

IMAGES OF WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN PL KYÔDAN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

USUI Atsuko

Ishiwata Yoshimi's paper examines the ways in which one of Japan's "new religious sects," PL Kyôdan (Perfect Liberty Sect), has accommodated and accorded meaning to the transformations that have occurred in the family in Japan. Ishiwata argues that PL Kyôdan is a sect that has managed to retain much of the system of religious teachings that it held to before the war as the Hitonomichi Kyôdan (Way of Humanity Sect), but also made adjustments in order to keep pace with the times. The chief merit of Ishiwata's paper lies in its correct indication of this dual aspect of the sect's teachings. As someone with similar research interests, I would like to make the following points with a view to furthering scholarly discussion in the future.

1) Firstly, the theme of this paper, the new religions' views concerning the family and relations between the sexes, is one that is still new as a subject of research. The broader topic of the transformation undergone by these new religious sects in response to social changes is not in itself new (these new sects tend to respond to social changes much more quickly than older, more well-established Buddhist or Shinto religious sects), but little attention has been paid to changing views concerning the marital relationship and gender roles. However, the views concerning these subjects give an idea of the principles behind people's concrete behavior in daily life as well as people's mentality. From this we get a clearer picture of the kind of salvation sought by sect believers, and thus of the part played by Japan's new religions in larger society. In this sense, Ishiwata's paper provides an extremely valid focus of analysis, and we can look forward to similar kinds of research regarding other religious groups. Her account of PL Kyôdan provides important data, and shows the way for more comparative analysis in the future.

2) In setting the time period for her analysis as the period of high economic growth in the 1960s, Ishiwata focuses on two main aspects: the change in the structure of the family, that is to say the transformation of the *ie* into the nuclear family; and the rise of concern for proper child-rearing and education, and the influence that these things had on the teachings of PL Kyôdan.

The changes that took place in family structure with the revisions in the Civil Code have often been seen as dramatic: but how dramatic were they really, in terms of how average people saw their lives? This is a question that Ishiwata addresses, and her analysis shows that, as far as this sect was concerned, the change from Hitonomichi to Perfect Liberty was not all that great. One reason may be that even before the war many of the sect's believers were residents of urban areas where a large percentage of families was already nuclear.

The second half of the paper consists of a discussion of the stress on the importance of the role of women as wives in PL Kyôdan. The nuclearization of the family brought about the disappearance of networks previously available for help in child rearing, and religious sects took over many aspects of this role. Because of this, the role of women basically went unaffected. Ishiwata concludes that women's identities as "wives" remained stronger than their identities as "mothers."

However, this raises questions: Why did PL Kyôdan show so much concern with relations between the husband and the wife? And why did the sect put so much emphasis on the role of the wife? Surely the fact that this sect laid such stress on the relationship between husband and wife before the war (as Hitonomichi Kyôdan), when there was so much promotion of the role of mother for women in state education, makes it rather unique. But *why* did it do this?

No doubt the reasons are connected with disparities between views regarding gender in larger society and views regarding gender in the religion. As long as a religion functions within society, its views do not necessarily differ markedly from those of the larger society: indeed, numerous religious sects have teachings that hardly differ at all from commonly held views. But if there are differences, the question naturally arises as to where exactly those differences lie.

As Ishiwata points out, PL Kyôdan's views symbolize their particular world-view, which relates to the way in which the sect aims to realize world salvation. The way in which a religion chooses to give meaning to the world is not necessarily confined to intellectual cognizance: it may include value judgements and purposeful decisions relating to how one should live one's life; and it may also contain emotional and practical motivating power. The way sex in PL Kyôdan is referred to as a "marital ceremony" and viewed as a "sacred rite" exemplifies one such re-interpretation. However, no such ordering can be detected between parents and children. One finds these kinds of world-views in other religious groups besides PL Kyôdan, but the question still remains: Why does PL Kyôdan pay such particular attention to spousal relations? This question needs further research.

3) Ishiwata's paper sets its time frame in Japan's period of high economic growth. This is the period that saw the establishment of the system whereby men worked outside the home while women's duty was to remain at home and look after the children. Even though the war was over, men now had to participate in a new kind of battle, the struggle of economic competition, as "company samurai," and women were still playing the role they had always had of "defending the home front." In other words, despite the tremendous changes that appeared to have taken place between the prewar and postwar periods, in fact, life patterns and the family relations supporting them had not changed all that much. PL Kyôdan's views concerning the married couple can perhaps be said to demonstrate this fact.

Now, in recent years we have seen a questioning of this gendered division of labor in the marital relationship. Much criticism has been made by feminism, for example, of the assumptions about the immutability of women's sexual role, and the numerous deleterious effects

brought about by the entrenchment of such a labor division. Nowadays, various theories are being posed regarding the family and spousal relations; revisions are being considered of the system of family registers (*koseki seido*), for example, and health insurance. All this is an indication that the family and, indeed, the spousal unit in Japan are undergoing yet another period of change. How will PL Kyôdan react to these kinds of changes? Will its teachings still have anything to attract believers? Such issues are mentioned in this paper as topics for future research, but these are the pressing questions, and they should be dealt with now.

4) The main focus of discussion in this paper is on the PL Kyôdan's views regarding husbands and wives, but this is a theme that raises questions that could surely be developed well beyond the narrow issue. I would like to indicate some issues not brought up in Ishiwata's paper that could perhaps be developed in the future along a broad theme of "Religion and Gender."

First of all, there must be some analysis of gender power structure. Even if the basic unit in the family is the marital one, this does not mean that the husband and wife are "equal." A situation where references are made overwhelmingly to the wives, and where even the husband's problems become problems that a wife has to deal with is a situation of "gender imbalance." Surely some indication of this power structure is necessary. Further, surely some observation should be made that this reflects a gender imbalance in the religious sect as a whole.

We are told that PL Kyôdan emphasizes the importance of "self-expression," "expression of the individual" and "self-willed decisions." And yet sect members are continually taught to aim for harmony in a context of relations with other people. Is such "self-expression" possible, in fact, in a situation where there are repeated injunctions to aim for harmony in relations with other people because this will lead to peace in society, and where criticism and confrontation are avoided? An extremely idiosyncratic view of what constitutes the self, and what constitutes the world, is at work here. Some indication is necessary of what it means for women, in particular, to be placed in these sort of contradictory circumstances. In such a situation, surely no woman can make a clear distinction between her roles as wife and mother: what actually happens is that she is required to look after the home in either and both capacities as the need arises.

In the pre-war period, this supported the emperor system that saw the state as one large family, and became linked with emperor worship. For all that, PL Kyôdan puts forth its slogan of "world peace;" surely the fact that its basic order remains unchanged in this regard even after the war is a grave cause for concern. Views on the marital relationship by no means depend solely on the couple concerned; neither are ideas concerning the wife's role relevant only to married women. Views concerning the marital relationship highlight problems in relations in society at large, as well as problems in the structure of authority. More emphasis should be given to these issues.

5) My final comments concern the question of religion and publications directed toward

women. In Ishiwata's attempt to deduce this sect's world-view and its views on the family, she focuses her analysis on its publications. This is a valid tool, since the influence exerted by this sect on its believers through its pamphlets and newspapers is considerable. At first sight, religion seems difficult to reconcile with "information," perhaps because religion tends to have a conservative image and is assumed to place most emphasis on one-to-one guidance and proselytization. In fact, however, since transmission of information is considered vitally important, religious groups have been remarkably quick to use the latest forms of media, including women's magazines. One is often amazed during the course of field-work at the way all the religions, both new and old, make free use of various media. At present, predominant use is still made of magazines; but the larger religious groups have long been engaged in radio and television broadcasting, making up their own programs and carrying live shows by satellite. Indeed, the Internet also becomes one means of their transmission of information. In this media age, research into the theme of religious groups and information, and the particular role of women within this, is only just beginning.

Women have always been the objects and targets of representation in religion, and in the pictures or stories of religious magazines. Many if not most of the religious sects, especially those that place a strong emphasis on information, have publications directed toward women. Some even publish separate magazines for unmarried and married women; even those that do not direct magazines specifically toward women readers will often have a special "Women's Page." One thing we must realize, however, is that none of these actually reflect the reality of the circumstances that direct women's lives; neither do they even represent an ideology that relates to the circumstances that the women are placed in. Rather, it is in the texts of these magazines that we find an ideology relating to women being constructed, and social relations being created. It is thus in the particular forms of these texts' narratives — narratives that both direct themselves toward women readers and aim to represent them — that we gain a limited idea of what is going on in the course of that construction of meaning, and thus something of what is actually going on in the same way in the world outside. Analysis of media and information in religions from the viewpoint of gender is an extremely important task not only for research into religions, but also as a means of analysis of social relations and the state.