

## The Status Elevation Process of Sōtō Sect Nuns In Modern Japan

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### INTRODUCTION

In Buddhist dogma, women are regarded as being impure, having a more sinful karma than men, and being unable to attain Buddhahood. Many Buddhist scriptures describe women as filled with evil desires and as being the most harmful obstacles to men who are striving to attain enlightenment. Men should always avoid women. One scripture says that if you see a woman, you will lose the virtue in your eyes and that seeing a snake is far better than seeing women.

Even nuns, who shunned all worldly attachments, were segregated from and had heavier precepts than monks. Two hundred and fifty precepts were imposed on monks while the figure for nuns was five hundred. In addition to these precepts, there were eight laws, called the *Hakkeikai*, which were written especially for nuns and placed them under the control of monastic orders. According to the law, no matter how long a nun had been in service, she was required to obey and worship even those monks who had taken the tonsure only the day before. Nuns were not permitted to hold the special long meditation (*ango*) without the presence of monks. Nuns were forced to ask a monastic order to send them a preacher twice a month. Nuns were not allowed to say anything about any monk's sin or mistake, but monks could condemn those of nuns. Nuns were not allowed to slander monks, and nuns who violated the precepts had to repent and be confined for fifteen days, a period twice as long as that required for monks.

The status of nuns was determined not only by Buddhist

dogma, but also by general views of women in society. In addition to the discriminatory attitude toward women in the scriptures, for more than one thousand years, until 1873, none of the sacred places and mountains in Japan allowed women.

In this paper I will describe the elevation of status and the modern Japanese equality movements for nuns of the Sōtō sect, which has been the largest Zen Buddhist sect in Japan. Focusing on the changes in Sōtō law, I will analyze the relation these have to the waves of feminism and modernization that have swept through Japanese society.

#### NUNS IN THE MEIJI ERA

The Sōtō sect, which currently has two head temples and fifteen thousand branch temples, was founded by Zen Master Dōgen in the 13th century. Dōgen was exceptionally understanding of women and affirmed the possibility of Buddhahood for women. In his best known work, the *Shōbō genzō* ("The eye of the true law"), he criticized the negative attitudes toward women held by the many monks who would prevent women from gaining access to them or to sacred places. He also emphasized the equality of men and women in attaining Buddhahood.

But these ideas and beliefs were not transmitted to his pupils. His view on women disappeared in the process of the expansion of the Sōtō school, and the head temples in the mountain refused admission to women until the Meiji era. This discriminatory policy of Zen Buddhism was strengthened and institutionalized under the religious control of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 17th century.

During the three hundred years of feudalism in the Tokugawa era—a period when the status of women was at its lowest point in all of Japanese history—nuns were located at the bottom of the religious system. As was the case in other sects, the nuns of the Sōtō sect were allowed to live only in hermitages, even though the temple in their area might have been unhabited and the people in need of a priest. Nuns were not permitted to hold the Zen retreat

*ango*—regarded by the Sōtō sect as its most important religious activity—by themselves, and were not allowed to attend retreats held by monks at the temple.

Nuns did not have the right to perform the initiation ceremony to the Buddhist priesthood for young nuns, which meant that the nuns could not become formal Zen masters. No matter how long nuns might have trained their successors, they still had to ask a priest from the temple to perform the ceremony, and he became the novice's nominal teacher. Nor were nuns allowed to receive the unbroken line of teacher and pupil from Dōgen, as a true Zen Buddhist.

In those days only priests at temples on the *hōchi* (the middle of three ranks of Sōtō temples) level or above were qualified to perform funeral services, which prevented nuns from having access to a major source of income, and thus they had no opportunity to achieve economic stability. Nuns had to support themselves by assisting priests at funerals and memorial services by chanting sutras as an accompanist, or by washing dishes and clothes for priests.

The color of monks' clothing was changed when a higher rank was attained, but nuns' clothes were black, which was the color of the novice (*Sōtō-shū nisō shi*, pp. 315-326) throughout their lives. This second class citizenship held by nuns during the feudal period remained unchanged through the modern age of Meiji, in spite of the fact that the government instituted many radical policies in the world of religion.

Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan has greatly modernized and industrialized, and many reformations have taken place in the field of religion. In 1872 the Meiji government issued a law allowing priests to eat meat, get married, and have free choice of tonsure, and in 1873 the same policies were adapted for nuns. This law shocked Buddhist society, and many sect leaders announced their disagreement, demanding its revocation. The government's answer was that the issue could not be judged as a matter of national law but was instead religious law, in which the

government should not interfere, and the Meiji government left the decision with the individual Buddhist sects. At the same time the prohibition of women from sacred places was abolished (Umeda, 1971).

The issues of meat and matrimony had different impacts on the lives of priests and nuns. Matrimony was prohibited in the Meiji era by the Sōtō law, but many priests married anyway (although most of them were unregistered), and by the end of the 19th century about half of the priests were married. On the other hand, there were neither records nor examples of nuns marrying, a fact which shows that nuns with unshaven heads who married were not defined as nuns by the society at large, and that their marriage meant a return to the secular world. The solving of the issues of meat and matrimony made the priesthood one of the social professions, a fact which enabled priests to combine their religious and daily lives with a wife and children. But nunhood was considered by more traditional standards, and nuns have maintained their ascetic life styles until now.

According to Japanese government statistics from the Meiji era, ten percent of all Buddhist clergy was nuns, and this ratio is reflected in the make up of the Sōtō sect. In 1891 about two thousand nuns were registered in the Sōtō sect. In 1935 the number of nuns increased to 2,382, while the number of priests was 28,093, which was the same ratio found in the Meiji era (*Bukkyō nenkan* 1935).

The status of nuns in the Sōtō sect did not change in the Meiji era. An important reason for this low status was that nuns lacked educational background, both within the religious body and in the society in general. Zen Buddhist schools were only open to monks, and society was indifferent to women's education. There were many illiterate nuns who learned to chant sutras by ear.

The compulsory education policy of the Meiji government, which made elementary education obligatory for all children, gradually improved the position of women. Changes in the world of nuns took place first in the field

of education. In 1902 the first new Sōtō provision for nuns since the Meiji Restoration passed the sect's assembly. This act established three schools which had both one year preparatory and three year regular courses, in which the nuns could study both basic Sōtō dogma and general areas such as history, geography, mathematics, etiquette and sewing (*Sōtō shū nisō shi*, pp.402-412). This provision aimed at giving nuns a general cultural education and cultivation. The level of the school was far below that for monks, who had both a university and special monasteries for meditation.

After the provision was issued, schools for nuns were established in Aichi, Toyama and Niigata prefectures between 1903 and 1907. This quick response was the result of the concentrated activities of nuns who had worked for higher education. (The Sōtō administration authorized three private schools after the issue.) During the Meiji era there were no other notable activities for nuns. But among the nuns who studied at these schools were some who were very active and later became leaders in the equality movement, working to organize other nuns.

#### NUNS FROM 1912 TO 1944

During the Taishō era (1912-1925) nuns lived in a world influenced by a society which was swept by waves of democracy and liberal theories. Awakened by social trends such as feminism and the suffrage movement, the consciousness of nuns went up, and several equality movements were launched. In 1924 the first Sōtō sect Nuns' Conference ever was held at Sōjiji Temple on the six hundredth anniversary of Sōtō's founder Dōgen's trip to China. The three hundred nuns who assembled at that time submitted a petition containing the following statements to the Sōtō administration:

1. Nuns have a duty to cultivate their own self-belief and enlighten the people.
2. Nuns have a right to a convent for Zen meditation.

3. Nuns deserve suffrage in the Sōtō sect.
4. Nuns have a right to perform initiation ceremonies for nun pupils.
5. Nuns have a right to serve as missionaries (*Sōtō shū nisō shi*, pp.402-412).

In 1930 a second Nuns' Meeting was held at Eihei-ji. This conference, which seems to have been influenced by the prevailing "Taishō democracy," issued new demands for equality. Its manifesto pointed out the prevailing liberalism in society and appealed for a new awareness of nuns, who continued to be suppressed by the world of Buddhism. Three new points were added to the five made by the first meeting:

1. The right to transfer the orthodox line from teacher to pupil.
2. The opening of a special seminar on Sōtō doctrine for nuns.
3. The right of nuns to become priests at Hōchi level temples.

In 1937 a third meeting was held, after which a petition was sent to the Sōtō administration every year; the nuns' demands became more concrete as time passed (*Sōtō shū nisō shi*, pp.440-441). But these movements were not strong enough to make the Nuns Organization an effective pressure group.

The majority opinion concerning nuns held by the priests of the Sōtō sect was the "division of labor" theory, according to which monks should learn the scriptures and preach, while nuns should take care of women and children like benevolent mothers. A typical opinion is that found in the preface of the 1915 issue of *Jalin*, a journal published once a year at the Kansai Nuns School. The author, a priest named Kondō, who was the principal of the school, pointed out three morals that innately belonged to women: obedience, patience and precision. He said the mission of nuns was to go back to their temple after school and guide women, to teach them sewing, the

tea ceremony and flower arrangement, and to educate them to become good wives and wise mothers. He emphasized these three morals and criticized the "new women" who were the topics of much of the journalism during the Taishō era (Kondō 1915, pp.1-2).

The most negative opinion toward nuns denied their existence altogether, holding that the most healthy and favorable life for women was to marry and bear children. People who held this opinion regarded the celibacy of nuns as a consequence of some unexpected choice of life (Furukawa 1938, pp.69-77). The opinion reflected a contemporary view that the woman's place was at home, and her role was to bear children and to serve her family. In the Buddhist world the status of nuns was considered secondary, and nuns were not accepted as independent priests.

The priest Den, a teacher at the Kansai Nuns' School, pointed out five problems in the nuns' world:

1. A general women's problem: The Sōtō sect should elevate the status of nuns and change the attitudes of the priests.
2. A humanitarian problem: Reconsider the nun's extreme asceticism.
3. A social problem: Eliminate nuns' alienation from society and from women's roles such as home making and infant rearing.
4. An educational problem: Raise the educational standards of nuns by increasing their financial support.<sup>1</sup>
5. A religious problem: reconsider the bachelorhood of nuns, as had been done for priests (Den 1913, pp.6-8).

Den finally emphasized the necessity of understanding on the part of priests and the society for resolution of nuns' problems. His sympathetic opinion was a minority in

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1. The Sōtō sect spent 600 yen yearly per nun and 180,000 yen per priest, at pre-war currency values.

the Sōtō sect, however, as the majority of the priests saw nothing wrong in the miserable situation of nuns.

In *Jolin* 5 the nun Kuga Kanshū criticized the indifferent attitude of the Sōtō administration, which belittled nuns, giving them no educational opportunities. She indicated that nuns were handicapped by the fact that they had to support themselves without any stable financial source, as compared with priests at Hōchi level temples who had regular parishioners. She also criticized the general attitude toward women in society, and conservative priests who thought nuns with a higher education would become conceited and depraved in terms of traditional moral attitudes such as obedience and modesty (Kuga 1916, pp.18-19).

In 1923 the first independent article on nuns appeared in Sōtō law. This bestowed the title of Shūso and Oshō upon nuns. But it did not mention any rights these titles would carry, although the monks with the rank of Oshō were allowed to run Hōchi level temples. In 1929 a new article was issued which defined "nun teachers." The Sōtō sect gave the title of "nun teacher" (Ama Kyōshi) to those who had graduated from nuns school, and "Ama Kyōshi-ho," a higher level, to these with fifteen years experience as a nun, but these were titles only, and carried no practical guarantees within the Sōtō sect.

As educational standards went up, the academic field in the Sōtō sect was gradually opened to nuns, and in 1924 Komazawa University, a Sōtō university, permitted nuns to enter as auditors. Five nuns, including Kojima Kendō, a pioneer in the nun liberation movements, attended lectures.

Apart from the inconsistent nuns' meetings and several gains in the education, nuns realized but few advances during the "liberal" period in modern Japanese history. Soon after the Taishō era, society became militarized and free-

There was also a big gap in the consciousness between nuns in the countryside and their younger and better educated sisters in the cities. Nuns had to wait until three conditions necessary for equality were realized. These

proved to be organization (the Sōtō Nuns Organization); a devoted leader (Nun Kojima Kendō), and favorable social conditions (the democratization of society brought about by defeat in World War II).

#### EQUALITY AFTER WORLD WAR II (1945-1979)

World War II contributed to the establishment of an organization of nuns. In 1943 a special seminar for training nuns was held in Tokyo by the Sōtō sect administration. Its goal was to elevate the patriotism of nuns, so they would cooperate with the war. About thirty representative nuns assembled from all over Japan, and were informed that three thousand nuns were registered in Sōtō sect. Motivated by hearing this to make an organization, they presented a petition to organize nuns at the end of the three day seminar.

In 1944 they assembled again to found the organization but their activity was concentrated on the war and they did not attempt any movement for equality. The organization was called the "Nuns Organization for Protecting the Nation," and was not connected to the nuns' meetings of the Taishō era in terms of leaders or consciousness. It was mainly concerned with nursing children evacuated from the cities, and lasted until the end of the war in August 1945 (*Sōtō shū nisō shi*, p.416).

When the war came to an end the organization lost its *raison d'être* and was at the point of dissolving. The nun Kojima Kendō, a teacher at the Kansai Nuns' School, devoted herself to transforming the organization into a status elevation movement. After the 1943 seminar, Kojima came back to the Kansai Nuns' School and organized a group of nuns for the war which was assigned by the government to work at a gunpowder factory.

She planned to hold a five day seminar for the group in August of 1945, just before the war ended. In spite of the chaotic situation brought about by defeat, she decided to hold the seminar as a memorial to the people killed in the war. At the seminar she proposed that the organization

should continue to exist even though the war was over. The Sōtō sect president, who attended the memorial, agreed with Kojima's proposal and the bureau was set up in the Tokyo Sōtō office in 1946. Kojima became the first director of organization and started a campaign for enlightening nuns, visiting nunneries all over Japan. She also held meetings at each nuns' school to present four new proposals to improve the status of nuns. These were:

1. Permission for nuns who had graduated from the nuns' schools to enter Komazawa University as formal students.
2. The appointment of nuns as principal of the nuns' schools.
3. The abolition of discrimination in the matter of ceremonies, qualifications of teachers, temples and suffrage.
4. Establishment of a special convent for nuns to practice Zen meditation.

The points were presented to the Sōtō sect Assembly in 1946. Some were accepted and incorporated in the new Sōtō Constitution (Kojima, interview).

This new constitution apparently continued progress toward equality, but the constitution was not accompanied by any substantial reforms. The nuns' organization had to work twenty years for perfect equality. The new 1946 constitution allowed nuns the following five rights:

1. Equality in the qualifications of teachers and integration of names and titles of monks and nuns.
2. Admitted the existence of certain female Zen masters who had been neglected for a long time. The constitution made it compulsory to record their names in the nuns' career list.
3. Allowed nuns to hold Zen meditation by themselves.
4. Gave voting rights to nuns who were qualified teachers.
5. Allowed nuns to become orthodox pupils in Zen

priest transmission lines (*Sōtō shū nisō shi*, pp.446-448).

The constitution did not, however, grant nuns the right to perform initiation ceremonies, the right to receive the line from a nun teacher, the right to manage temples of the *hōchi* level, or the right to run in elections. Although nun Zen masters were recognized, it was only as a name in a document; they were not allowed to have their own nun pupils. The same was true for their rights as teachers. Nuns did not have the proper monasteries or facilities to train themselves to attain higher status. They could not send a representative to the Sōtō sect Assembly, and very few priests in the Assembly were sympathetic with the idea of nuns's rights.

In 1948 the organization of nuns presented a new petition to the Sōtō Assembly, criticizing it for making only nominal reforms in the status of nuns and not instituting any actual improvements. The Assembly approved the right of nuns to stand for election, and Kojima ran for election to demand equality. Although she was defeated as an alternate candidate in the election, she became an Assembly member in 1951 because of the death of the member from her district.

In the Assembly she spoke out against the continuing unequal situation of nuns, pointing out the imperfections in the new constitution that allowed nuns to receive the line of dogma from male Zen masters but refused to allow them to transmit it. She asked the members to reconsider the unequal situation of nuns from the point of view of Buddhist doctrine, holding that prohibiting nuns to transmit Zen teachings was a violation of the Buddhist precept against killing in that it severed the line of Zen priests, and also that it was against the spirit of Buddha, who admitted nuns to Buddhism, and unfair to restrict the right of succession of the line only to the priests.<sup>2</sup> In October of 1951 nuns

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2. Remarks taken from a stenographic record of the Sōtō assembly.

acquired the rights to perform the initiation ceremony and to transmit the teachings of Zen masters; these enabled them to have their own formal nun pupils and nun Zen masters.

After solving these largest and most fundamental problems, nuns continued their campaign for perfect equality, in which they would be regarded not as secondary or exceptional cases, but as being in the same category as monks. In 1957 the Sōtō council abolished the custom making the Sōtō president the head of the nuns' organization, and Kojima was inaugurated as its head. The organization then became independent.

Under Kojima's leadership, the nuns' organization continued to promote its activities for perfect equality. In 1970 at the 28th Sōtō Assembly, equality was achieved by reforming the law. Nuns were granted the opportunity to become priests of *hōchi* level temples and to hold the long Kessei Ango meditation service by themselves.

Actual equality in education took almost the same length of time. In 1947 three nuns attended the Sōtō educational council to request the repletion of facilities for nuns. In 1949 Komazawa University became coeducational and four nuns entered as formal students. In the same year nuns were allowed to attend the special seminar to become missionaries, and several nuns received training in preaching, which had been regarded as the role of monks. In 1950 four schools for nuns were allowed to function as Zen monasteries for nun teachers at a higher level. Other special seminars and training courses were also gradually opened to nuns, but nuns had to wait until 1968 for permission to build a special monastery to obtain the title of missionary at the highest level. This special monastery was a substitute for that of the head temples, which nuns could not attend. It was the result of a continuous effort of the nuns' organization, which had sent a petition every year since 1953. With this special monastery full equality was achieved in the educational field, and four nuns, including Kojima, were appointed as missionaries.

After achieving its first target, the nuns' organization extended its activities to reform of the Sōtō sect system, consequently criticizing the current system of the sect and the lives of priests. The 1968 meeting of nuns decided to present a petition for the reformation of the sect's election system, focusing on the political conflicts between the two head temples. In 1974 the nuns made election problems one of their five important issues, and declared that nuns would hold a neutral position, outside the whirlpool of political strife.

As women's status in society raised after World War II, the nuns' organization was forced to confront another women's problem, the rise of the power of priests' wives; this touched the most fundamental points of priesthood and definitions of Buddhism.

#### THE WIVES OF PRIESTS

In Buddhist doctrine, matrimony has been traditionally prohibited. In Japan it was also prohibited by civil law until the Meiji era. Evidence that priests did marry, however, can be found in the Yōrei codes of the seventh century, which allowed priests' families to inherit any private fortune (Eguchi 1941, p.276 and p.263). During the Edo period, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, matrimony was severely punished—priests who were found to be married were exiled to an island. Informally, however, many priests lived with women in their temples, and regulations forbidding women to stay at temples were frequently issued by the Tokugawa shogunate.

The freedom of matrimony granted by the Meiji government was quickly accepted by priests. In spite of the formally negative attitude in the Buddhist world, more and more priests married, and by 1912, the end of the Meiji period, half of them had married. Some 80 percent of the priests in the Sōtō sect had married by 1935 (Sōtō sect Manual, 1935). But the status of their wives was very low. Matrimony was prohibited in Sōtō law and most of the marriages were unregistered. Their children were counted

as pupils rather than children in the census. Social condemnation of these temple wives was severe, and because the marriages were unregistered, very few intelligent women with higher education became priests' wives. For those who did, their actual life was not far from that of a maid or a slave. It frequently happened that after the death of a priest his family would be dismissed by the new priest of the temple.

In the Taishō era the protection of priests' families became a topic of discussion in many Buddhist sects. But the family protection law focused mainly on the protection of the successor of the temple and neglected the rights of wives. In 1901 Sōtō law prohibited women from staying at temples, but in 1923 it permitted priests to register their own successors if the successor could take the priest's place within five years of the priest's death. The priest who acted as a substitute priest at the temple until that time was obligated to bring up or to educate the successors (*Shūkyō gyōsei*, 1933). There was no description of wives, but the Sōtō administration had to admit their existence and ask for their cooperation during the war to manage temples in the absence of priests who were drafted and sent to the war.

In 1943, at the same time of the special nuns' seminar in Tokyo, one for wives was held at Eihei-ji, one of the two head temples of the sect. About 120 representatives attended from all over Japan. They received lectures on Sōtō doctrine for three days, the priesthood initiation ceremony, and a Zen Buddhist surplice. In 1944 the Sōtō administration issued a rule on families which allowed wives to enter the priesthood and gave them the title of nun. Wives whose husbands entered military service could receive the lowest nun title, "Ama joza," and could work as assistants if they attended a seminar. Wives who shaved their heads and attended a seminar more than three times were regarded as nun and ranked as nun teachers on the elementary level. The definition of "wives" included those whose marriages were unregistered (Sōtō shūho 123), which

shows us that quite a few common law wives lived in the temples. This proclamation formally guaranteed the lives of the wives, so long as they would consent to run the temple and to educate their children as successors.

The rights of wives, granted for convenience sake during the war, were carried into the new Sōtō constitution of the post war period, where it was written that the wives should be the product of legal marriages. The change, defining wives as married women only, was a reflection of the society, in which equality of men and women became the ruling ideology under the occupation of the United States. And most wives married, following this new proclamation.

Under the influence of the democratic reformation that was taking place in society at large, the Sōtō sect adopted a positive policy to educate wives and protect their rights. One of these was determined to be the right of the wife to veto any possible successor to the temple after the death of her husband. In 1950 the Sōtō sect decided to recommend life insurance for its priests, for the sake of their families and parishioners (*Sōtō shūho* 204). Then in 1954 a duty was imposed on temples to protect the priest's family if he should die.

Any successor was required to win the agreement of the former priest's family in order to be appointed. In 1977 a new set of regulations was issued concerning the wives of priests, which granted them the privileges of a sub-teacher if they successfully completed a correspondence course and a seminar. Priests' wives have gradually become an important force in the enlightenment of parishioners.

As the power of the *jizoku* (priests' wives) grew, these wives soon came into confrontation with the nuns. The nuns' organization submitted a petition in 1968 critical of the Sōtō administration for qualifying the wives as teachers too easily, and demanding that the wives undergo more severe training. The nuns' 1974 meeting took up as one of its topics for discussion the question of *jizoku*, and proposed that wives should undergo a certain period of compul-

sory religious practices at the convent. At the 1976 conference of Sōtō monasteries, the Aichi Convent brought up the jizoku problem and proposed that the sect should give wives a different title, one that would not be accompanied by the taking of the tonsure or undergoing the practice of long meditation (*Otayori* 68).

One of the most serious problems at the convents was that nuns, unlike priests, were unable to pass their temples on to their children, which made the choosing of a successor difficult. The nuns were discouraged by the lax attitude on the part of the Sōtō administration toward the jizoku. They themselves underwent much more severe practices and continued to maintain the Buddhist life style that had been traditional since the religion was introduced to Japan, but priests' wives were granted many of the same privileges they enjoyed without undergoing the same hardships.

The sect administration, from the perspective of the nuns, avoided any definite answer to the nuns, replying only that the jizoku were not permitted to perform the role of priests at funeral or memorial services (*Otayori* 68). At present wives must remain as assistants, and are not allowed to perform priestly functions, but it is possible that their roles will expand as their educational standards get higher. It is possible that wives will become nuns and run temples along with their sons after the deaths of their husbands. They would not be nuns under the old definition, which is a reflection of a society in which the lives of women have become diversified by a greater number of choices.

## CONCLUSION

One of the striking features of Japan's modernization has been the increase of women's activities in society. In the case of the Sōtō nuns, however, this has led to an unexpected antagonism between the celibate nuns and traditional housewives.

The power of women has, in fact, been realized in two contradictory ways. The appearance of nuns who are

widows with children, and the expansion of the roles as assistant of wives of priests have especially worked to confuse the traditional category of single nuns living apart from the secular world.

The current status of nuns gives us two points from which to reconsider present society. The first of these is religious. The maintenance by the nuns of the traditional ascetic Buddhist life constitutes a silent criticism of the lives of priests, who live in the midst of both secular and religious activities; furthermore, we must reconsider the activities of Buddhism itself, which has become what might be called funeral Buddhism.

At the same time, however, the nuns have had to confront the problem of a lack of successors. Until the end of the war young girls became nuns during childhood and were brought up in convents. A decrease in the number of children per household, a general decline in religious beliefs, and an elevation of the standards of living, however, have all worked together to decrease the number of women who wish to become nuns. This problem with successors has become a distressing one for the nuns' organization, which brings us to a second point, the feminist aspect.

The less well defined nature of nuns in Sōtō Buddhism as expressed above urges us to reconsider the attitudes toward men and women, lives of women, home, marriage and profession throughout the entire society. The tonsure, for example, is the symbol of the priesthood, and the shaven head of the nun once proclaimed a renouncement of the secular world and devotion to her profession. For these nuns there were but two choices, whether to live a religious life or give it up and return to the secular world.

Now, however, the difficulty is whether to accept different types of nuns, such as widows with children or nuns who have not shaved their heads; this reflects a widening of choices for women who wish to lead "religious" lives. The many uncertain aspects in the world of nuns is but a reflection of the changing status of women in the present society.

Glossary

ango 安居  
Hakkeikai 八敬戒  
hōchi 法地

jizoku 寺族  
Kessei ango 結制安居  
Shōbō genzō 正法眼藏

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