

CHANGES IN THE FEMALE ROLES OF WIFE AND MOTHER AS SEEN IN THE WOMEN'S MAGAZINES OF A JAPANESE NEW RELIGION BEFORE AND AFTER WORLD WAR II

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Introduction

This paper looks at how religious movements react to and interpret changes in the family and the shifts in gender roles that they entail through a content analysis of bulletins published by religious organizations. Japan's new religions took off in the early 1860s and represent one aspect of Japan's modernization process. In contrast to established religions, a relatively large number of female leaders have been active in the new religious movements. Their teachings reflect a female worldview that prevailed before and after World War II. Among the followers of the new religions, women usually outnumber men, and are, in most cases, the more active members. The contents of religious publications reflect these circumstances, and, generally, set their sights on a female readership. Directives that offer guidance, as well as messages and stories about the experiences of believers abound. The believers' "experiences" can be interpreted as religious messages used by the sects to present their ideals. A content analysis of the religious bulletins provides one way of understanding the accepted belief system of female readers. Moreover, the bulletins reveal the place of women in these religious organizations.

In many cases, the assignment of gender roles forms an integral part of the worldview of the new religions. The acceptance of designated gender roles by female believers is crucial to their acceptance of the belief system itself. Articles on women's activities in the religious sects include news pertaining to the organization's women's groups. The female believers who assumed positions in the religious organizations, for the most part, gave off positive messages about the social conditions that regulate women's lives.

Of particular concern in this paper is the ideal of the "wife" and the problems connected with this teaching as reflected in the Perfect Liberty Sect or PL Kyōdan. The question of why the sect puts so much importance on the role of the wife cannot be ignored. Although PL Kyōdan was founded after World War II, many of its teachings are based on a prewar sect called Hitonomichi Kyōdan. Among other things, PL Kyōdan adopted Hitonomichi's views on the role of the wife.¹

During the war, the Japanese State emphasized the importance of women as mothers. Hitonomichi, on the other hand, stressed that the wife's position was the most significant. The wife was seen as the support for the *ie* (household), the basic unit of the so-called "family state," with the emperor as its locus of power. After the war, the new civil code abolished the

concept of the *ie*. Hitonomichi's successor, PL Kyôdan, however, continued to stress the position of the wife. In examining PL Kyôdan's perspectives and ideological formulations — particularly the organization's response to women — I will describe the continuities and discontinuities between the two sects. The social upheavals Japan underwent after the war caused changes not only in women's lives, but also in the thought and beliefs of PL Kyôdan.

Miki Tokuchika founded PL Kyôdan in 1946. The headquarters are located in Osaka. According to a report put out by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 1998, the official membership was listed as 1,165,000. A 1992 survey reported 650,000 active members, with women comprising approximately 70 per cent of that number.² During the years from 1965 and 1975 a surge in membership occurred, and the number of believers was said to have reached 3 million. This period correlated approximately with the second half of the period of high economic growth in Japan.³ Miki was quick to respond to the social circumstances of the time. Taking it as his cue, he concentrated on expanding the sect's religious doctrines to assure total devotion from his followers. The meaning the sect attributed to female gender roles, in particular, sheds light on how the construction of such role models figure in the worldview of the organization.

From 1951 to 1967, PL Kyôdan published a magazine for unmarried men and women called *PL seinen* (The PL Youth). Another PL Kyôdan publication, *PL fujin* (The PL Woman), that came out between 1963 and 1972, targeted female followers, but supposedly also found a male audience. The numerous photogravures of fashion models in *PL fujin* indicate that it was created with contemporary popular women's magazines in mind. In 1972, however, *PL fujin* was re-named *PL* in an attempt to target both male and female believers.

Hitonomichi Kyôdan's Conception of the "Couple"

Below, I will describe the "couple" as portrayed by PL Kyôdan's predecessor Hitonomichi Kyôdan. The sect's religious publications included a magazine titled *Hitonomichi*, starting in 1925, and another magazine, *Hitonomichi fujin* (The Hitonomichi Woman), starting in 1928. My accounts of Hitonomichi's teachings are taken from both magazines.

Miki Tokuchika's father, Tokuharu (1871-1938), founded Hitonomichi Kyôdan in Osaka in 1924. Under Japan's military regime, Hitonomichi suffered severe oppression and eventually was dissolved when the organization was accused of lese majesty. In spite of its short ten-year existence, the sect attracted a total of 800,000 members (Ikeda 1977: 901). The sect's doctrines can be found in several documents: "The Teachings in 21 Articles" (*Jinkun nijūichi kajō*), "The Cosmological Principles" (*Uchū no gensoku*), and "The Imperial Rescript on Education" (*Kyōiku chokugo*).⁴ These documents described the organization's cosmological principles and offered guidelines for living life on earth.

The most basic religious practice followed by Hitonomichi believers was called *mioshie*. While illness, injury, and other calamities were understood as warning signs sent by the Gods

(*mishirase*), *mioshie* taught the proper way to respond to these warnings through feelings and actions. If an illness or accident occurred and the divine warnings demanded urgency, the founder and leader of the sect could temporarily shoulder the burden on behalf of the believer. This practice was known as *ofurikae* (transfer of duty). The calming function of *ofurikae*, coupled with the religious leader's explanation of *mioshie* and the practical advice given, or *omichibi*, attracted followers, especially from urban areas where nuclear families were increasing, and where few cooperative groups existed.

Hitonomichi's ideal couple was described in the religious doctrines and developed further in the sect's magazines. According to the doctrines, "Everything in the world is based on the cosmic forces of *yin-yô* (yin and yang) or "shadow and light" (*Jinkun*, Article 7). While men had the attribute of *yô*, "light," women were endowed with yin, "shadow." Light and shadow were considered male and female attributes in that "men have the power to beget" (*Gensoku*, Article 4) and "women have the power to bear" (*Gensoku*, Article 5). The powers "to beget" or "to bear" were not limited to fathering or giving birth to children. They corresponded to the creation of all happiness and unhappiness. The pre-condition for a couple to exhibit these abilities was for the wife to demonstrate "absolute obedience" to her husband. If a wife obeyed her husband, then the Gods would give her the power to bear children, which in turn would empower the husband to beget (Hashimoto 1931: 67).

Hitonomichi Kyôdan stressed the ideal functions of men and women in an attempt to show the importance of the couple as the basis of the household and the world (Maruyama January 1936: 22-9). Less weight was put on relations between parents and children. As the war effort intensified, Japanese society praised motherly love and the role of women as "good wives, wise mothers" (*ryô sai kenbo*). Hitonomichi criticized this ideology in its magazine, and it took the stance that emphasizing motherhood was selfish. The sect claimed that it was the parents' ego that caused parents to relate to their children more than necessary, and instead promoted a philosophy of *laissez-faire* (*sute sodate*) that left child rearing up to the Gods:

To raise healthy children, parents must be in harmony with each other. Particularly important is for the mother to strive for unity with the father and meekly submit her own life to his. That is, parents should bring up their children impartially and unselfishly with an uncompromising divine spirit. They should care for them as if they were entrusted with the precious child of His Majesty [the Emperor]. They should not worry, be anxious, or lavish their love on the children as if they belonged solely to them, but allow them to grow up independently. (Ikeda 1977: 587-88)

The ideal relationship between a husband and wife was seen as "being two in body but one in mind" (*ittai dôshin*). The sect, nevertheless, supported a gender-differentiated division of labor and an unequal status between husband and wife. The wife's "absolute obedience" to her husband, however, was not meant to be exercised in a narrow sense. The wife should

obey her husband happily and positively. She should never act out of a sense of duty, but take an active interest in her life and, thereby, turn it into a work of art (*seikatsu o geijutsuka suru*) (*Hitonomichi Fujin*, February 1933: 12).

Hitonomichi's "way of the wife" (*tsuma no michi*) described the ideal life for a woman. According to this doctrine, a wife could use the power of her heart to turn a bad-tempered husband into an ideal husband. By so doing, the wife would fulfil her own needs and still show "absolute obedience" to her husband (Yuasa 1930: 12). In short, the wife did not have to think for herself. Her task was to believe and follow the path revealed to her by her religious leader. The reasons for Hitonomichi's idealization of the couple can be seen in terms of its historical background — urbanization and the spread of the nuclear family in the cities — during the Taishō era (1912-1926). In contrast to the Omoto sect that attracted a large rural following during the Meiji period (1868-1912), Hitonomichi grew rapidly after 1931, with the nuclear family as the basic organizational unit. The majority of the believers came from a class of small shop owners, white-collar workers, and the owners of small factories. Home-based businesses, in particular, relied on cooperation between the couple as idealized by Hitonomichi.

Many of Hitonomichi's activities and religious practices found their basis in the couple as a unit. Couples, for example, were supposed to practice *ofurikae*, the transfer of religious duty to the religious leader, and *omichibiki*, guidance by the religious leader. Husbands commonly accompanied their wives to maternity and childcare classes. (*Hitonomichi*, January 1934: 156) Stressing the importance of the couple was a way to assure the stability of the household. In a wider social context, Hitonomichi's model of the perfect couple can be related to the concept of loyalty to the Emperor (*chū*) and filial devotion to one's parents (*kō*). Naturally, "absolute obedience" was not only limited to the couple. Citizens had to be obedient to the Emperor, children to their parents, younger siblings to older siblings, and employees to employers. (Misawa 1928: 9) "Absolute obedience" was part of a "cosmic contract" that secured social stability.

A wife's obedience to her husband as the foundation of the *ie* (household) was extended to include the relations between parents and children, and the Emperor and his citizens. Hitonomichi interpreted the state as a "family," and referred to it as *soson-isshin*, a term that defined the existence between the minds of ancestors and their descendants (Ikeda 1977: 585). This concept does not feature prominently, however, in the sect's magazines.

The sect taught that devoting oneself to one's work and one's family business contributed to the good of society and the nation. This simple teaching increased Hitonomichi's popularity. At the same time, it helps explain why Hitonomichi's believers remained rather indifferent to the Emperor, in spite of the stress that the religious doctrines put on this concept.

PL Kyōdan's Way of Explaining "The Couple" and "The Wife"

The year after Hitonomichi Kyōdan's dissolution in 1937, Miki Tokuharu died. Missionary

leaders, including Tokuharu's eldest son, Tokuchika, were arrested and prosecuted. Following the war, Tokuchika was released and absolved of his "crimes." In 1946, he founded PL Kyôdan.

In 1947, PL Kyôdan's religious doctrines were set forth under the title "The Guiding Principles of PL" (*PL shoseikun*). They included a total of 21 articles, that centered around the doctrine "Life is art" (*jinsei wa geijutsu de aru*) which Tokuchika created (Numata 1979:197). The meaning of "art" came from the teachings of Hitonomichi Kyôdan where the "art of life" meant ridding oneself of the traces of an "ego" (*jiga*), but expressing one's individuality (*kosei*) (Ikeda 1971:266). PL Kyôdan put particular emphasis on learning to express oneself. This came from the belief that through self-expression a person's worries would vanish and one could live a happy life. This is reflected in article 4 of the Guiding Principles: "If I don't express myself, I will suffer." Even if one's "ego came out," it was considered better than not expressing oneself (Kawashima 1991:90).

The teachings of PL Kyôdan reflect the democratic ideal of the post-war era. Instead of Hitonomichi's concept of the state as a family headed by the Emperor, PL Kyôdan stressed harmony in everyday human relationships as the basis for peace between people and nations (Ikeda 1971: 269; Kawashima 1991: 254-67). Among the main religious practices offered by the organization's missionaries for believers is personal guidance, and the explanations, *kaisetsu*, of the divine teachings (*mioshie*). Similar to the practice of religious guidance or *omichibiki* in the Hitonomichi sect, the PL Kyôdan missionaries listen to the sorrows of their followers and provide personal guidance based on the "explanations." Thus, they exert a kind of divine authority on their believers. The head of the organization also provides practical support for followers, such as offering advice on employment services or helping in finding marriage partners (*PL Fujin* October 1967: 48).

PL Kyôdan's model of the perfect couple is expressed in the phrase "husband and wife are of one flesh" (*fûfu ittai*) (Miki 1970: 208). The sect rejects the idea of a separate existence for husband and wife. Ideally, both spouses should give up their own personal viewpoints. The couple is considered the right and left half of a single unit. Respect for oneself means respect for the partner. Sexual relations between a husband and wife conform to a "celebration of the couple" (*fûfu no shiki*), and the wife is expected to engage positively in the sexual act with her husband:

Just as food is necessary for the body's survival, sex sustains the couple and is important for its growth. A couple's sex life becomes the barometer for whether the husband and wife are living harmonious and full married lives. It would be wrong, of course, to go beyond the limit of one's body, but as long as one keeps within the bounds of reason, sex should not be neglected. Giving themselves to each other is an important celebration through which husband and wife are united in body and mind (Miki 1970: 176).

The importance of the couple, however, is more than bearing children. The couple manages the household assets, maintains the husband's social position, molds the children's character with a look to the future, and considers their fates (*PL fujin* November 1968:40). The strong focus on the couple resulted in PL Kyôdan's emphasis on the importance of the wife's role. But the belief that "husband and wife are of one flesh" also connotes a wife's subservience to her husband:

In the case of men, when they are expressing love, that is, when they actually are loving their partners, a deeper love results. In women, on the other hand, to love somebody represents their wish to be loved by that person.... [Therefore,] first, women have to satisfy their partners' desires.... The best way to express love for the purpose of being loved (*aisareru ai*) is to find out what men want. To treat one's partner according to what one thinks he may like, going only by one's own feelings, without considering his state of mind, is to love him, but will not lead to being loved by him. (Kawashima 1991: 242-43)

Thus, the ideal wife is always considerate of her husband's feelings and his work, and she strives to satisfy him.

According to the Hitonomichi philosophy, obedience meant to follow, in the strict sense. But in PL Kyôdan's post-war teachings, it, too, included expressing one's own thoughts. It is essential for a couple to talk with each other and not hide their thoughts. (PL Kyôdan 1979: 126) Nevertheless, here, too, the overall stress is on the ideal wife who follows her husband. If the husband falls ill or has an accident, for example, this is understood as a divine message or a *mishirase*. The husband must respond to the divine message by obtaining a *mioshie* and putting its teachings into practice. The organization then advises the wife to obtain a *mioshie* for herself. Since the wife enjoys the power of shadow (*yin*), she can help her husband resolve his *mishirase*. Even though the divine message of a *mishirase* concerns the husband's feelings and actions, it is a problem for both wife and husband to tackle together. Because a couple is like one body, they must both apologize to the Gods to obtain help for the husband (*PL fujin* August 1964: 20-30). The accounts of believers' personal experiences published in the organization's magazines, however, do not show that the same process holds true for women as for men. First, there are fewer accounts of men's personal experiences. And no mention is made of men who regard their wives' *mishirase* as their own, or as a problem the couple should resolve together.

Because the main principle of the organization is "life is art," one's personality is defined as "the expression of the person." This is in keeping with gender-specific ideals. Men ideally express "love," while women ideally express "being loved" (Miki 1970: 48-81). In other words, a wife's personality comes out through the love she receives from her husband. The wife should not passively accept this love, but rather show that it accords with her own will. What this means is that a woman not only expresses herself in her function as a "wife," but also in

her role as a “wife” which is closely connected to her personality.

The mutual expression of the self by the couple is the basis for all human relations. The daily relationship between a husband and wife is an exercise in self-control, and it is the foundation for relationships with other people and wider society (Kawashima 1984: 251). Indeed, everything that transpires in society is perceived as material for self-expression, and, thus, should not be opposed. One of the organization’s principles states: “All is a mirror” (*Jinkun*, Article 15). This encompasses the idea that whatever happens is a reflection of the person and should not be criticized or rejected. If the couple succeeds in achieving self-control, then peace will exist in the family. Peace in the family translates into world peace, and shows the significance women have as wives (Kawashima 1984: 261-2).

PL Kyôdan’s ideal couple resembles the prototypical couple Hitonomichi envisioned. The only difference is that Hitonomichi called the couple the foundation of the *ie*. This view no longer dominates the teachings of PL Kyôdan. Rather, the home that the couple creates together is ultimately linked to world peace. If the couple is of one heart, peace will naturally be present in the home.

The Role of the Mother

So far we have explored the idea of a perfect wife in the teachings of PL Kyôdan and its predecessor, the prewar Hitonomichi sect. When PL Kyôdan’s women’s magazine *PL fujin* first came out, the effects of the war were still present. Many female believers worked in family businesses. Others, whose husbands were killed in the war, operated their own businesses. The number of white-collar workers (*sararîman*) increased. Moreover, dual income families became more common. These changes affected the life styles of many believers. The large number of self-employed believers of the Hitonomichi sect were steadily being replaced by white-collar workers who belonged to PL Kyôdan (*PL fujin* 1964.12: 74). The content of the magazine clearly reflects these social changes.

One general effect of these shifts in employment was the new emphasis in Japanese society on the division of domestic and public roles for husband and wife. The wife assumed main responsibility for the home and the children’s education. The 1960s also saw the beginning of a surge in academic competition as the basis for a successful career. The mother’s role as educator became even more important. The term *kyôiku mama*, a mother who persistently pushes her children to study, gained prominence (Jinnai 1994: 274). When birth rates began to drop, PL Kyôdan began to take an interest in children. Many believers wanted to give their only child the best education possible. Others worried whether what they were doing for their child’s education would prove sufficient. The organization responded by publishing special editions of their magazine featuring different aspects of raising children. The titles included “The art of child care” (*PL fujin*, January 1964–1965 March 1967), “From conception to birth” (July 1965), “The education of babies” (May 1966), and “Refined motherly love” (November

1968). Detailed advice was offered on subjects from breastfeeding to discipline. With the increasing number of nuclear families, *PL fujin* served as a manual on child rearing for urban women. Articles on child care continued to increase, even though the sect supported the principles inherited from Hitonomichi: Namely, that children were “Children of the Gods” and acted as “the parents’ mirror,” and parents should refrain from forming overly close ties with their children.

The sect also responded in other ways to the new focus on children. When a woman was four months pregnant, for example, the organization recommended that she receive a *mioshie* for the birth. It explained that the mother’s attitude exerted an influence on the child and that pre-natal care was most important (August 1965). The founder of the sect, Tokuchika, is even said to have made an effort to procure American baby food and American manuals on how to care for babies when the present leader of the sect, Miki Takahito, was a baby (April 1963). Hitonomichi’s founder, Tokuharu, believed that “Strict discipline destroys the child’s personality, and forces the child into a mold” (Miki 1973: 270). No doubt, PL Kyôdan’s new emphasis on childcare was a response to the changed social circumstances and the demands from its followers. In the beginning, most articles in the magazine gave advice about children under 13 years of age, particularly on babies and toddlers, supposedly before the emergence of the “ego.” Eventually, the age range widened and articles on children sitting for exams often appeared in the magazines.

Female believers became more and more active in child-rearing groups and their children’s education. PL Kyôdan even invited non-members to participate in these activities. Still, the sect continued to stress the role of women as wives. This raises the question how PL Kyôdan linked the increasingly important role of the mother to its traditional focus on the role of the woman as a wife. Even if there were children, the mother’s relationship with her husband was considered more important than her relationship with her children:

Mrs. S’s motive for applying for a *mioshie* was her eldest son’s (9 years old) *mishirase* (in this case, unaccountable headaches).... The *mioshie* she received read: “Restore your conjugal relations from the core!” At first, she did not understand the meaning of this *mioshie*, but as a result of her church leader’s advice and her own consideration of the problem, the attitude she had been maintaining toward her husband suddenly came to mind.

For instance, when Mrs. S’s husband said, “Let’s go out for the evening,” she would automatically think of her son who was preparing for an examination. She came to realize that in their daily life such small emotional differences had accumulated like sediment. From then on, she made it her objective not to oppose her husband, no matter what. (“Uteba hibiku tsuma ni natta toki” 1967)

That is not to say that PL Kyôdan did not emphasize the role of the mother. Since children were considered “the parents’ mirror,” the couple’s present situation, as well as their past feelings and actions, were reflected through their children. Children also mirrored the feelings and actions of their forebears (PL Kyôdan 1979: 154). In the prewar teachings of Hitonomichi Kyôdan, slogans like “ancestor and descendants are one body” (Miki 1973: 37) and “the flow of the family” expressed these ideas (Miki: 47).

PL Kyôdan’s emphasis on the role of the mother can be interpreted as an elaboration of Hitonomichi’s teachings on family succession. Both husband and wife’s ancestors are among the spirits enshrined and worshipped in the family. Should a negative influence from one’s ancestors become evident in the children, it was regarded as the couple’s problem. If the couple improved their relationship, the problem could be resolved (Miki: 227). Once again, the focus is on the behavior of the couple.

Conclusion

PL Kyôdan’s teachings center on the couple. Of primary importance for a woman is her role as “wife.” During the period of high economic growth, the role of the “mother” also received attention. The atmosphere of postwar democracy finds expression in PL Kyôdan’s emphasis on “expressing oneself” and “one’s personality.” For a woman, this implies a close connection between her personality and her role as a wife. On the other hand, once a woman becomes a mother, she strengthens her relationship with her husband through her children. She becomes the link between the family’s ancestors and its descendants. These two elements are brought together in a gender-specific role model for female believers. PL Kyôdan revived the beliefs of its predecessor Hitonomichi. At the same time, the sect managed to respond to the demands of the time, which served to reinforce its followers’ faith in the sect.

In Japanese society today we see a trend towards more individualistic life styles and changes in the family structure. Is a sect like PL Kyôdan, with its gender-specific role models and focus on preserving the family, equipped to cope with these challenges? PL Kyôdan presently is making an attempt to respond to changes in the family, in spite of its gender-specific definitions of “men’s expression” and “women’s expression.”⁵ How do contemporary female believers respond to contradictory gender roles? Religions have the ability to explain such discrepancies. How Japan’s new religions continue to do this will be the subject of further research.

NOTES

- 1 Previous studies on this subject have been carried out by Hino (1988, 1990), Usui (1991), Ishiwata and Watanabe (1995).
- 2 These figures were obtained from the chief of the liaison section of PL Kyôdan, Mr. Takashi Kôno, whom I interviewed at the PL headquarters on August 22, 1992.
- 3 In this paper, I view high economic growth to last from 1955 to 1973. Slightly differing views of

periodization exist.

- 4 Hītonomichi based its teachings on the Kyōiku chokugo, which was promulgated in 1890 and became one of the most fundamental and influential ideological texts in prewar Japan. This led to Hītonomichi's suppression, since it was charged with misinterpreting the Emperor's words. Jinkun Nijūichi kajō (hereafter referred to as Jinkun) and Uchū no gensoku (hereafter referred to as Gensoku) are included in the sources compiled by Ikeda (1977).
- 5 Today the "way of the wife" (*tsuma no michi*) is no longer mandatory for the followers of PL Kyōdan, but several women interviewed answered that they felt they had a divine obligation to follow the "way of the wife." Presently, PL Kyōdan's activities revolve around courses on child care and circles devoted to tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, and karaoke. While the "way of the wife" has lost its importance, the sect's activities have increased. This is probably the result of a generation change in the religious leadership and the introduction of a new religious philosophy.

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