letters to the Editor" section was created for the bulletin, and from the May issue letters from the *jizoku* started to appear. These letters, like those quoted above, expressed the wives' frustrations and asked the institution for greater sympathy.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the entire September issue was given over to the *jizoku* problem, with feature articles by three female members of the Sōtō organization. Among all the special issues of the bulletin to date, this was the one that has received the most attention. This year the publishing division appointed two female members (one representative for nuns and one for the *jizoku*) to the committee that plans the special issues.<sup>34</sup>

### *Reconstruction of the Tradition: The Birth of Jizoku*

We have explored how the Sōtō institution has defined key points of doctrine in androcentric terms and thereby restricted female members of the organization to limited roles.<sup>35</sup> We now need to consider whether there is a future for the *jizoku* within the organization, and what the possibilities are for elevating their status.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> One letter from a *jizoku* stated that she had been preoccupied with the idea of suicide for the first three years of her marriage (*Sōtōshūhō* 11 [1994], p. 15). It should be noted that many of the letters are anonymous, which testifies to the difficulty of their position.

<sup>34</sup> This year these two representatives are Igawa Etsudō, a distinguished Sōtō nun, and myself. There are five male members on the committee.

<sup>35</sup> I have no intention here of labeling all male members of the institution as "sexists" lacking in sympathy for women. This would be an overgeneralization—one can certainly find dissenting voices among males, including conscientious members of the Human Rights Commission (Sōtōshū Jinken'yōgo Suishin Honbu 曹洞宗人権擁護推進本部). Mention can also be made of Ishikawa Rikizan, a professor of Buddhism at Komazawa University.

<sup>36</sup> This paper has limited its focus to the problem of the priests' wives, and for this reason issues pertaining to nuns, another oppressed category of women within the institution, could not be taken up. A common piece of rhetoric used by male priests to block the status-elevation of the *jizoku* is that "nuns would not appreciate it if the *jizoku* were to become too powerful." This is partially true (see UCHINO 1987, especially pp. 171–72). The potential for conflict between the *jizoku* and nuns, however, occurs precisely because the male priests do not treat nuns as their equals. Instead of limiting the *jizoku*'s advancement, efforts should be made to elevate the nuns' status.

The attempt to classify the *jizoku* within the anachronistic category of *upavāsa*, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, would have provided no solution: it would only have rigidified and reinforced the hierarchical order of monks, nuns, *upavāsa* (*jizoku*), laymen, and laywomen.<sup>37</sup> Instead of adopting euphemisms of this sort, the institution should rid itself of the deceptive ideal of celibacy and seek a more eclectic means to transform itself in a way faithful to the reality of present practice. This solution has been proposed by many; indeed, YAMAUCHI Shun'yū, a professor of Buddhism at the Sōtō-affiliated Komazawa University, has been advocating it for the last thirty years. It is unrealistic in the contemporary world to preach the traditional doctrine of world-renunciation (*shukke shūgaku* 出家宗学) and identify temple life with monasticism (1990, pp. 222–24). Yamauchi points out that, since family life has laicized the clergy, this reality must be recognized as part of a reconstruction of the tradition.<sup>38</sup>

Once the *jizoku* are recognized as legitimate members of the temple and not as something comparable to quasi-concubines, the next step would be to secure for them educational opportunities leading to the conferral of an authorized license. One letter published in the official bulletin articulates this point well (SENO 1994). The writer argues that the license of “subteacher” (*jun-kyōshi* 准教師), which the *jizoku* can presently obtain by completing an educational program designed by the headquarters, is of no practical value. She then points out the merits of granting *jizoku* a license similar to that of the priest-the parishioners, certainly, would prefer a well-educated *jizoku* with proper credentials to teach. She concludes that if a temple is truly to be a place for enlightening people, those who reside there, including the *jizoku*, should be trained as religious specialists.

This position is eminently reasonable. In order to turn this proposal into a reality, however, it will first be necessary to implement institutional reforms aimed at eliminating the restrictive gender roles espoused by many Buddhist organizations. As indicated in my comments on the “cult of motherhood” and the hierarchized relationship between *omote* and *ura* roles, the traditional assumptions of gender differentiation do not allow for the affirmation of the full personhood of

<sup>37</sup> This analysis was suggested by Yoshizu Yoshihide (personal correspondence). I thank him for his insight.

<sup>38</sup> SASAKI Kōkan (1984) offers, from an anthropological perspective, the insightful view that both the priest and the *jizoku* live somewhere in between the traditional monastics and the laity, a fact that actually enhances the services they render at the temple. This is because people come to the temple with diversified needs, in order to answer which the temple members require experience of the multidimensional aspects of life. In other words, he encourages temple members to make use of their laylike quality.

women within the Sōtō organization. Under the present system it is nearly impossible for the *jizoku* to train at a monastery, since they are tied to the temple by their "triple role." In order to facilitate equal access to educational opportunities, the institution must encourage its male members to participate in the dual-parenting of the successor, so that both the authority for and responsibility of raising him are divided equally between the *jizoku* and the priest.

In addition, the hierarchized realms of the priest and *jizoku* must be interfused through a revalorization of domesticity. The Sōtō organization should, in other words, shift from a position that emphasizes only the *jizoku*'s role in domestic duties to one that stresses the participation of the priest as well. This would help reduce the burden on the wives and provide time for them to fulfill a more specialized role in the temple. There should be no obstacle to this if the leaders reinstate the importance of household activities as a spiritual discipline (see GROSS 1993, pp. 276–78). Even those liberal priests who have been encouraging the *jizoku* to take on a more priestly role seem unaware of the fact that such a role would only place additional burdens on the *jizoku* unless they are released from their sole responsibility for domestic tasks.<sup>39</sup>

This proposal mirrors the solution offered by Lebra to the more general problem of working Japanese women. LEBRA suggests that the realization of a nonexploitative relationship between husband and wife is possible only when a woman's double career is "matched by her husband's double career, together making a quadruple career" (1984, p. 313).

The *jizoku* must define for themselves the roles that will be non-exploitative and give them a sense of self-fulfillment and self-reliance. These roles may vary considerably depending upon the personal interests of the *jizoku* and the characteristics of her particular temple; choices must be based upon the subjectivity of the individual *jizoku*. The experience of temple wives is not uniform; claims of "the shared experience of women" were long ago called into question (MOORE 1988, pp. 1–11). If all *jizoku* were forced into roles imposed upon them by the institution, or even by the more capable and privileged group of temple wives, this would only comprise another form of injustice. For this reason the priestly role should not be required for all *jizoku*. Some may indeed opt for a female priestly role and participate in ritual performance, but others may find their mission in other activities, in which case they might be better off establishing an inde-

<sup>39</sup> On this point see my response to a solution to the *jizoku* problem proposed by a young male priest. KAWAHASHI 1994 (b).

pendent position within the temple where they could exercise a degree of independence from the priest. They might serve as teachers of Buddhist doctrine, as more traditional instructors of calligraphy, tea, or *baika* 梅花,<sup>40</sup> or as leaders of a volunteer activity utilizing the resources of the women's association connected with the temple.

Also beneficial in this respect would be an exchange of ideas among Sôtô-sect *jizoku* from different regions and of different ages. This might help the *jizoku* organize study groups of their own with topics, textbooks, and instructors geared to their personal needs. It might also contribute to the formation of consciousness-raising activities aimed at overcoming essentialist views of the "ideal *jizoku* woman," views that many temple wives have thoroughly internalized.

Additional contributions to advancing the position of the *jizoku* might be made through interreligious dialogue among women of different Buddhist sects. Both the Hongan-ji and Ôtani schools of Jôdo Shinshû have established committees to discuss *jizoku* issues. It should be noted that in Jôdo Shinshû, where the *jizoku* are generally thought to have a more clearly defined and thus higher status, various problems of female oppression still exist.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the achievements of the women in these groups, the product of many years of struggle, is something to be emulated by the Sôtô organization.<sup>42</sup>

Activists outside the Buddhist organizations might object that the *jizoku*'s efforts to find a better role for themselves through the institution are self-deceptive and self-destructive. They may deride as ignorant the adherence of these women to the Buddhist tradition, and criticize those who are struggling within the tradition as self-deluded collaborators of Buddhist patriarchy. Such critics might assert that the best way for the *jizoku* to better themselves is simply to sever their ties with the temple. It is questionable, however, whether this type of "destructionist" discourse really helps to better the position of the *jizoku*. True empowerment lies in the *jizoku* reclaiming their pride and confidence as indispensable members of the temple, endowed with a certified public role. This goal should not be dismissed as passive exploitation or incorporation by the institution. Outside critics should

<sup>40</sup> *Baika* is a recently developed Buddhist art form, in which songs expressing Buddhist doctrine are sung. It is especially popular among laywomen, and many *jizoku* belonging to the older generation teach *baika* at their temples.

<sup>41</sup> For a brief history of relevant developments in the Ôtani School, see INOUE 1989.

<sup>42</sup> In terms of consciousness-raising programs, these two sects are far more advanced than the Sôtô sect. For example, the manual for *jizoku* published by Honganji clearly states that sexism is something the *jizoku* must overcome, a position not seen in an equivalent text published by the Sôtô sect. See JÔDO SHINSHÛ HONGANJIHA SOSHIBIBU 1983, p. 54.

respect the desires of those seeking positive experiences within the tradition.

It is often said that Buddhist attitudes toward women are shaped in response to the social circumstances of the day. If this is true, the institution should revise its conservative and authoritarian structure in order to conform to contemporary Japanese society, which is gradually becoming conscious of the need for gender equality.<sup>43</sup> Instead of trying to cover over the existence of the *jizoku*, Japanese Buddhist institutions should regard the rise of the *jizoku* as a benefit to all, and consider it an opportunity to redefine and transform their heritage.

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<sup>43</sup> In this context, Ruben HABITO's work (1991) on a Buddhology of Liberation, a rereading of Buddhist scriptures from the viewpoint of the oppressed, is rich in insight.

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