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Gendering the Shinto Priesthood in Postwar Japan

A dissertation presented

by

Dana Mirsalis

to

The Committee on East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 22, 2022

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Abstract

Dissertation advisor: Helen Hardacre Dana Mirsalis

Gendering the Shinto Priesthood in Postwar Japan

This dissertation uses archival and ethnographic research to examine how the entrance of women into the Shinto priesthood in 1946 precipitated the formation of a gendered priesthood. Although more than 16% of the priesthood is female as of 2020, the rhetoric espoused by Jinja Honchō (the Association of Shinto Shrines) holds that women and men are essentially different, and therefore casts female priests as subpar substitutes for male priests, whose inclusion in the priesthood is precipitated by demographic crisis and a need for familial continuity. Female priests use strategic gender essentialism to reframe this rhetoric as an argument for their inclusion—due to women's essential difference from men, a shrine cannot comprehensively cater to its parishioners without the participation of both male and female priests. I argue that Jinja Honchō's view of gender is homogeneous and based on enduring prewar notions of gender (especially "Good Wife, Wise Mother"), leading to pronouncements about how all women (and therefore all female priests) should behave. This understanding of gender leads Jinja Honchō to restrict women's participation in the priesthood, through gender-segregated regulations and hiring practices, to dissuade "improper" gender expression. However, female priests' experience of gender is much more intersectional and contextually grounded, leading to them constructing a type of femininity that is not only particular to priests but also specific to their local shrine context. Rather than agitating for gender equality via collective action, female priests implement individualized solutions to systemic problems, contributing to the gap between Shinto as it is imagined by Jinja Honchō and as it is practiced within shrine communities.

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Introduction

One day during my fieldwork, I was spending time at Uchida's[1] shrine. Uchida is a lower ranking priest from an "ordinary" family (that is, a family that is *not* a hereditary shrine lineage) at a midsized shrine.[2] During a lull in the office when the rest of the staff was occupied elsewhere, Uchida started scrolling through her email on her phone. She abruptly burst into tears. Alarmed, I asked if she was alright. She explained that she had recently passed the next level of certification as a priest, so she had sent an email to one of her mentors (a male priest), letting him know the good news and thanking him for all his support over the years. Rather than congratulations, he had sent back (in faux-classical Japanese) an invective, scolding her for focusing on rising in the ranks of the priesthood rather than her duty to the Japanese nation as a woman. She should not let her studies get in the way of being a wife and mother, he wrote; women should put the household first. Rather than studying for the next level of certification, she should have been studying how to be a "mother of humanity" (人類の母 *jinrui no haha*).

Uchida was gutted by his response. She respected him greatly, but many of her recent interactions with him had ended in him angrily scolding her. She often thought that he hated her, she confessed. More than his anger, though, she feared that he spoke the truth. She was in her thirties, and under intense pressure to get married from her parents. She loved being a priest, and delighted in picking my brain about Shinto history, but she was terrified that continuing to pursue her chosen path as a priest would mean sacrificing her dreams of a family. She cried for

[1] All names used for interviewees in this dissertation are pseudonyms. In some cases, I have changed minor details of their stories to protect their anonymity. In a very small number of cases, I have used two different pseudonyms for the same person at their request, to section off parts of their story that they feel may particularly imperil their position if they become publicly known.

[2] See chapter 1 for an explanation of what these terms mean.

five or ten minutes, while I tried to make sympathetic noises in Japanese and tell her that she wasn't a failure or a disgrace to the Japanese nation. Eventually, she cried herself out and went to clean herself up before any of the other shrine staff returned.

I start this dissertation with this story because it encapsulates the tensions at the heart of this project. This dissertation examines how the entrance of women to the Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto priesthood in 1946 has precipitated the formation of a gendered priesthood. It considers not only how Jinja Honchō imagines and legislates female priests and their bodies but also how those ideals impact female priests themselves. When women become priests, they must contend not only with a priesthood that is built by and for men but a gender ideology that espouses female priests' inferiority and treats women who enter the priesthood for the "wrong" reasons with suspicion and hostility. Many of these women accept this gender ideology and actively support the ideals of Jinja Honchō, so they must find ways to reinterpret Jinja Honchō's vision to better fit their local shrine communities and their unique life circumstances. This reinterpretation is not without difficulty, as we might guess from Uchida's case, and much of this dissertation is about the friction between Jinja Honchō's ideals and the reality of being a female priest serving in a shrine.

In the remainder of this introduction, I discuss what I mean by a "female priest" and offer a brief overview of the history of female ritualists serving in shrines. I then discuss my methodology and fieldwork before turning to a review of the relevant scholarly literature on the topic as well as my major arguments. I close by laying out the structure of the dissertation and the major arguments of each of its chapters.

What Do You Call a Priest Who Is a Woman?

In this dissertation, I refer to Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto priests who are women as "female priests." This turn of phrase condenses four separate phrases in Japanese—"*joshi shinshoku*" (女子神職), "*josei shinshoku*" (女性神職), "*josei kannushi*" (女性神主), and "*fujin shinshoku*" (婦人神職). The first term is currently the most frequently used within the "shrine world" (神社界 *jinja kai*)—the term that my interlocutors use to refer to the places, people, and institutions under the jurisdiction of or adjacent to Jinja Honchō.[3] The second is mainly used by people outside of the shrine world, although it is sometimes used by people within the shrine world because they find the term "*joshi*" demeaning or because they just like the sound better.[4] The third uses a synonym for the word "priest" and is functionally equivalent to the first two.[5] The fourth has mostly fallen out of use in the past thirty years, although it is still occasionally used. However, there are no strict divisions between usages—discussions of female priests will sometimes include segments wherein the discussants express confusion over what to call them or acknowledge that many terms exist.[6] Within my own fieldwork, I tend to use "*joshi shinshoku*" when talking to people within the shrine world and "*josei shinshoku*" when talking to academics

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[3] The inclusion of shrines that are adjacent to Jinja Honchō is important, as there are several major shrines that are not directly under Jinja Honchō's jurisdiction (such as Meiji Shrine and Yasukuni Shrine) that are nonetheless still considered part of the shrine world. See the discussion of *beppyōsha* in chapter 1. Shrines that are affiliated with Shinto-type New Religious Movements, on the other hand, are usually not considered part of the shrine world.

[4] "*Joshi*" (女子) is not the standard word to refer to women—most sources use "*josei*" (女性) instead. "*Joshi*" might better be translated as "girl"—a term that is uncomfortable to many adult women.
Odaira Mika is one example of a priest and scholar who consistently uses "*josei shinshoku*." See Odaira Mika, *Josei shinshoku no kindai: jingi girei, gyōsei ni okeru saishisha no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2009).

[5] Interestingly, I am not sure I have ever heard anyone use the term "*joshi kannushi*" (女子神主); people both within and outside of the shrine world tend to use "*josei kannushi*" instead.

[6] See, for example, "Zentai tōgi," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 189, 204.

and people outside of the shrine world. When speaking in English, I do not use the term "priestess," as it is a gendered term, unlike the original Japanese terms, which are gendered modifiers mashed onto an (arguably) gender-neutral term.

Female priests should not be mistaken for *miko* (巫女), often called "shrine maidens" or (erroneously) "Shinto priestesses" in English. Female priests, unlike *miko*, must have credentials (神職資格 *shinshoku shikaku*, see chapter 1), whereas *miko* do not need any specific credentials or certification. Female priests should also not be mistaken for *naishōten* (内掌典), female ritualists who serve in the shrines attached to the imperial palace.[7] While some *naishōten* are recruited from female graduates of the Shinto universities (Kokugakuin University in Tokyo and Kōgakkan University in Ise), they do not serve the same roles as priests. Finally, the term "*fujin shinshoku*" should not be confused with the very similar "*shinshoku fujin*" (神職婦人). While the former refers to a female priest, the latter refers to the *wife* of a (male) priest—who may be a priest in her own right, may be uncredentialed but performing the same work as a priest, or may be uncredentialed and not performing any shrine work.

[7] Little academic research on *naishōten* exists, but an autobiography of a *naishōten* has been published in recent years. See Takaya Asako, *Kōshitsu no saishi to ikite: Naishōten 57nen no hibi* (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2017).

A Brief History of Female Shrine Ritualists

Women have served in shrines in a variety of different roles since the beginning of recorded history. These ritualists included *miko*;[8] the *saiin* (斎院) and *saiō* (斎王) of the Kamo and Ise Shrines, respectively;[9] ritualists in the imperial palace, including the *naishōten*;[10] and assorted female ritualists at major shrines (including Kasuga Shrine, the Kamo Shrines, and Aso Shrine).[11] Explicating all the different roles women served in shrines before the Meiji period could be the topic of multiple dissertations, so let us instead focus on a few broad points. First, shrines were not the exclusive domain of male ritualists—as Odaira Mika documents, some of these female ritualists were credentialed through the same system as male priests during the Tokugawa period and were included in the category of "priests" (神職 *shinshoku*) during debates about who counted as a priest.[12] Second, while female ritualists served in shrines, they served *gender-specific* roles—there was no gender-neutral ritualist role that both men and women could fill.

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[8] Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 19-70; Gerald Groemer, "Female Shamans in Eastern Japan During the Edo Period," *Asian Folklore Studies* 66 (2007), 27-53; Lori Meeks, "The Disappearing Medium: Reassessing the Place of Miko in the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan," *History of Religions* 50, no. 3 (2011), 208-260.

[9] On the *saiin*, see Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 123-124. On the *saiō* see Hardacre, *Shinto*, 82-84; Ochiai Atsuko, "'Saishi to josei'—josei saishisha to shite no saiō ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu," *Shintō shūkyō* 218 (2010), 84-86.

[10] Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 71-185; Odaira Mika, "Jinja ・ Shintō o meguru josei tachi no shosō—saishi girei to kokumin kyōka o chūshin ni," *Rikkyō Daigaku jendaa fōramu nenpō* 18 (2017), 72-73.

[11] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa* (Kyoto: Keizaikai, 2007), 117-118; Yoshie Akiko, "'Kamo no agatanushi kaden' ・ dō 'furoku'—Kamo sha josei shinshoku 'itsuki no hafuriko' ・ 'imuko' o megutte," *Teikyō shigaku* 11, no. 1 (1996), 203-220; Odaira, "Jinja ・ Shintō o meguru josei tachi no shosō," 71-72; Murasaki Machiko, "Aso Jinja saishi ni okeru josei no yakuwari," *Nihon minzokugaku* 223 (2003), 64-76.

[12] Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 19-70.

In 1871 the Dajōkan (太政官 the Council of State) designated shrines as the "rites and creed of the nation" (国家の宗祀 *kokka no sōshi*) and eliminated hereditary classes of ritualists as well as female ritualists.[13] Between 1894 and 1902, the priest employment system (神職任用制度 *shinshoku ninyō seidō*) was established, which specifically legislated that priests must be men over the age of 20.[14]

However, this did not mean that female ritualists were immediately removed from shrines. There were cases of outright resistance to the removal of female ritualists, such as at Dōmyōji, a temple that continued to employ former nuns as priests at its sub-shrine following the formal separation of Buddhism from Shinto.[15] There were also attempts to reintroduce female ritualists to shrines. For example, in 1874, Yamanashi prefecture proposed to the Ministry of Doctrine that women be allowed to serve as priests at district shrines. This proposal was made in the context of women serving as doctrinal instructors (教導職 *kyōdōshoku*), due to a lack of Shinto priests available to serve in the Great Promulgation Campaign.[16] The Ministry of Doctrine agreed to the proposal, although the Left Chamber eventually wound up reversing that decision due to belief that public morals would be disturbed if women served as shrine priests, since priests were considered public servants.[17] Unlike the preceding two cases, the *naishōten*

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[13] Hardacre, *Shinto*, 373-375. See also Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 187-242; Ochi Miwa, "Josei saishisha ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu—kingendai no jinjakai no joseikan to joshi shinshoku ron," *Shintō Shūkyō* 190 (2003), 116.

[14] Ochi, "Josei saishisha ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu," 116.

[15] Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 226-231. For more on the separation of Buddhism from Shinto in this period, see Hardacre, *Shinto*, 368-373.

[16] For more on the Great Promulgation campaign, see Hardacre, *Shinto*, 376-380.

[17] Odaira Mika, "Modern Women's Education and Religion in Yamaguchi Prefecture: The Publication of

were eventually reinstated. They were saved by their ritual expertise, as their (male) replacements lacked the knowledge to perform the requisite rituals.[18] Because they were one of the few classes of female ritualists to survive the Meiji transition relatively unscathed, the *naishōten* are often used as a source of inspiration for postwar regulations regarding female priests (see chapter 4). Overall, however, the new shrine policies under the Meiji government purged female ritualists from shrines and laid the foundation for later assertions that the priesthood was—and had always been—an exclusively male domain.

Miyamoto Shigetane, a shrine priest in Yamaguchi Prefecture, petitioned for women to be allowed into the priesthood in the 1920s and 1930s. Miyamoto's petitions must be understood in the context of his activities surrounding women's education and enlightenment—including the founding of the journal *Joshidō*—because of his belief that Shinto was in crisis (especially when compared to Buddhism) and women would be effective proselytizers.[19] He did not endorse gender equality, instead embracing gender complementarianism, asserting, "Our way of the *kami* (神ながらの道 *kannagara no michi*) does not hierarchically rank men and women. It respects men as men and women as women, and values men and women as two sides of the same coin (不二一体 *fu ni ittai*)."[20] Miyamoto eventually enlisted the assistance of the Chūgoku-Shikoku

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Joshidō," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 4 (2015), 213-214; Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 221-226.
For more on women's place in public and politics during this period, see Marnie S. Anderson, *A Place in Public: Women's Rights in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010).

[18] Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*, 211-221. See also Hardacre, *Shinto*, 359-368.

[19] See Tanahashi Kumiko, "Meiji ki shinshoku no josei keihatsu katsudō—Yamaguchi Miyamoto Shigetane no baai," in *Tatara seitetsu ・ Iwami ginzan to chiiki shakai—kinsei kindai no Chūgoku chihō*, ed. Sagara Eisuke-sensei taishoku kinen ronbunshū kankōkai (Seibundō Shuppan Kabushiki Gaisha, 2008), 431-455; Odaira, "Modern Women's Education and Religion in Yamaguchi Prefecture," 212-239.

[20] Quoted in Kobayashi Akie, "Miyamoto Shigetane no 'fujin shinshoku nin'yō ron' ni kan suru shōkō," *Meiji Seitoku Kinen Gakkai Kiyō* 46, 257.

Priests' Alliance (中四国神職連合 Chū Shikoku Shinshoku Rengō) to submit proposals to the National Priests' Council (全国神職評議会 Zenkoku Shinshoku Hyōgikai) in 1930 and 1931. However, the motion was shelved because of concerns about blood pollution and women's education levels.[21]

The exclusion of female ritualists from shrines ended in 1946 when the newly formed umbrella organization Jinja Honchō (神社本庁 the Association of Shinto Shrines)[22] allowed women into the priesthood. This decision is detailed in chapter 1. For the first time, both men and women could fulfill the same ritualist role—at least on paper. As of 2020, 3,489 of the 21,790 priests associated with Jinja Honchō were female, composing 16% of the priesthood.[23] The factors that have driven this demographic shift are discussed in greater depth in chapter 1.

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[21] Ochi Miwa, "Joshi shinshoku—josei no shinshutsu wa aru no ka," in *Shintō wa doko e iku ka*, ed. Ishii Kenji (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2010), 98; Kobayashi, "Miyamoto Shigetane no 'fujin shinshoku nin'yō ron' ni kan suru shōkō," 251-267.

[22] Jinja Honchō is frequently referred to as the National Association of Shinto Shrines or the National Association of Shrines in English-language literature on the subject—see, for example, Hardacre, *Shinto*; John Breen, "Resurrecting the Sacred Land of Japan: The State of Shinto in the Twenty-First Century," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010), 295–315; John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). The translation offered on Jinja Honchō's official website, however, is "Association of Shinto Shrines" ("JINJA HONCHO – Association of Shinto Shrines," Jinja Honcho, accessed April 1, 2017, http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/en/) and the Wayback Machine shows that Jinja Honchō has been using this translation on their website since at least 2000 (see https://web.archive.org/web/20101006023432*/http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/en/). It is likely that some scholars append "National" to differentiate the national organization from the prefectural organizations (神社庁 Jinjachō) or from other priestly organizations.

In this dissertation, I refer to the national organization as Jinja Honchō. I refer to their prefectural branches as either "prefectural Jinjachō" or "Jinjachō."

[23] Bunkachō, ed., *Shūkyō nenkan Reiwa 2nen ban* (Bunkachō, 2020), https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/r02nenkan.pdf, 55.

Methods, Fieldwork, and Positionality

This dissertation employs mixed methods, blending archival and ethnographic work. I first came into contact with some of the communities and individuals who appear in this dissertation in 2011-2012, while I was in Nagoya on a Fulbright Fellows grant, studying at Nanzan University and conducting a research project on the connections between shrines and local communities. However, I conducted most of my fieldwork between summer 2015 and summer 2019. I conducted intensive participant-observation at K Shrine, a midsized shrine in Nagoya, during the summers of 2015, 2016, and 2019, as well as intermittent trips to the shrine (of a week or two) while living in Tokyo during 2017-2018. During my time at K Shrine, I operated somewhat like an intern—I did many of the chores that the shrine required to keep running, and sometimes helped with rituals and paperwork. I introduce K Shrine and discuss my work there in greater depth in chapter 5.

In additional to my fieldwork at K Shrine, I conducted formal (recorded) interviews with over thirty priests and spoke informally to several dozen more.[24] I visited many of these priests at their shrines and in some cases had the opportunity to participate in shrine activities, ranging from festivals to meetings of tea clubs to meetings of shrine representatives to serving as a *miko* during festivals. I also had the opportunity to participate in or attend other priest affinity groups, including the Aichi Prefecture Young Priests' Association (愛知県神道青年会 Aichi-ken Shintō

[24] While the bulk of my interviewees were from Aichi Prefecture, I also formally interviewed and spoke informally with women from seven or eight other prefectures as well. Where there are region-specific themes in my interviewees' stories, I make sure to note them.

Seinenkai) and the Aichi Prefecture Female Priests' Association (愛知県女子神職会 Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai).

During 2017-2018, I was a visiting fellow at Kokugakuin University with the generous support of a Fulbright grant, where I was able to speak to many more priests, priests-in-training, and instructors at Shinto universities, including formal interviews with five students. I additionally interviewed two women with credentials who had been unable to find work as priests. While at Kokugakuin, I was also able to participate in all the ritual training classes for an intensive priest training course and observe a day of a ritual and vestments class at Kōgakkan University. Both of these courses are discussed in greater depth in chapter 4.

I call the people I engaged with during my fieldwork either "interlocutors" or "interviewees" in this work, not to project impartiality,[25] but because my relationships to them were varied and complex. Some of them are my friends. Some are my *senpai* or mentors. Some are acquaintances or distant connections. One of them declared herself my "Japanese grandmother" and has fulfilled that role spectacularly. Where our relationships are relevant to the story, I try to detail them.

I exist within this work as a human being—not just someone with a fallible memory and body (although I have both), but also as someone with a body and identities that were read (or misread) by my interlocutors. Although I entered shrine communities as a foreign researcher, several factors made my position within my research sites somewhat unusual.

[25] See Levi McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), x.

First, because my position at K Shrine has been both a researcher and a pseudo-intern, I am often introduced in both of those capacities—as either "*uchi no Haabaado no gakusha*" (うちのハーバードの学者 our scholar from Harvard) or "*uchi no Deina-chan*" (うちのデイナちゃん our Dana-chan[26]). The data I gather is thus different than what I would be given access to without that affiliation, as I am often approached as an "insider" to the shrine world who has some degree of understanding of shrine life and politics (both in general and specific to Aichi Prefecture). My position as someone who is enough of an "insider" to know many of the players while being enough of an "outsider" to not immediately repeat what they have been told has also made me an attractive person to gossip with or vent to.[27]

Second, the data I gather is often predicated on my interlocutors' assumption that we are "fellow women" and share gendered aspirations, such as marriage and children. Since I am younger (often significantly younger) than most of the people I am interviewing, and many of them have known me (or know people who have known me) since I was twenty years old, I am frequently spoken to as a though I am a mentee rather than a scholar, which can change the dynamic of interactions from an interview (my asking for information and their giving it) to an instruction (their offering information and my accepting it).

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[26] "-chan" is a name suffix in Japanese that denotes familiarity. It is most commonly used for small children but can also be used familiarly among young women. At my main field site (discussed in greater depth in chapter 5), I am consistently (and affectionately) referred to as "Dana-chan."

[27] In this respect my experiences were similar to those of Allison Alexy, who found that her non-Japaneseness "indexed a lack of critical judgment […] that made people more inclined to share potentially stigmatized experiences." See Allison Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections: Divorce and the Romance of Independence in Contemporary Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 26-27.

Finally, I am a mixed race Latine person, which frequently confused my interviewees, who did not know how to categorize me (and often assumed I must be part-Japanese).[28] My racial background meant that I was treated differently than foreign but obviously white-passing researchers, which, depending on the situation, helped or hindered my access. In some cases, this left me open to racism and xenophobia, whether targeting me specifically or simply overheard when the speaker "forgot" that I belonged to a group they were disparaging.

Literature Review

In this dissertation, I ask three major sets of questions, which are contextualized within three different subfields. First, I locate myself within the broad field of Japanese religious studies and the narrow field of Shinto studies to ask: How has the entrance of female priests reshaped the priesthood, the understanding of gender within Shinto, and the ways that shrines operate? What does studying female priests tell us about contemporary Shinto? Second, I compare with studies of gender in postwar Japan to ask: How are the gender constructions we see within the shrine world related to the constructions of gender and gendered labor in both other Japanese religions and "mainstream" (or, as my interlocutors would say, "ordinary") Japanese society? How does studying gender in the shrine world contribute to our understanding of gender in postwar Japan? Third, I draw on studies of gender in conservative and historically male-dominated religious traditions to ask: How do we understand female priests' engagement with and navigation of a system that is hostile to their existence? How should we think and talk

[28] Sometimes this confusion manifested in amusing ways. While working at the 2015 summer festival for K Shrine, for example, the head priest became so frustrated that I was being consistently read as Japanese (undermining the novelty of the shrine having a foreigner working at the festival) that she made an announcement over the loudspeaker that there was a "foreigner *miko*" performing *suzubarai* (鈴祓 a purification using bells).

about women who support and endorse a gender ideology that calls for their continued marginalization? I offer an overview of the relevant literature and broad arguments for each of these questions below.

Japanese Religious Studies and Shinto Studies

In recent years, scholars have begun paying attention to the understanding of women's roles and status within Japanese religions.[29] However, the bulk of this inquiry has focused upon women in medieval Buddhism,[30] although a few works have focused on more marginal figures, such as *miko*.[31] Work focusing on gender in modern Japanese religion is similarly focused on women's roles in New Religious Movements (NRMs) or Buddhism.[32] Two recent special

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[29] For two recent overviews of the state of the field, see Kawahashi Noriko, "Gender," *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions*, ed. Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and Fabio Rambelli (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 257-265; Emily B. Simpson, "Women," *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions*, ed. Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and Fabio Rambelli (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 257-265.

[30] To name only a small selection of works: Ryūichi Abe, "Revisiting the Dragon Princess: Her Role in Medieval Engi Stories and Their Implications in Reading the Lotus Sutra," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 42, no. 1, 27-70; James C. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010); Barbara Ruch, ed., *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002); Caitilin J. Griffiths, *Tracing the Itinerant Path: Jishū Nuns of Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

[31] Groemer, "Female Shamans in Eastern Japan During the Edo Period," 27-53; Meeks, "The Disappearing Medium," 208-260.

[32] See, for example: Paula Arai, *Women Living Zen: Japanese Soto Buddhist Nuns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kawahashi Noriko, "*Jizoku* (Priests' Wives) in Sōtō Zen Buddhism: An Ambiguous Category," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22 (1995), 161-183; Kyōko Nakamura, "The Religious Consciousness and Activities of Contemporary Japanese Women," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 1/2 (1997), 87-120; Emily Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Ōmotokyō* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Program, 1993); Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura, "No Women's Liberation: The Heritage of a Woman Prophet in Modern Japan," in *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 174-190; Jessica Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home: Domestic Religion in the Contemporary Jōdo Shinshū* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019); Niwa Nobuko, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku: Nichiren-shū josei sōryō no jirei*

journal issues on gender/feminism and religion in Japan, for example, included no articles on Shinto.[33]

Very few English-language works have mentioned gender in Shinto, and those that have tend to focus upon women in Japanese myth.[34] Only a few English-language works have mentioned female priests, and none have gone into great detail.[35] In Japanese, there is a monograph tracing the roles of women in shrines (as well as the discourse surrounding conceptions of priesthood and gender) from ancient times until the Dajōkan ban on female priests in 1871[36] and some short articles on postwar female priests,[37] but no monograph-length

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kara (Tokyo: Kōyō Shobō, 2019); Mark Rowe, "Charting Known Territory: Female Buddhist Priests," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 75-101.

[33] The 2003 special issue of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* on "Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan" features two articles on women in NRMs, two on women in Buddhism, and none on Shinto. See Kawahashi Noriko and Kuroki Masako, eds., special issue on "Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003). The 2017 special issue of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* on "Gender Religious Practices in Japan: Multiple Voices, Multiple Strategies" offers slightly more variety, with one article on NRMs, one on Christianity, two on Buddhism, one on Shugendō, and one on spirituality. See Kawahashi Noriko and Kobayashi Naoko, ed., special issue on "Gendering Religious Practices in Japan: Multiple Voices, Multiple Strategies," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017).

[34] See, for example, Allan G. Grapard, "Visions of Excess and Excesses of Vision: Women and Transgression in Japanese Myth," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991), 3-22; Michiko Yusa, "Women in Shinto: Images Remembered," in *Religion and Women*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 93-119.

[35] Ambros's book features one section on the masculinization of the Shinto priesthood in the Meiji period but no information on female priests in the postwar period. See Barbara Ambros, *Women in Japanese Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 125-126. Hardacre includes the longest treatment of female priests in English, with a section on issues facing women shrine priests in the Heisei period. See Hardacre, *Shinto*, 531-533. Nelson's work contains a (poorly contextualized) chapter on a female priest. See John K. Nelson, *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 122-129. Rots includes interviews with female priests (although on topics unrelated to their gender, identity, or status within their shrine communities). See Aike P. Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan: Making Sacred Forests* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[36] Odaira, *Josei shinshoku no kindai*. Odaira has also published articles based on chapters of her book under both her married name (Kobayashi) and maiden name (Odaira). Kobayashi Mika, "Jingi saishi ni okeru josei no hataraki ni tsuite—'mikannagi' to 'naishi' o chūshin ni," *Jinja Honchō Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo Kiyō* 20 (2007), 157-181; Odaira Mika, "Jingi saishi ni okeru josei shinshoku no hataraki—kodai jingū・kyūchū no saishi kara," *Gakushūin Daigaku Jinbun Kagaku Henshū* 12 (2003), 41-67. At present, she uses her married name for shrine work and her maiden name for scholarly work, so I refer to her in this dissertation by her maiden name.

[37] Ochi, "Joshi shinshoku," 93-112; Ochi Miwa, "Shinshoku kōkeisha mondai ni okeru josei no yakuwari ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo Kiyō* 20 (2015), 45-79; Ochi Miwa, "Dentō shūkyō no josei

treatment of gender in the postwar priesthood. Studies of postwar Shinto in English have been similarly sparse. They have tended to focus on major (politically important) shrines,[38] the ideology of Jinja Honchō,[39] the relationship between Shinto and the state,[40] or particular festivals at shrines.[41]

To the field of Shinto studies, this dissertation contributes the first monograph-length treatment of gender in postwar Shinto, the postwar priesthood, and female priests. It also offers a window into the day-to-day workings of small- and midsized shrines, which make up the majority of the shrines in Japan but tend to be overlooked in scholarship. I argue that the introduction of women to the priesthood has created a gendered priesthood, with distinct roles for (unmarked male) priests and female priests. However, this is not to say that all members of the shrine world have the same understandings of gender. Jinja Honchō's view of gender is homogeneous, leading to pronouncements about how all women (and therefore all female priests) should behave, so Jinja Honchō attempts to control and gender female priests' bodies and behavior through its regulations. However, female priests' experience of gender is much

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shūkyōsha no genjō ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu," *Shintō Shūkyō* 218 (2010), 144-146; Ochi, "Josei saishisha ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu," 116-118.

[38] See, for example, Akiko Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine: History, Memory, and Japan's Unending Postwar* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015); John K. Nelson, *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Karen A. Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

[39] See, for example, Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*; Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto*, 199-220; Breen, "Resurrecting the Sacred Land of Japan," 295–315.

[40] See, for example, Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019); Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868-1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Mark R. Mullins, *Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2021); David M. O'Brien, *To Dream of Dreams: Religious Freedom and Constitutional Politics in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

[41] See, for example, Nelson, *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine*; Scott Schnell, *The Rousing Drum: Ritual Practice in a Japanese Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); Hardacre, *Shinto*, 475-507.

more contextually grounded, leading to them constructing a type of femininity that is not only particular to priests but also responsive to their local shrine context.

Mark Rowe argues that female Buddhist priests' experiences are

> illustrative of and inseparable from the broader context of institutional Buddhism. […] My goal is […] to situate and contextualize those voices as both part of a broader temple Buddhist institution and as a means of providing fresh insight into its parameters. I want to deepen our understandings of both the experiences of individual female priests and of the larger forces at play, both sectarian and social.[42]

I similarly argue that studying female priests tells us the story of postwar Shinto—a Shinto shaped by ideological compromises made in the face of demographic shifts, the economic precarity of serving as a priest at a small shrine, and an attempt to return to an idealized past while refusing to plan for the realities of the present. Studying female priests also tells us about the experiences of those priests within both larger societal flows and the narrow worlds of their home shrine communities. I hope that this study, like Rowe's, "illuminates a previously hidden coastline"[43] by exploring aspects of contemporary Shinto that have remained unexamined in previous scholarship.

Gender and Labor in Japan

The literature on both gender and gendered labor in Japan is robust, and I engage with it extensively throughout this dissertation. Rather than exhaustively recapping literature I cite

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[42] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 76-77.

[43] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 79.

within my chapters,[44] in this section I will identify the lacunae that this dissertation fills and then discuss how I think and write about gender in this dissertation.

While there is a large amount of literature on gender in the workplace, it has tended to focus on women working in corporations,[45] although there has been a more recent turn to more marginal figures, such as sex workers, tour guides, or workers in the digital economy.[46] However, studies of gendered labor have tended to avoid considering religious institutions or professionals.[47] This dissertation brings the gendering of religious professionals into larger conversations about gender and labor in postwar Japan. It shows that, similar to the trends we see in the "mainstream" Japanese workforce, female priests are used to bolster a failing male workforce, but their position is much more precarious and contingent than their male colleagues. Like Koch shows that "gender remains fundamental to the economy" by thinking about what the

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[44] See chapters 2 and 3 for most of the works I could cite here.

[45] For just a few examples, see Mary C. Brinton, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan* (University of California Press, 1993); Gill Steel, ed., *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019)**;** Kumiko Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Yuko Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender and Work in Japanese Companies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Kondo's work arguably goes in this category as well, although she is looking at a much smaller company than many of the above works. See Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[46] See, for example, Gabrielle Koch, *Healing Labor: Japanese Sex Work in the Gendered Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Gabriella Lukács, *Invisibility by Design: Women and Labor in Japan's Digital Economy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); Shiho Satsuka, *Nature in Translation: Japanese Tourism Encounters the Canadian Rockies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 122-146.

[47] The major exception is Jessica Starling's work on *bōmori*. See Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*. The Gendering Labor in Contemporary Asian Religions workshop, scheduled to be held at Lund University in June 2022, will also hopefully produce some scholarship to fill this gap.

There has been some work on gendered labor of *volunteers* in Japanese religions—see, for example, Paola Cavaliere, *Promising Practices: Women Volunteers in Contemporary Japanese Religious Civil Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Levi McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 137-169. However, this research is more in line with studies of gendered volunteerism in Japan, rather than studies of gender in the workplace. For a few examples of the former category, see Aya Hirata Kimura, *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Robin M. LeBlanc, *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

"simultaneous importance and marginality of female sex workers in Japan exposes about the nature of women's work more generally,"[48] I argue that the simultaneous importance and marginality of female priests reveals both the precarious economic situation of the shrine world and the value placed on women's labor in shrines (essential to mitigate demographic crisis but ideologically difficult to accept as equal to men's). I demonstrate, however, that there are notable departures from the trends we can see in the mainstream labor market—most notably, the demand for female workers to hew closely to gendered familial roles in order to remain palatable to Jinja Honchō's gender ideology.

The terminology and concepts I use to discuss gender in this dissertation are heavily influenced by trans and non-binary communities. Because "[c]itation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow,"[49] it is important to acknowledge my intellectual debt to the many trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming people I have been in community with for more than a decade, even if I cannot include them in my formal bibliography. For readers who have not had the good fortune to live within or beside these communities, I explain how I talk about and understand gender in this dissertation below.

Gender is an identity, but it is also a series of behaviors that can be viewed and judged. My interlocutors subscribed to a binary, biological essentialist notion of gender; they saw gender as inherent, split into male and female, and determinative not only of their physiology but also their capabilities, temperament, and more. However, gender was not something that they were intrinsically "good at." Gender had to be expressed and performed "correctly"—and many of

[48] Gabrielle Koch, *Healing Labor*, 4.

[49] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 17.

our conversations were about anxieties around "doing gender wrong" (even if not always expressed in those words exactly). Male priests and Jinja Honchō administrators worry that allowing women into the priesthood—or allowing those women to move through space, wear vestments, and play the same roles as men—violates gender norms, which will lead to the destruction of the family and the nation. My interviewees expressed the same fears—that their duties as priests and their duties as women conflicted, that their gender meant they would never be treated with the same respect accorded to their male peers, that they (or the women around them) were not able to be the women they were told they should be.

Gender is culturally constructed. The gender norms I have to negotiate in Japan are different than those I have to negotiate in the United States, although they have some overlapping themes. We cannot—and should not—assume that "womanhood" is a concept that is portable across space and time, or that "fellow women" will inherently understand each other's gender, regardless of the cultural context they were raised in. For this reason, I spend time in this dissertation unpacking exactly what goes into postwar Japanese conceptions of womanhood, and I review large portions of the literature not only on the construction of gender in the postwar period but also on gender and labor.

Nor are Japanese conceptions of gender monolithic. While I argue in this dissertation that the gender norms that operate within the shrine world are variations on those we can see in "mainstream" Japanese society, they were often subtly different. These differences tripped up my interviewees who were not born to shrine families and sometimes chafed against those who were. If navigating gender norms is like traveling through an invisible maze, gender norms within the shrine world replicated the maze of "mainstream" Japanese society—just slightly

shifted and distorted. The general contours were the same, but traveling by rote memory might cause a feeling of disorientation, a stubbed toe, or a full-body slam into a wall.

However, this is not a story solely about gender. Gender is just one of the threads that make up the complicated tapestry of my interviewees' lives. They are women *and* they are part-time priests (but wish they were full-time). They are women *and* they are not from a shrine family (even if they married into one). They are women *and* they are divorced; they are women *and* they are the only priests at their rural shrines; they are women *and* they have to convince a room of elderly male parishioners to cooperate. Gender is not a monolith, nor does it prove sufficient grounds for meaningful solidarity for many of my interlocutors, who point out a half dozen ways that *this* woman is not the same kind of woman as *that* one.

Women's Participation in Male-Dominated Religious Traditions

In approaching the question of how to conceive of female priests' participation in (and support of) a system that frequently and vocally calls for their marginalization, I take my cue from a number of other scholars of religion working on conceptualizing female participation within conservative religious traditions.[50] These scholars grapple with the fact that, on one hand,

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[50] To name a selection of these studies: Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990), 41-55; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Aline H. Kalbian, *Sexing the Church: Gender, Power, and Ethics in Contemporary Catholicism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Omar Kasmani, "Fakir Her-Stories: Women's Spiritual Careers and the Limits of the Masculine in Pakistan," TRAFO—Blog for Transregional Research (blog), May 26, 2016, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/4243; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Nirmala S. Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a related study that considers gender among other intersectional factors, see Alyson Prude, "A Reexamination of Marginal Religious Specialists: Himalayan Messengers from the Dead,"

"women are seen to assert their presence in previously male-defined spheres while, on the other hand, the very idioms they use to enter these arenas are grounded in discourses that have historically secured their subordination to male authority."[51] These discourses often involve gender complementarity—the notion that men and women have distinct roles to play. In the case of female priests, we see them not only adopt but actively support the rhetoric that contributes to their continued marginalization.

As Saba Mahmood argues,

> the normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and subversion. In doing so, this scholarship elides dimension or human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance.[52]

Thus, rather than attributing women's involvement in conservative religious groups to "false consciousness of the internalization of patriarchal norms through socialization,"[53] she suggests analyzing "the conceptions of self, moral agency, and politics, that undergird the practices of this nonliberal movement, in order to come to an understanding of the historical projects that animate it."[54] For this reason, I spend time in this dissertation considering the discourses (both those unique to the shrine world and those shared with broader Japanese society) that undergird female priests' construction of gender and their understandings of themselves as both priests and women.

Journal of the American Academy of Religions 88, no. 3 (2020), 779-804.

[51] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 6.

[52] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 14.

[53] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 6.

[54] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 5.

In this approach, I align myself with a number of recent works in Japanese religion that have started to interrogate dominant modes of discussing gender. Jessica Starling has argued against focusing on "doctrinal or prescriptive elements of the tradition" as it "tends to cast Buddhist women into one of two opposing categories: either they are unconscious victims of a misogynistic discourse, or they are heroic resisters asserting their agency against a patriarchal structure."[55] She tries instead to "avoid confining women's agency within a simplistically dualistic framework" as "[t]he negotiation of individual desires in everyday life, as everyone knows, is no simple matter."[56] Mark Rowe similarly "seek[s] to articulate the ways in which the female priests […] construct and inhabit their clerical roles as women—as self-determinate agents who represent a product of, a perpetrator of, and reformulator of prevailing norms."[57] He argues that

> [t]o look only for stories of female priests rejecting or co-opting androcentric teachings would neglect how women use a variety of tools at their disposal to live Buddhist lives. Thus while some of the stories here reflect resistance, others might read more like capitulation or simply getting by.[58]

Levi McLaughlin similarly sees Gakkai women not as "passive followers who have been misled into obedience within an oppressive power structure but […] instead self-conscious agents who emerge from a complex web of aspirations and values."[59]

In this dissertation, I approach the question of female priests' engagement with a male-dominated institution by focusing on their strategies for survival. I detail the ways that the

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[55] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 5.

[56] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 131.

[57] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 79.

[58] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 79.

[59] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 139.

institution constrains them, as well as the ways that they carve out power and space for themselves. Female priests replicate the logic of their marginalization—the gender essentialism that claims they will never be the equals of male priests as they are inherently different—because they support Jinja Honchō's national project. They see this formulation of gender as one inherent to Japanese culture and themselves as transmitters of that ancient tradition. However, they reframe this inherent difference between men and women as an argument for their inclusion—if shrines truly want to cater to the entire population, they will need both men and women serving as priests and ministering to their parishioners.

However, there are repercussions to this approach. By linking their value as priests to their adherence to normative womanhood, female priests create an environment where gender deviance causes emotional turmoil or censure (by other priests, parishioners, or others). Uchida's story, which opened this introduction, is a prototypical example of the type of pressures—both internal and external—that female priests must weather.

Female priests' reliance on strategic gender essential also weakens their ability to agitate for institutional change—indeed, as we will see, the strategies female priests employ to improve their situation tend to be local and contextually specific, unlike the feminist movements we have seen within other Japanese religions.[60] While there are Female Priests' Associations (I introduce

[60] See, for example, Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 138-142; Kawahashi Noriko and Kobayashi Naoko, "Editor's Introduction: Gendering Religious Practices in Japan: Multiple Voices, Multiple Strategies," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 4-7; Kawahashi Noriko, "Women Challenging the 'Celibate' Buddhist Order: Recent Cases of Progress and Regress in the Sōtō School," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 55-74; Kobayashi Naoko, "Sacred Mountains and Women in Japan: Fighting a Romanticized Image of Female Ascetic Practitioners," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 103-122; Kawahashi Noriko, "Feminist Buddhism as Praxis: Women in Traditional Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003), 291-313; Yamaguchi Satoko, "Christianity and Women in Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003), 315-338; Kawahashi Noriko and Kuroki Masako, "Editors' Introduction: Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003), 207-216; Miki Mei, "A Church with Newly-Opened Doors: The Ordination of Women Priests in the Anglican-Episcopal Church of Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 42-50.

them briefly in chapter 2) at both the prefectural and national level, they cannot rightfully be considered "feminist" organizations. In future iterations of this project, I plan to consider their activities more deeply, but to briefly offer a summary here, they have tended to avoid collective political action, instead providing a gender-segregated space for women to engage in training and "polish themselves." They have tended to reproduce much of Jinja Honchō's gender ideology, and, as we shall see in chapter 2, have offered a platform for Jinja Honchō administrators and high-ranking priests at large shrines to lecture female priests on how to properly embody femininity in their priestly duties.

In this dissertation, I try to depict my interlocutors as human beings who are navigating a hostile environment, who deserve both empathy and a critical eye. Some of my interlocutors have hurt each other in deep and lasting ways—through pressure, coercion, or outright bullying. Many of them have been hurt by the same systems and beliefs they perpetuate. Some have attempted to shield their colleagues from harassment and created safer spaces for women within their shrine communities. Others are aware of the ways that the deck is stacked against them but do not have the power to fix it. All of them are trying to make the best of an imperfect situation, often with mixed consequences.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured with each chapter building on the previous chapter. We start by building a foundational knowledge of the challenges facing the postwar priesthood (chapter 1) so we can then turn to more conceptual discussions. The next two chapters discuss the construction of gender in the postwar priesthood—first from an institutional point of view

(chapter 2) then from the perspective of female priests themselves (chapter 3). The final two chapters examine how female priests apply their understandings of gender to their work, first in the limited realm of gendered bodily regulations (chapter 4) and then in their work within shrines (chapter 5). The conclusion considers the vision of the future espoused by Jinja Honchō and what examining female priests reveals about the division between Jinja Honchō's vision of Shinto and Shinto as it is practiced in local shrine communities. I detail the specific contents of each chapter below.

In the first chapter, I use the "successor problem" as an entrance into examining the state of the priesthood in Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto. I begin by exploring how economic pressures, demographic shifts, and time constraints are reshaping the priesthood, especially for priests at small, family-run shrines. I then turn to how female priests are positioned as necessary to shore up a failing system in a time of crisis, and how this rhetoric is mirrored (or not) by other religious organizations in Japan, which similarly rely upon women's labor to function. I demonstrate that while similar trends are occurring in other Japanese religions, both the timing of women's entrance to the priesthood and the gender balance of the priesthood set Shinto apart.

In the second chapter, I turn to Jinja Honchō's discourse regarding female priests. I argue that Jinja Honchō administrators and highly ranked priests at major shrines see men and women as inherently different and consider the erasure of gendered difference a threat to both the family and the nation. They therefore believe that women cannot fill "male" roles without modification. However, they recognize that shrines rely on female labor, so they cannot outright bar women from serving as priests. Instead, they encourage female priests to "leverage their special characteristics," expect women to assist their male superiors, or refuse outright to hire women to major shrines. They create a priesthood that is often gender-segregated, with women

serving different roles than men in practice (and sometimes in name). I contextualize these practices within trends in the "mainstream" Japanese labor market, which similarly marginalizes women's labor even as it relies on it to bolster a labor force being wracked by demographic shifts. However, I note that the importance of congruence with familial roles in the shrine world reverses the trends we can see in corporations, where women are often expected to forgo marriage and children in order to climb the corporate ladder.

In the third chapter, I turn to how female priests conceptualize their identities as priests. I demonstrate that female priests tie their identities as priests to their familial identities as daughters, wives, and mothers. Rather than fighting for an equal access, gender-neutral priesthood, female priests use strategic gender essentialism to argue for their own place within the priesthood, taking Jinja Honchō's rhetoric of essential difference and twisting into an argument for inclusion. However, this strategy links their value to the priesthood with their adherence to (hetero)normative womanhood, creating anxiety and emotional turmoil for women whose life courses have not followed that normative trajectory or who feel tension between their duties as a priest and their duties as a woman in a family. I compare the gender norms within the shrine world to "mainstream" constructions of gender, and demonstrate that while they share common elements, the disjoint between gender norms in the shrine world and in "mainstream" Japanese society is particularly noticeable for women who weren't born into shrine families, who find themselves in adulthood being socialized into a new "proper" type of femininity and must reorient their understandings of their own gender and life course.

The fourth chapter considers the body as both a site of friction and a lens through which to view larger issues surrounding the gendering of the Shinto priesthood. I examine three case studies in the gendering of priests' bodies—menstrual pollution, ritual technique, and

vestments—to examine how Jinja Honchō transmits their ideal of priestly femininity to priests and priests-in-training. Although Jinja Honchō has separate gendered regulations for ritual technique and vestments, it has avoided weighing in on menstrual pollution due to the theological issues it poses. However, female priests do not unquestioningly adopt Jinja Honchō's directives. Female priests do not actively resist Jinja Honchō so much as they reinterpret, adapt, or ignore regulations, taking advantage of the liminal, ambiguous space that female priests inhabit within the institutional structure to forward their own understandings of what female priests should do and be.

The fifth chapter extends this consideration of female priests' adaptations and reformulations of Jinja Honchō's legislation to explore the experiences of female priests working within shrines. I demonstrate that the character of women's shrine labor is varied and often locally determined, and trace the precarity inherent in shrine work, given their reliance on the good will of parishioners and their local community. I close the chapter by considering how the precarity of the priesthood impacts female priests' experience of and ability to react to harassment and abuse. Despite issues that many of my interviewees recognized as systemic (or at least shared by all female priests), female priests have not created collective means to address these shared challenges, instead relying on individualized, context-specific solutions.

Chapter 1
"The Successor Problem" in the Postwar Priesthood

Women were allowed into the Shinto priesthood under the Jinja Honchō charter of November 1945. Article Seventy-Nine of the charter reads:

> [Article] Seventy-Nine The employment of priests is based on their rank
>
> To be qualified for employment as a head priest, in addition to rank, [one] needs to be a male (男子 *danshi*) over the age of twenty[1]

The phrasing of this article implied (but did not outright state) that women were allowed to serve in positions below head priest. The next mention of female priests that appears in Jinja Honchō's institutional histories is an off-handed mention of vestments (discussed further in chapter 4) being decided for male and female priests on June 8, 1946: "The reason why female priests were allowed is gender equality (男女平等 *danjo byōdō*) and to open the road for the widows of priests who died in the war (戦死神職の未亡人 *senshi shinshoku no mibōjin*)."[2] On March 22, 1948, the trustees (評議員会 *hyōgiinkai*) decided that "in order to indicate equal rights for men and women (男女同権 *danjo dōken*)" the word "male" (男子 *danshi*) would be struck from Article Seventy-Nine, allowing anyone over the age of twenty to serve as head priest.[3]

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[1] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1956), 126.

[2] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1951), 39.

[3] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi*, 176.

However, almost all mention of gender equality is struck from later discussions of the decision to allow women into the priesthood. Instead, commentators fixate on female priests' relationship to the "successor problem" (後継者問題 *kōkeisha mondai*), a demographic crisis facing the Shinto priesthood. Female priests are imagined not as a symbol of gender equality in Shinto but as a solution to a deficit in male labor.

In this chapter, I use the "successor problem" as an entrance into examining the state of the priesthood in Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto. I begin by exploring how economic pressures, demographic shifts, and time constraints are reshaping the priesthood, especially for priests at small, family-run shrines. I then turn to how female priests are positioned as necessary to shore up a failing system in a time of crisis, as shrine families have fewer children and (male) shrine children have fled the priesthood in search of more economically stable work. Female priests provide cheap labor that preserves the family lineage but are still presented as a subpar substitute for the men they are replacing or assisting. Finally, I look at how this rhetoric is mirrored (or not) by other religious organizations in Japan. While one might assume a uniformly gendered world in Japanese religions, this is not the case. While other religious organizations have turned to female labor in times of crisis, the timing of women's entrance to the priesthood (in the postwar period rather than during the war) as well as the percentage of women in the priesthood in comparison to other Japanese religions sets Shinto apart. For this reason, we must historicize and contextualize women's participation in the Shinto priesthood before we can turn to bigger questions about gender construction in Shinto.

What is the "Successor Problem"?

The "successor problem" refers to a large set of overlapping issues, but at its core is concern about the lack of young people (successors) willing to take over their families' shrines. Here a "successor" (後継者 *kōkeisha* or 跡継ぎ *atotsugi*) refers to a person (usually a family member, as discussed below) who has agreed to step into the head priest position once the current head priest retires.

Jinja Honchō has highlighted "the successor problem" as an ongoing issue since at least the 1990s; in my following discussion, I draw primarily from sources published by either Jinja Honchō or their prefectural branches, Jinjachō (神社庁). These sources can be split into three major categories. First, beginning in the late 1990s, a number of prefectural Jinjachō conducted large-scale mail surveys relating to the successor problem—I draw here mainly from the datasets provided by Niigata, Yamaguchi, Saitama, and Yamagata, since they are the most accessible.[4]

[4] Niigata conducted their survey three times. The results can be found in Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Niigata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa chōsa hōkoku* (1998); Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2004); Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2013).

Yamaguchi conducted their survey once. See Ishii Kenji, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2007).

Saitama conducted their survey twice. See Ishii Kenji, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2008); Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," *Saitama-ken Jinjachō Hō* 228 bessatsu (2019).

Yamagata conducted their survey once. See Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2009).

Five of the reports (Niigata 1998 and 2004, Yamaguchi 2007, Saitama 2008, and Yamagata 2009), along with some associated articles using the survey datasets, can be found in *Kakuken Jinjachō shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 2010. However, the only copy of this book that I have managed to locate is at Kokugakuin University, and the library catalogue does not include any further publication information; see https://opac.kokugakuin.ac.jp/webopac/BB01562307. A plate on the inside of the volume identifies it as being donated by Fujimoto Yorio, an associate professor in the Shinto department, so it may be a personal collection of printed reports that was bound and donated.

Kobayashi reports that (as of 2008) prefectural surveys had also been performed in Nagasaki and Ehime prefectures (Kobayashi Mizuho, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki: Yamaguchi-ken no chōsa o rei ni," *Shintō Shūkyō* 208-209 (2008), 66), but I have found no published reports associated with these surveys. The most recent Saitama report also references a similar survey being conducted in Osaka (Saitama-ken Jinjachō

Second, in 2015, Jinja Honchō conducted two mail surveys—one focused on the conditions of shrines and one focused on the priests themselves—which were sent out to all the head priests affiliated with Jinja Honchō.[5] Third, I examine commentary related to the successor problem. In addition to roundtables, reactions, and essays that were published alongside the aforementioned survey results, I draw on the 28th Jinja Honchō Shinto Education Research Conference (神社本庁神道教学研究大会 Jinja Honchō Shintō Kyōgaku Taikai), held in June 2010, which was on the topic of the successor problem. A transcript of the proceedings was subsequently published in *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo kiyō* (Bulletin of Shinto Education Institute).[6]

It is worth noting that many academics have bemoaned the lack of data from the shrine world, especially in comparison to Buddhist sects, some of which are performing successor surveys every 3-5 years (discussed below).[7] One prominent Shinto Studies academic, while directing me toward some successor surveys I hadn't accessed yet, declared that Jinja Honchō is "allergic to numbers." While this may be hyperbolic, the 2015 Jinja Honchō survey was the first time that Jinja Honchō had surveyed all its head priests on any topic,[8] and its data wound up

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Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 3), but I have also not found a published report.

Nagano prefecture announced in 2013 that they had completed a survey and released some preliminary results, along with some data from six other prefectural reports (three surveys from Niigata as well as one each from Yamaguchi, Saitama, Yamagata, Ehime, and Miyagi). See Murei Hitoshi, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan—sūchi kara," *Shinshū* 115 (2012), 7. They originally planned to release the full report in the next edition of their periodical, but later announced that it would be delayed. See Takei Tetsuya, "Kyōkabu iinkai hōkoku," *Shinshū* 116 (2013), 7. I have not been able to find a published copy of the complete report.

Hiroshima also completed a related survey in 2017; see Kyōka Iinkai, "Chiiki no hito to kangaeru kaso chiiki jinja no kōkeisha mondai ni tsuite," *Futaba* 133 (2017), 4-5.

[5] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, "*Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo Kenkyū Saimuka, 2016).

[6] *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 87-244.

[7] Ishii Kenji, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten* (Niigata-ken Jinjachō, 2000), 5-6.

[8] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 37.

being problematic on multiple levels.[9] Fortunately, many of the trends found in the Jinja Honchō survey have been verified by other surveys, but in the following discussion I note places where the data may be misleading, partial, or unclear.

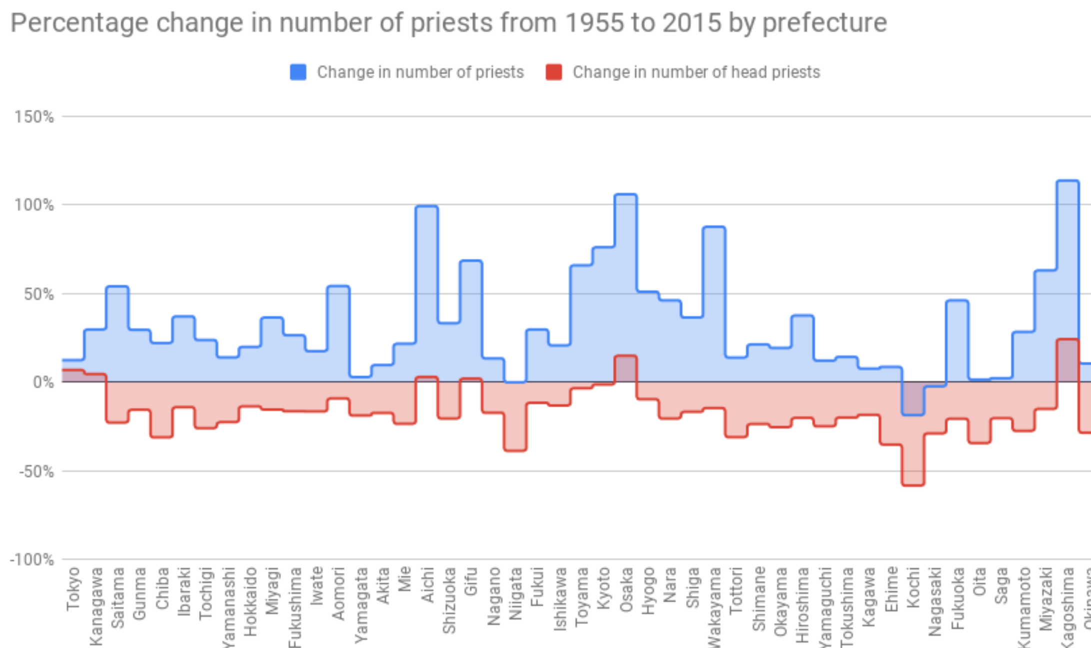

Figure 1.1 Percentage change in the number of priests from 1955 to 2015 by prefecture.[10] All statistics collated from Jinja Honchō's histories.[11]

[9] The Jinja Honchō survey had multiple questions that yielded data that was obviously unusable. The limitations of the data are discussed at length in the analysis section; see Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 37-124.

[10] Although we have data for the total number of priests in each prefecture from 1950, the number of head priests was not collected until 1955.

[11] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gonenshi*; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi*; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1961); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1966); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1971); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1976); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1981); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō yonjūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1986); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō yonjūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1991); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gojūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1996); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gojūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2001); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō rokujūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2006); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō rokujūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2011); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nanajūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2016).

The easiest way to understand the successor problem is by looking at numbers, so let us start there. Figure 1.1 illustrates the change in the number of priests in each prefecture from 1955 to 2015. At a glance, we can see that while the number of priests has increased in every prefecture except Kōchi in the postwar period,[12] the number of head priests has decreased (sometimes precipitously) in all but five prefectures.[13] The number of shrines in Japan has, however, not appreciably decreased in the postwar period.

We may wonder, then, where the surplus priests have gone. This question reveals one of the major splits in the landscape of postwar Shinto—between so-called large shrines (大社 *taisha*), especially *beppyōsha* (別表社 "special category shrines," which are loosely affiliated with Jinja Honchō but are not fully under their jurisdiction, allowing them more autonomy), and their smaller neighbors, often referred to as "*shōsha*" (小社 small shrines) or "*minsha*" (民社 popular shrines). Small shrines tend to have a unification of the household and the shrine, similar to the unification of the household and the temple in Buddhism,[14] wherein a single family serves at the shrine. *Beppyōsha* and other large shrines, on the other hand, are more financially secure, but succession is usually not determined by blood relation.[15] While the number of priests serving at large shrines has increased over the postwar period, smaller rural shrines have faced a

[12] Tokyo, Kanagawa, Aichi, Osaka, and Kagoshima more than doubled the number of priests in the prefecture between 1950 and 2015.

[13] Kanagawa, Aichi, and Gifu had basically the same number of head priests in 2015 that they had in 1955. Osaka and Kagoshima have increased incrementally (15% and 24% respectively).

[14] See Jessica Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home: Domestic Religion in the Contemporary Jōdo Shinshū* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

[15] Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 24.

labor shortage.[16] Sonoda,[17] a priest in Saitama Prefecture, for example, reports that the three *beppyōsha* in his district of 104 shrines employ almost half of the 84 priests.[18]

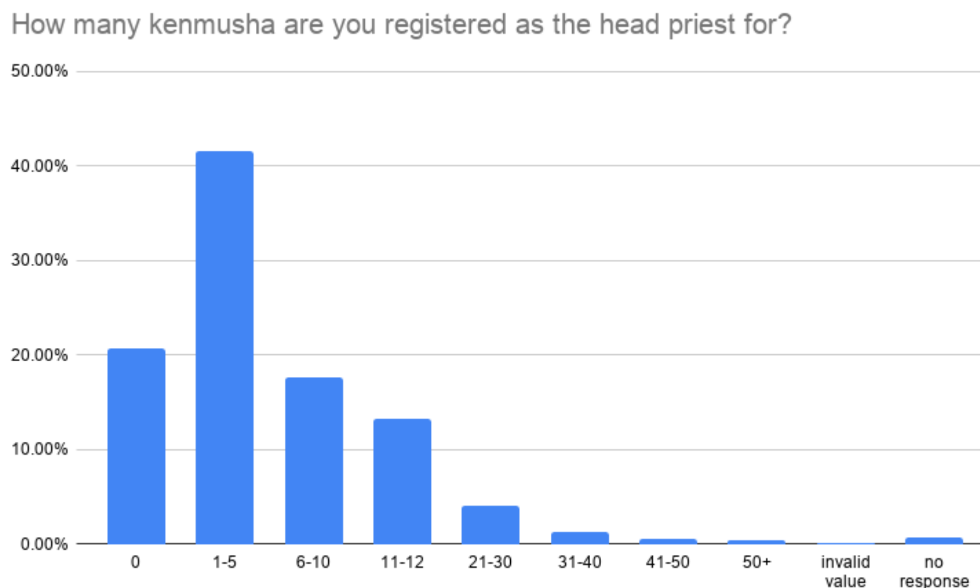

Figure 1.2 A graph of responses to the question "How many kenmusha are you registered as the head priest for?" Data from 2015.[19]

Additionally, many small shrines, especially in depopulated rural areas,[20] are "*kenmu jinja*" (兼務神社) or "*kenmusha*" (兼務社), that is shrines that are taken care of "part-time" by a head priest whose "main" shrine (本務神社 *honmu jinja* or 本社 *honsha*) is elsewhere.[21] The

[16] For discussion of this issue, see Sakamoto Koremaru, "Komento ni," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 153.

[17] Participants in the discussion were identified only by family name, making it very easy to guess the identities of the presenters (whose full names are listed in the notes on their presentations), and somewhat trickier to identify those who did not present. In the following discussion, I identify the presenters by full name and the non-presenters by only their family name.

[18] "Zentai tōgi," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 186.

[19] Data from Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 28.

[20] For more on how depopulation affects shrines, see Fuyutsuki Ritsu, "Kasoka to jinja—Shōdoshima no jirei kara," in *Shintō wa doko e iku ka*, ed. Ishii Kenji (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2010), 160-173.

[21] For discussion of this issue, see, for example, Arai Kimiyoshi, "Saitama-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai

2015 Jinja Honchō survey found that 20.74% of the respondents had no *kenmusha*, but 59.14% had 1-10 *kenmusha*, 13.28% had 11-20, and 6.15% reported having 20 or more (see Figure 1.2). As Murei points out, we can use the number of shrines and head priests to estimate the number of *kenmusha* in each prefecture. According to these estimates, nationally, each head priest is responsible for an average of 7.5 shrines (as of 2010), which has increased from 6.2 shrines (as of 1975).[22] However, regional rates vary wildly (Figure 1.3)—as of 2010, Toyama (19.0), Chiba (15.8), and Fukui (15.0) had the highest rates of *kenmusha*, while Osaka (1.7), Hokkaido (2.5), and Wakayama (2.6) had the lowest.[23]

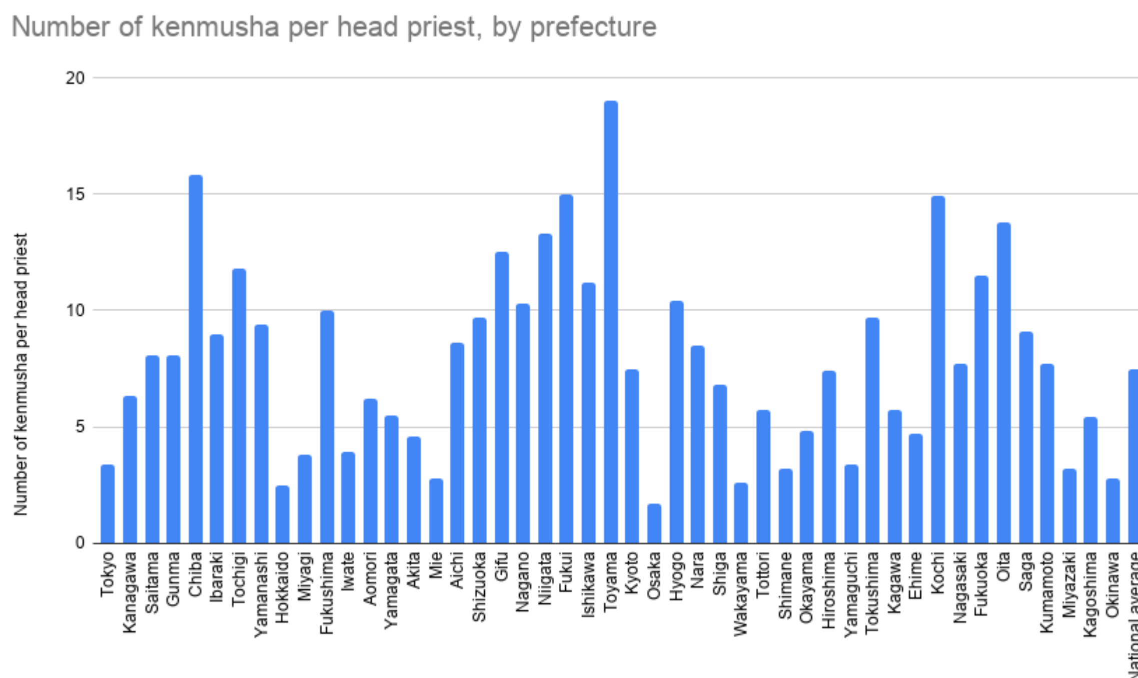

Figure 1.3 Number of kenmusha per head priest, by prefecture. Data from 2010.[24]

jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 123.

[22] Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan," 4.

[23] Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan," 6.

[24] Data cited in Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan," 6.

Surveys project that the number of head priests will shrink even further in the next generation. Prefectural surveys have found rates of 66.8% to 83.7% of head priests indicating that they have a successor determined, with most reporting rates around 70-75% (see Figure 1.4). Jinja Honchō's national survey found a slightly lower rate of 63.32%. Saitama Prefecture offers us particularly helpful data, as they performed almost the same survey 11 years apart.[25] Between 2007 and 2018, the number of priests who had successors decreased by about 10%.[26]

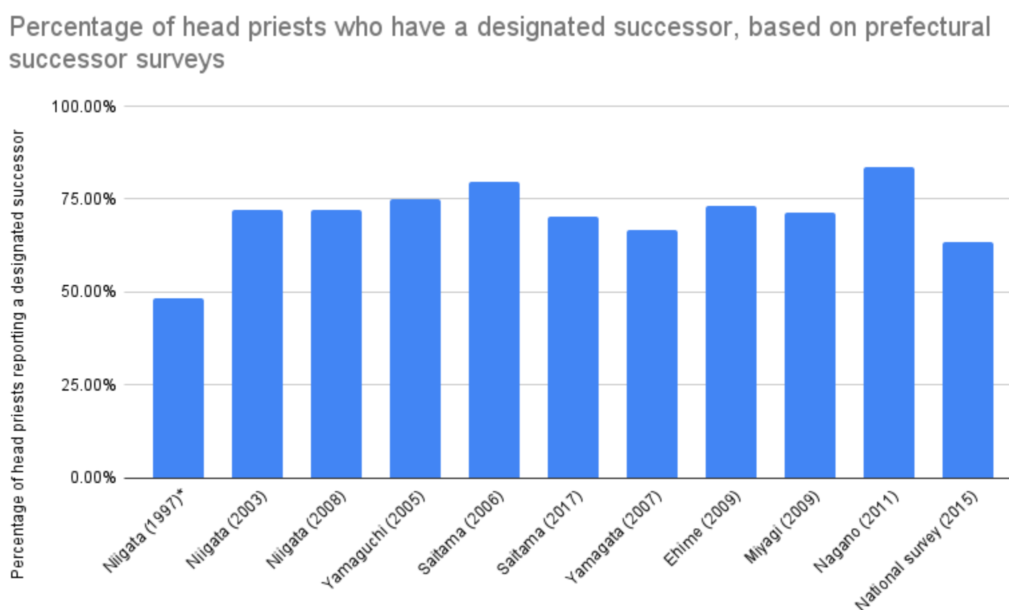

Figure 1.4 Percentage of head priests who have a designated successor, based on prefectural surveys. The 1997 Niigata survey had different criteria for successors (the successor had to have already received credentials to be counted), leading to the abnormally low rate.[27]

[25] Niigata Prefecture also performed multiple surveys, although they had different criteria for counting priests as having successors between the first and second surveys, making their results slightly harder to compare. The rate of successors between the second and third Niigata surveys were identical, although as the report writers note, Jinja Honchō should not expect these trends to persist, due to generational change. Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 5.

[26] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 4.

[27] Data collated from Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Niigata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa chōsa hōkoku*; Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*; Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3 kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*; Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*; Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*;

However, these rates may be artificially inflated, as Ishii Kenji has indicated, due to the nature of the surveys (distributed and returned via post), as those without successors may have been less inclined to mail in their results.[28] The authors of the most recent Niigata survey report, too, note that of the 72% of respondents who have successors, 10% are in middle school or younger (so it is unclear if they will actually choose to succeed once they come of age). An additional 21.4% said that they were currently working outside of the shrine. The authors noted that it might be more appropriate to say that the rate of successors is 49.4-72%.[29] This means that somewhere between 25% and 50% of shrines may wind up unstaffed in the next generation, presenting a crisis of an unthinkable scale for Jinja Honchō.

What Makes the "Successor Problem" a Problem?

A cluster of major issues tend to be identified as contributing to this trend.[30] Below I discuss three related issues: the increasing economic unviability of the priesthood, especially in rural and depopulated areas; the inability of hereditary shrine lineages to provide successors; and the logistical and temporal challenges posed by the educational system for priests.

Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*; Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho"; Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan—sūchi kara."

[28] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 18.

[29] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3 kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 9.

[30] For an introductory overview, see Izawa Masahiro, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 89-95.

(Not) Making a Living as a Priest

In every survey conducted on the successor problem, economic issues have been designated as one of the most pressing (if not *the* most pressing) issues facing shrines. The income from working as a shrine priest is often not enough to support a family. 60.4% of the priests surveyed by Jinja Honchō in 2015 were making 3,000,000 yen (about $28,000 USD) or less a year from working as a priest (including income from *kenmusha*),[31] and priests in depopulated areas tended to have lower incomes on average.[32] A 2017 Saitama survey found that only 7% of priests considered their current financial situation "sufficient," with another 32% who said it was "mostly sufficient." 28% said it was "not very good."[33]

Lack of economic viability means that most priests tend to be "part-time priests" (兼業神職 *kengyō shinshoku*, that is priests who have other work in addition to being a priest) rather than "full-time priests" (専業神職 *sengyō shinshoku*). Only 46% of the priests surveyed in Yamagata prefecture were full-time priests;[34] Shiga prefecture found nearly identical numbers (45%).[35] Unfortunately, even these numbers may be artificially inflated. In a survey conducted in Niigata, for example, 56.4% of the priests were full-time. However, only 20.1% had been full-time from the start of their careers; 36.3% were retired, meaning that they had only become full-time priests

[31] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 97.

[32] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 132.

[33] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 39.

[34] Ishihara Jun'ichi, "Yamagata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 128.

[35] "Zentai tōgi," 170.

after retiring from a full-time job outside of the shrine world.[36] Similarly, Kobayashi Mizuho found that only 36.9% of self-identified full-time priests in Yamaguchi prefecture were under the age of 60.[37] In the 2015 Jinja Honchō survey, while 63.96% of respondents said they were full-time priests, only 23.18% said they gained 100% of their income from being a priest.[38] Some "full-time" priests may work in agriculture, work full-time at a shrine aside from their own, or be supported by their spouses, who work outside of the shrine.[39] In rural areas, especially, few priests are able to make a living wage and many retiree head priests live off of their pensions.[40]

Additionally, priests in rural areas may have few economic opportunities in their home communities. Few jobs offer the flexibility needed by priests—the frequency of branch transfers that would require relocation to another prefecture, for example, bar priests from many professions. Festival dates are often locked to a specific date, irrespective of the day of the week, which means that priests need jobs that have a certain amount of flexibility in the time

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[36] Yasuda Mitsutoshi, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 109-110. See also: Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 2.

Similar patterns can be seen in Saimata Prefecture. See Arai, "Saitama-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 120-121; Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 10.

[37] Kobayashi, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki," 68. Similarly, only 23.4% of the full-time priests in Niigata were under the age of 60 in 2003. See Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 3.

Ishii and Kobayashi suggest that Yamaguchi may have a higher rate of full-time priests than prefectures in the Tōhoku or Chūgoku regions due to more aggressive shrine merger programs in the Meiji period. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 2; Kobayashi, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki," 67. Niigata, by comparison, had a less aggressive merger program, leading to a higher rate of part-time priests. Kobayashi, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki," 68.

[38] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 28-29.

[39] Ueda Toshinori, "Komento ichi," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 143; Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 25, 34.

[40] While it is never specified in these discussions, these are likely national pensions (国民年金 *kokumin nenkin*) rather than pensions specific to the shrine world. See discussion in Ishii Kenji, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 22-23; Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 66.

they can take off.[41] While priests used to be able to work as teachers or public employees, which allowed more flexibility than a corporate office job, recent restrictions on public employees having a second job have closed down those avenues.[42] Even workplaces that allow priests to take time off for festivals may not be willing to let priests take time off to assist at festivals at other shrines, an important aspect of belonging to a local shrine network.[43]

Some commentators suggest that priests holding a second job is actually beneficial, as it will expand their horizons and help them better relate to and connect with their parishioners.[44] Participants in a roundtable discussing the Niigata prefecture survey results, for example, raised the idea that part-time work allowed priests to expand their horizons (by working outside of the shrine world) and that their lack of economic dependence on the shrine allowed priests to "serve with only a faithful heart (信仰心 *shinkōshin*)"[45] (rather than focusing on the monetary aspects of the work).[46] However, it is unclear how often these sentiments are being expressed by part-time priests who are struggling to make ends meet versus full-time priests (and administrators) trying to "look on the bright side" while examining their colleagues' unfavorable situations.

Kenmusha are a major issue for part-time priests, as they increase the workload on priests while providing negligible income.[47] One priest I interviewed in Aichi Prefecture, for example,

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[41] Izawa, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," 92.

[42] See, for example, discussion in Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 27; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 41.

[43] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 42.

[44] "Zentai tōgi," 181. I have heard similar sentiments from my interviewees.

[45] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 26.

[46] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 14.

[47] For a discussion of how to boost the income of *kenmusha*, see Ishihara, "Yamagata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha

administered twenty-two shrines, each of which had at least one mandatory ritual per month (月次祭 *tsukinamisai*).[48] He was retired, so he could devote most of his month to traveling from shrine to shrine, but one can imagine how quickly this situation would become untenable for someone with a full-time job. Due to depopulation and economic issues at shrines, rural priests may only be able to support themselves by taking care of fifteen or twenty shrines[49]—which in turn means that the death of a priest eliminates the head priest for *all* those shrines.[50]

Economic issues were consistently raised as an issue in successor surveys. 32.7% of respondents in Yamagata said that the lack of economic stability posed an issue in deciding a successor.[51] Only 5.6% of successors in Saitama chose "economic stability" as one of the attractions of being a priest, while in Yamaguchi it dipped to 3.8%.[52] Full-time priests tend to be more likely to have successors lined up,[53] while depopulated and mountainous areas tend to have

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mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 137-138.

[48] Shrine ritual calendars are discussed in greater depth in chapter 5.

[49] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 60.

[50] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 62.

[51] Similar results have been found in other prefectures. In Saitama, 27.8% of head priests, 21.3% of spouses, and 27.9% of successors indicated that economic instability was an issue in deciding a successor. Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 10. 34.7% of respondents in Yamaguchi indicated that economic instability was an issue in deciding a successor. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 9.
Interestingly, in surveys where head priests, spouses, and successors were surveyed, the head priests tended to consider economic issues much less of a problem than spouses and successors; see, for example, Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 9-10; Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 13.

[52] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 53; Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 39.

[53] For example, while 66.8% of respondents in Yamagata said they had a successor, 73.6% of those who identified themselves as "full-time" priests had successors while only 61.3% of those who identified as "part-time" priests did. Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 9. In Niigata, 84.8% of full-time head priests, 76.1% of head priests who became full-time after retirement, and 63.3% of part-time head priests had a successor. Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai*

lower rates of successors.[54] Interestingly, Murakami found that priests with no *kenmusha* were the least likely to have successors, and rates of successors increased with the number of *kenmusha*, until the priest had 25 *kenmusha*, at which point it declined.[55] Similarly, increases in income were correlated with increases in rates of successors.[56]

Due to economic pressures, the most common response from head priests as to when they were hoping their successor would formally become a priest was when the current head priest became unable to serve.[57] In Yamagata, only 14.3% of successors were working full-time as a priest at their family's shrine; 10.2% were working full-time at a different shrine, 40.8% held a job in addition to being a priest, and 13.6% were not serving as priests and working outside the shrine world.[58] As commentators have noted, this means that the next generation of priests will

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kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho, 4. See also "Zentai tōgi," 175.

However, not every prefecture found such a stark split between full-time and part-time priests; see Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 3.

[54] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 10; Arai, "Saitama-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 119.

It is worth noting, however, that successor rates don't seem to be mapped neatly onto the rural/urban split. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 3; Murakami Kōkyō, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni tsuite," in *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, ed. Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo Kenkyū Saimuka, 2016), 211; Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 4.

[55] Murakami, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni tsuite," 204-205.

[56] Murakami, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni tsuite," 206.

[57] 40.9% in Saitama (Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 8) and 49.3% in Yamaguchi (Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 7). Saitama found even higher rates in 2017—52%. Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 4.

[58] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 13.

Similar numbers can be seen in other prefectures; for example, according to head priests' responses, 18.7% of successors in Saitama were full-time at their own shrines, 11.6% were full-time at other shrines, 23.7% were working a second job in addition to being a priest, and 15.7% were working entirely outside of the shrine world. Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 7. In Yamaguchi, 17.4% of successors were full-time priests at their own shrines, 7.6% were full-time at other shrines, 24.3% were working a second job in addition to being a priest, and 20.1% were working entirely outside of the shrine world. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 6. In Niigata, 10.6% were full-time at their own shrines, 9.4% were full-time at other shrines, 32.2% were working a second job in addition to being a priest, and 15.3% were working entirely

not be able to serve under and learn from the previous generation.[59] However, splitting an already negligible income between two priests is not economically viable, so many parents encourage their children to work outside the shrine (and earn much needed money) for as long as possible.

A major issue is lack of awareness of the plight of part-time priests on the part of Jinja Honchō and their prefectural Jinjachō. As Yasuda Mitsutoshi points out, Jinja Honchō tends to act as though part-time priests are the minority when they are in fact the majority,[60] and their administration is thus built and scheduled for full-time priests (discussed below with regards to education). One impassioned respondent, on a write-in question asking what they had done to convince their children to become priests, wrote,

> If there is no financial security, we cannot think about the successor problem. Isn't it that Jinja Honchō and Jinjachō mostly only respect the opinions of large shrines (大社 *taisha*) and aren't looking directly at the reality of small shrines (小社 *shōsha*)? [...] I am already dumbfounded by Honchō's armchair theory (机上の空論 *kijō no kūron*). Currently, Honchō is accomplishing nothing with regards to the successor problem.[61]

Other commentators have complained (in slightly less aggressive terms) about Jinja Honchō's centering of large shrines and full-time priests, ignoring the often financially unstable conditions of part-time priests at small shrines.[62] Among my interviewees this was often a point of contention—my interviewees who were "part-time priests" or who were from shrine families that

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outside of the shrine world. Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 7.

[59] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 4.

[60] Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 108.

[61] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 29.

[62] See the multiple entries in Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 36.

could not live off income from their shrine(s) would frequently decry "full-time priests" for being full of themselves or unaware of their privilege.

The economic instability of much of the priesthood makes it an unattractive career option—and that instability is further compounded by the loss of opportunities in depopulated rural areas, as well as the inflexibility of priests' work, which bars priests from many jobs. However, beyond economic instability, the priesthood faces an even greater problem: the hereditary nature of the priesthood.

Won't Someone Think of the Children?

The successor problem is framed, first and foremost, as a familial problem. In his introductory remarks to the conference on the successor problem, for example, Izawa Masahiro said, "I think that the successor problem, in addition to being a problem related to the foundations upon which shrines exist (神社存立の基盤 *jinja sonritsu no kiban*) is a problem with the priesthood as a family trade (家職 *kashoku*)."[63] The authors of the 2013 Niigata Prefecture survey report, too, stressed that the successor problem was a "family problem" (家族の問題 *kazoku no mondai*) that was potentially being caused by two factors: problems that are

[63] Izawa, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," 91-92. Izawa makes similar remarks in Izawa Masahiro, "Shinshoku kōkeisha mondai ni yosete," *Saitama-ken Jinjachō Hō* 188 (2013), 4.

affecting (all) families in contemporary Japan and the difficulty of transmitting (継承 *keishō*) a trade.[64]

Why the focus on succession as a familial problem? Some of this focus on familial succession is based on the demographics of the priesthood. 85% of respondents to the Jinja Honchō survey said their designated successor was their child and another 8.1% said that it was a relative.[65] Prefectural surveys reveal similar results.[66] Almost all shrines pass from a parent to a child (or another relative in the small number of cases where a child is not available or interested).

Demographic trends in Japan have already begun reshaping families and communities. Japan's fertility rate has fallen to 1.45—far below the "replacement level" necessary to maintain the population. It is estimated that by 2065 38.4% of the population will be over the age of 65.[67] The average age of first marriage is also increasing, and an increasing number of people are rejecting marriage altogether.[68]

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[64] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 8.

[65] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 110. As Murakami points out, some regional variation does exist. See, Murakami, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni tsuite," 197.

[66] Prefectural rates: 88.4% in Yamagata (Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 12); 88.4% in Saitama (Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 7); 91.0% in Yamaguchi (Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 6); 90.6% in Niigata (Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 6). See also Murakami, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni tsuite," 170.

[67] Allison Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections: Divorce and the Romance of Independence in Contemporary Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 17.

[68] Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections*, 18. See also Mark Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013-2020: Tokenism, Gradualism, or Failed Strategy?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 19, no. 4 (2021), https://apjjf.org/2021/4/Crawford.html; Kumiko Nemoto, "Why Women Won't Wed," in *Beyond the Gender Gap* in Japan, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 67-82.

Given the importance of family (especially parent-child linkages) in determining succession, it is no surprise that these demographic shifts pose an existential threat to the priesthood's stability. In the 2015 Jinja Honchō survey, more than a quarter of the respondents indicated that they did not have children; the prefectural surveys found similar trends.[69] Marriage rates are still relatively high—84.7% of respondents to the 2015 Jinja Honchō survey indicated that they were married.[70] Interestingly, female respondents were less likely to be married than men (only 53.8% were married), although that may indicate large numbers of widowed women who took over for deceased husbands (see discussion below).[71] As we might expect, head priests with successors are much more likely to be married than those without; in their 2017 survey, Saitama Prefecture found that 97.5% of head priests with successors were married while only 54.5% of those without successors were.[72]

Commentators suggest that it may be harder for priests to get married than men from the general population. "Probably normal women don't like them very much," one participant in a Saitama roundtable explained.[73] Another participant explained, "I get the feeling that priests are seen as unusual (異色 *ishoku*) people."[74] The low incomes earned by priests, in addition to the

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[69] Prefectural surveys asked respondents who indicated that they had no successor why they had no successor; 32.9% of respondents in Yamagata (Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 30), 38% in Saitama (Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 18), and 39.6% in Yamaguchi (Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 17) said it was because they had no children.

[70] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 25.

[71] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 84.

[72] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 24, 35. See also the discussion in Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 27.

[73] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 36.

[74] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 36.

fact that they are often working two or three jobs, make them unattractive partners. Raising a child with the understanding that they will be expected to take over the shrine can also be stressful and undesirable for women who are not from shrine families. Female priests' marriage choices, as discussed in chapter 3, are often even more constrained.

Here it is worth noting that this panic over priests' inability to marry has both logistical and ideological dimensions. Married people in Japan are often seen "as responsible social adults (*shakaijin*, literally 'social person')." As Allison Alexy argues, until the late 20th century, most people in Japan got married, "and being in a heterosexual marriage demonstrated a person's 'normalcy.'"[75] Moral panic surrounds a number of family problems (家族問題 *kazoku mondai*) in contemporary Japan, including a declining marriage rate, later marriages, and more divorces.[76] In her research on divorce, Alexy reports

> almost everyone I spoke to in the course of this project imagined the contemporary divorce rate as unquestionably higher than it had ever been, and therefore evidence that Japan's families, and perhaps Japanese society, were coming apart. To these people, the divorce rate symbolized contemporary families' perceived demise in relation to a hallowed traditional past.[77]

While some of the panic around low marriage rates and lack of children is undoubtedly grounded in the material consequences for a priesthood grounded in hereditary succession, some of it is also tied up in Jinja Honchō's gender (and family) ideology, which sees itself struggling to preserve a traditional family under attack by contemporary society (see chapter 2).

[75] Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections*, 4.

[76] Allison Alexy and Emma E. Cook, ed., *Intimate Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019). See also Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections*, 16-18.

[77] Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections*, 16.

However, even when priests are married and have children, those children may not be compelled to enter the priesthood. Children from rural shrine families may opt to move to urban areas or turn their back on the priesthood to pursue more lucrative work.[78] Some may gain certification but seek full-time employment, leaving the shrine in their parents' hands.[79] Others may gain certification but choose to work as priests at major shrines rather than returning home.[80] In rural areas, schools have shut down, leading young couples to avoid moving to the area, further exacerbating the greying of the local population.[81]

The rising age of marriage has forced priests to stay active for longer, as they don't have children who can take over when they reach retirement age, leading to a greying of the priesthood.[82] Only 27.2% of respondents to the 2015 Jinja Honchō survey were under the age of 60—although it should be noted that only head priests were surveyed, meaning that the average age of priests as a whole is slightly lower.[83] The "priest basic data" (神職基礎データ *shinshoku kiso deeta*) collected by Jinja Honchō for 2015 offered similar numbers—the average age for head priests was 65.1 (65.3 for women and 61.4 for men),[84] and the average age for priests of

[78] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 23.

[79] Izawa, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," 92.

[80] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 25.

[81] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 23.

[82] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 28.

[83] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 39. Yamagata prefecture offered similar numbers: 44.6% of respondents were seventy or older while over 60% were over sixty. See Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 8.

[84] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 39.

grade four (四級 *yonkyū*)[85] or more (which encompasses most of the priesthood) was 55.7 (56.2 for men, 52.9 for women).[86]

It is worth taking a moment here to step away from the numbers and consider the ideological dimensions of the shrine world's emphasis on familial succession. Responses to the successor problem have focused heavily on education of "*shinshoku shitei*" (神職子弟)[87]—a phrase that could hypothetically mean either "priest children" or "priest sons," but in practice almost always refers to the latter. The emphasis on familial succession was even encoded into the successor surveys themselves, which offered respondents four possible reasons for not having a designated successor: A. not having any children at all, B. having a child who doesn't want to succeed, C. having a child the parent doesn't want to force to succeed, and D. having a successor who hasn't yet taken certification (and therefore is not eligible yet).[88]

Jinja Honchō tends to emphasize the *ie* (家), sometimes called the stem-family, rather than the nuclear family. As Borovoy lays out,

> the Japanese "stem-family" system has historically emphasized vertical ties between the generations; marriage did not establish a new family, but rather served to perpetuate the ongoing family line, traced through the eldest son. In practice, the Japanese stem-family

[85] There are two rank systems within Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto. The more relevant one is the system of ranks (階位 *kaii*) laid out below, which determines what positions at the shrine a priest can fill. An additional system (身分 *mibun*) arranges priests in grades from four (the lowest) to "special" (the highest) and determines what color *hakama* the priests can wear. Priests can advance their grade through years worked in the priesthood or services rendered to Jinja Honchō. In my experience, most priests below grade two (when they can wear purple *hakama*) are not aware of their grade—I had one interviewee phone her mother in the middle of an interview because she wasn't sure what grade she was. (Her mother also didn't know but guessed that she was grade four.)

[86] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 41.

[87] Izawa, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," 94.

[88] See, for example, Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Niigata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa chōsa hōkoku*, 86; Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 33.

> is imagined above all as an economic enterprise, prioritizing continuity, economic cooperation, and self-sufficiency, so that the perpetuation of the family line and vertical ties (between parents and children) were prioritized over horizontal bonds between husband and wife.[89]

Shrine families (社家 *shake*) are imagined to operate in much the same way—as an economic enterprise, centered on the shrine, where the "protection" of the shrine is understood to supersede the desires of individual family members.

Shrine families, however, are understood to operate differently than *ie* in "ordinary" society. First (although often not mentioned in these discussions), other occupations that identify themselves with the *ie* system possess real property which is inherited by the successor,[90] whereas shrine families do not own the shrines in which they serve (discussed below). Instead, participants in the conference highlighted the importance of making successors understand their position as bearers of "tradition" (伝統 *dentō*) and "Japanese culture" (日本文化 *Nihon bunka*).[91] Jinja Honchō's stance—that Shinto priests are the stewards of an unbroken tradition that lies at the heart of Japanese culture—has been well-documented elsewhere.[92] For this discussion, the most interesting dimension of this stance is the imagination of this transmission of Japanese culture from one generation of priests to the next. As Izawa argues, "One special

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[89] Amy Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife: Alcohol, Codependency, and the Politics of Nurturance in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 88.

[90] Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 122.

[91] See, for a small collection of examples, Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 115; Arai, "Saitama-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 118-119. Similar comments can also be found in Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 7.

[92] For an overview, see Aike P. Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan: Making Sacred Forests* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 25-45.

characteristic of our shrine Shinto is 'succession' (継承 *keishō*)."[93] This sentiment was echoed by countless other participants in successor surveys, roundtables, and conferences. A typical remark came from Kobayashi Mizuho:

> As has already been touched on many times, the "*ie*" (家) of a shrine is fairly different than the "*ie*" of the general public. Even if you briefly say "succeed," it's not just carrying on the name and the "*ie*" like in the general public. [Shrine families] have to carry on many things, such as "tradition," "festivals," "parishioners," "public nature" (公共性 *kōkyōsei*), etc., which must be accompanied by "resolve" (覚悟 *kakugo*) and of course "faith" (信仰 *shinkō*).[94]

Tradition, as the argument goes, can only be preserved when transmitted, and proper transmission *must* occur through the family.

This assumption powers the sense of duty that weighs upon successors—whether felt intrinsically or applied in the form of parental pressure. 69.7% of surveyed head priests who had successors in Saitama indicated that the successor had chosen to succeed because of "a sense of duty to the shrine family" (社家としての使命感 *shake to shite no shimeikan*), although the successors themselves and the spouses of the head priests tended to stress instead that it was the parents' wishes or a personal choice.[95] Parental pressure (or a desire to conform to a parent's wishes) was acknowledged by all the surveys as a major factor in determining successors, although its exact weight seems to vary from prefecture to prefecture (in part because of

[93] "Zentai tōgi," 221.

[94] Kobayashi, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki," 77-78.

[95] Arai, "Saitama-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 122. See also Ishihara, "Yamagata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 130; Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 15.

differing survey design).[96] Ishii reports similar comments from students enrolled in Kokugakuin University's degree programs,[97] and my interviewees frequently spoke of the familial obligations motivating their entrance into the priesthood (see chapter 3).

Many of the elements Kobayashi emphasizes—the special nature of shrine families, their need to carry on tradition, and the resolve required to do so—appear again and again. Participants in the 2010 conference waxed poetic on how marvelous it was to serve at a shrine—a small shrine, they specified, not a large one—as a family.[98] Rhetoric surrounding shrine families in general—and succession specifically—tends toward the fatalistic. Participants in the Saitama roundtable, for example, emphasized that in the shrine world, everything is determined by where you're born.[99] Other commentators have discussed the resolve necessary to succeed or how they have felt constrained by their family of birth.[100] One anonymous participant in a Yamagata roundtable on the successor problem, for example, said, "To use my own case as an example, I really rebelled against my heritage (世襲 *seshū*) in my youth. It felt like my life was

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[96] In Saitama, for example, 53.5% of head priests, 69.5% of spouses, and 61.5% of successors named "the parent's guidance" (親の指向 *oya no shikō*) as a factor in designating a successor. Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 10-11. In Niigata, 35.3% of respondents named parent's guidance as a factor (Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 10-11)—but Saitama allowed multiple options to be selected while Niigata only allowed one. The Jinja Honchō survey allowed participants to select up to three options; 35.62% of respondents named parental wishes as a major factor in deciding the successor. Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 33.

[97] Ishii reports similar comments from students enrolled in Kokugakuin University's degree programs. See Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 56-57.

[98] "Zentai tōgi," 192-193.

[99] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 35.

[100] See, for example, Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 25; "Zentai tōgi," 176. For a more positive take using the same terminology, see Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 16.

constrained by rules; I couldn't freely choose."[101] Comparisons between shrine families and family businesses abound in roundtables on the successor problem.[102]

Solutions to the successor problem have thus focused primarily on A. increasing the number of children born to shrine families and B. inculcating the proper sense of duty in potential successors so that they will succeed without complaint. Attempts to increase the number of potential successors often illustrate the ways succession is imagined to be hereditary and priests are imagined to be male. Several prefectures have discussed or held matchmaking events (婚活 *konkatsu*) for priests. Saitama, for example, has run an event intended to introduce priests to potential partners, but their notes on the event make it clear that the event was targeted at *male* priests and potential *female* partners.[103]

Given the focus on inculcating correct values in the next generation, home education (家庭教育 *katei kyōiku*) of priests is a frequent target for improvement.[104] This focus on pre-college education reflects the timeline for many children of shrine families accepting that they will succeed—40.8% of successors surveyed in Saitama said they knew that they would become the successor by the end of high school, while another 20.1% said that they knew in college.[105]

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[101] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 55. For a female priest's story which utilizes much of the same language, see chapter 3.

[102] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 50.

[103] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 18-19.

[104] Fascinatingly, both Yamaguchi and Saitama prefectures asked spouses (and only spouses) whether home education was important in getting children to succeed. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 37; Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 50. Commenters during the Saitama roundtable also stressed the mother's importance in convincing children to succeed. Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 30-31.

[105] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 51.

Ishihara Jun'ichi, in discussing the results of the Yamagata Prefecture survey, highlighted the isolation of shrine children from their peers as well as their distance from the shrine itself as major issues contributing to the lack of successors. He recommended that priests enlist their children to assist at festivals and also reduce the amount that they complained about the shrine around their children, to avoid their children focusing on the negative aspects of serving in a shrine (such as the low pay or the irritation of dealing with ornery parishioners).[106] He explained that he had four daughters, all of whom he has made assist at the shrine since they were young.[107] Motozawa Masafumi, in his comments, also discussed the loneliness of being a shrine child and the importance of building organizations that allow shrine children to meet their peers.[108] Some prefectures have also attempted to create groups for children from shrine families to dress in shrine vestments, recite the *Ōharae norito*, and learn about the shrine. However, many of these groups have wound up being dissolved due to lack of participants.[109]

We can see similar patterns in responses in other prefectures. For example, in Yamaguchi, 42.9% of respondents said they knew by the end of high school, with another 14.3% in college. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 38.

For an example of a "sole successor" female priest who knew she would succeed in childhood, see chapter 3.

[106] For further discussion of the pros and cons of enlisting children for festivals, see "Zentai tōgi," 177-178, 183. For further discussion of the importance of not isolating children from the shrine or having their only contact be a parent venting about their job, see "Zentai tōgi," 178-180.

[107] Ishihara, "Yamagata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 131-134. For other advocates of early education, see Sakamoto, "Komento ni," 156; Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 22. For cautionary voices, worrying that too much pressure on children from shrine families might cause resistance, see Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 22.

[108] Motozawa Masafumi, "Komento san," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 159-160. For additional thoughts on reforming education of shrine successors, see Ishihara Jun'ichi, "Tōji shiryō: Jinja Honchō kyōgaku taikai 'Shinshoku no kōkeisha mondai to kadai,'" *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 226-227. For more on growing up in a shrine family as an isolating experience, see Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 32.

[109] "Zentai tōgi," 208-213. Ueda describes running a similarly child-focused cram school (塾 *juku*) once a month. "Zentai tōgi," 218.

Ishii Kenji's comments have been more consistently negative. Ishii is a professor at Kokugakuin University, and he frequently discusses having students from shrine families who have never worked in the shrine and have no familiarity with it.[110] He says that there are shrine children who dye their hair blond, have piercings, and paint their nails, all of which are indicative of a lack of home education.[111] Ishii, like Motozawa and Ishihara, blames the successor problem on the lack of home education in shrine families, but adds that the post-war educational system makes children believe they have a choice in work.[112] "I get the impression that kids who go to college these days are more like foreigners than Japanese people," he says.[113] While Ishii's comments may seem to be extreme, the transformation of the priesthood into an occupation rather than a calling and the transformation of the postwar educational system are frequently named as culprits in the successor problem.[114]

We have very few windows into the reasons why children of shrine families might not be willing to enter the priesthood—they are not targeted by successor surveys, for obvious reasons. However, Yamagata conducted a survey of children of priests who did not want to succeed, which offers some interesting data. When asked why they didn't want to succeed, respondents

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[110] See, for example, Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 19; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 46-48, 56-57.
Kobayashi Mizuho has made similar comments. See Kobayashi, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki," 78.

[111] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 14. For more on the importance of appearances for priests, see chapter 4.

[112] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 46-47. He makes similar comments in Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 33-34.

[113] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 66.

[114] For an example of the former, see Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 7. For examples of the latter, see Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 59, 60.

cited lack of familiarity with shrine work while growing up; low evaluation of, low satisfaction in, or lack of pride in working as a priest; and economic issues, such as difficulty in finding supplemental work or inability to take time off from their full-time job.[115] While a sense of duty (or parental pressure) may compel children to follow their parents' footsteps, and home education might help children find pride in their parents' work, neither of these factors is enough to overcome the substantial barriers posed by economic instability.

Not everyone agrees with the focus on familial succession, however. In response to a question on what respondents had done in order to convince their children to succeed in Saitama's survey, one anonymous write-in response was, "Succession is not a hereditary system (世襲制 *seshūsei*), so answering this question is difficult."[116] They were in the minority, however, as all other responses offered their own experiences convincing their children to become priests.[117] Ishii Kenji, who was involved in almost every successor survey, has (as we have seen) tended to emphasize the hereditary nature of the priesthood, but he has also criticized the tendency to treat the successor problem as an issue of individual shrines and families rather than a systemic issue facing the shrine world as a whole.[118] Some commentators have also noted, with some irony, that both the Meiji government and the postwar Religious Corporations law designated shrines as not being private possessions, yet most small shrines are handed down within families.[119]

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[115] Ishihara, "'Tōji shiryō,'" 224-225.

[116] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 28.

[117] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 28-29.

[118] Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 1; Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 1.

[119] "Zentai tōgi," 200-201.

One obvious solution to the successor problem would be to expand notions of succession beyond blood relations.[120] While many people who are not from shrine families may be interested in becoming priests—some commentators suggest that they are *more* interested and motivated than children from shrine families[121]—it is very difficult for them to secure work. This issue is especially acute for female students (see chapter 2). Often the only jobs available to non-shrine family priests are at *beppyōsha*, so the influx of new blood to the priesthood does not travel to shrines facing depopulation, unless they marry into pre-existing shrine families.[122] Older people from "ordinary" families—especially those who decide to gain certification after retiring from full-time work—have no employment prospects, unless they are getting certified in order to take over a specific community shrine.[123] While priests caring for large number of *kenmusha* could transfer some of them to these priests, people tend to think of shrines as their family property and are unwilling to give them away.[124]

Commentators also often raise the difficulty of building community connections as a stranger to the community rather than as the child of a shrine family.[125] While some priests support integrating more people from "ordinary" families,[126] others worry that local traditions

[120] While integration of outsiders—through adoption—is a common feature of *ie*, as discussed below, the shrine world leans heavily toward the primacy of consanguinity, with adoption saved as a last resort.

[121] "Zentai tōgi," 183; Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 25-26.

[122] Motozawa, "Komento san," 163; "Zentai tōgi," 172.

[123] For an example of care of a shrine being transferred to a community member from an "ordinary family," see Yamashita's story in chapter 3. See also Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 36-37.

[124] "Zentai tōgi," 187-188; Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 25.
Complaints that priests think of shrines as private property rather than public property (as commentators argue they should) abound; see "Zentai tōgi," 188.

[125] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 25; Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 5.

[126] See, for example, Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa*

can't be transmitted to outsiders.[127] Although some participants in the successor problem conference indicated their desire to open up the priesthood to people from non-shrine families,[128] the majority of the conversation centered on children from shrine families.

Some rhetoric around the primacy of blood relations seems to be dissolving, as conditions become more severe. Respondents to the most recent Saitama survey, for example, noted that "If you prioritize blood connections, I think it will be fairly difficult,"[129] and were much more likely to consider having to find a third-party (a non-blood relation) to inherit the shrine inevitable when facing a lack of successors.[130] However, much of this shift seems to be related to constrained choices rather than a reorientation of values—successors, for example, tend to very strongly assert that it is not acceptable to pass the shrine into a third party's hands,[131] whereas priests without successors tend to say that it is more acceptable than those with successors.[132]

Regardless of where they place the exact blame, commentators on the successor problem hold two tenets to be true. First, the shrine as an organization is centered on the family, and therefore any solutions to its problems must also be focused on the family as a unit. Second, resistance to succeeding in the younger generation can be mitigated through appropriate action

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hōkokusho, 65.

[127] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 63.

[128] "Zentai tōgi," 217.

[129] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 7.

[130] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 16. Similar results can be seen in Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 20.

[131] See, for example, Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 20.

[132] See, for example, Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 24.

from parents (whether that means enlisting children to help in rituals, instilling the proper sense of duty, or restraining oneself from complaining about the shrine while at home).

Learn to Be a Priest in a Month

One final issue commonly identified as contributing to the successor problem is the current educational system for priests. In order to serve as a priest at a Jinja Honchō-affiliated shrine, one must first gain certification (神職資格 *shinshoku shikaku*). There are currently two major ways of gaining certification—through an exam (administered by Jinja Honchō) or through a training course (considered the "non-exam" route). Most priests are certified through one of the training courses. Among my interviewees, for example, only one of them took one rank (of her four total ranks of certification) via an exam, while all the rest took all ranks of their certification via training courses.

There are three types of training courses. The first is gaining credentials as part of one's undergraduate education at one of the Shinto universities (Kōgakkan University or Kokugakuin University). The second is completing the one-year postbaccalaureate "major course" (専攻科 *senkōka*) at either of the Shinto universities or one of the other training centers. The third is to complete the *kōshūkai* (講習会), a one-month training course held at the Shinto universities as well as regional training centers.[133] The Shinto universities are open to anyone who passes the

[133] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 86-87. Interestingly, Buddhist doctrinal education also tends to be offered in either a university program or short, intensive course format. See Monika Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?: Self-Understandings of Ordained Buddhist Women in Contemporary Japan," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 4 (2015), 191-193.

entrance exam—Motozawa Masafumi estimates that 30-40% of the graduates from the Shinto departments and priest tracks of the Japanese literature and history departments at Kōgakkan University are from shrine families.[134] Attending *kōshūkai*, on the other hand, requires letters of recommendation both from the head priest of the shrine where the participant will be employed and the leader of the district (支部 *shibu*).

To make matters more complicated, priest credentials currently have five ranks (階位 *kaii*)—*chokkai* (直階), *gonseikai* (権正階), *seikai* (正階), *meikai* (明階), and *jōkai* (浄階). The number of ranks—and the requirements for attaining them—have changed over the past 75 years,[135] but currently one must hold at least the second rank (*gonseikai*) to serve as a head priest. Graduates of the four-year program enter directly into the third rank (*seikai*) unless they have completed the (more intensive) *meikai* course in their undergraduate studies. However, they are automatically promoted to *meikai* after a comparatively short time working in a shrine. One-year course graduates similarly graduate with either *seikai* or *meikai*, depending on which path of study they choose. One-month training course graduates must work their way up, rank by rank. In theory, it should take a middle school graduate moving through the *kōshūkai* system

[134] Motozawa, "Komento san," 161. Other estimates put it closer to 50/50; see "Zentai tōgi," 172. My interviewees have tended to estimate a much higher number of students from shrine families, usually from 60-80%, although many of them took their certification some time ago.

[135] *Gonseikai* was created in 1961. College graduates no longer receive *meikai* directly upon graduation. The *seikai* training course used to have no prerequisite, allowing people to jump directly to the third level without any previous certification. See Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 87.

four years (one one-month course per year) to get to the fourth rank (*meikai*), which is about the same time as it takes a college graduate.[136]

However, this assumes that the priest in question can take one month off work every year for four years. Starting at the second level (*gonseikai*), priests are also required to complete a month-long internship (実習 *jishū*) at a large shrine in the area, which can be particularly onerous for priests working full-time, as these internships must be completed during business hours.[137] Even completing the *kōshūkai* may be difficult for people who are working a full-time job, as it requires taking a full month off work.[138] 34.2% of respondents in Yamagata, for example, said that they had someone who could succeed but they hadn't taken certification yet.[139] Many of the respondents in all the surveys cited the long period of time required to complete certification as a barrier to potential successors.[140]

Gaining more than the minimum certification is also often difficult for priests at smaller shrines, as training sessions are not timed to coincide with weekends (on the assumption that priests are full-time) and gaining further levels of certification often requires significant

[136] Izawa, "Shinshoku kōkeisha mondai ni yosete," 4.

[137] One of the priests at my main fieldwork site, for example, was completing her required thirty days of internship during summer 2016—she had begun almost a year before, since she had to do it piecemeal on her days off. Another interviewee, who had completed her certification at the same time, had not even completed half of the internship, as she worked a full-time job on top of serving as a priest.

[138] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 32; Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 36.

[139] There appears to be some regional variation in this trend. Saitama only had 19%, for example. See Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 18. However, it is also possible that there may have been differences in understandings of what a "successor" is—after all, many priests across all the surveys said that they had a successor who was still in elementary or middle school (and therefore could not have had credentials).

[140] See, for example, Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Niigata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa chōsa hōkoku*, 4, 11; Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 18; Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubukai, ed., *Dai3kai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 44-45.

expenditure of both money and time.[141] One respondent to the 2019 Saitama survey, for example, noted that one of their relatives needed to take *kōshūkai* twice to get to *gonseikai* (necessary to serve as head priest). In order to take it the first time, they had to quit their job; for the second, they were able to convince their employer to let them use all their vacation days for that month.[142] I heard similar stories from my interviewees—several women I interviewed took certification because their husbands could not take time off work. While priests may theoretically gain the fourth level of certification (*meikai*) via *kōshūkai*, most of the respondents to the Jinja Honchō survey with *meikai* were graduates of one of the Shinto universities,[143] demonstrating the serious barriers to attaining higher credentials for priests who did not go the university route.

Most priests gain through credentials through one of the *kōshūkai*—over 60%, according to Izawa.[144] The Jinja Honchō survey, although it had issues on some of the questions related to certification,[145] found similar trends—only 18.9% of the respondents got their credentials through undergraduate study at one of the Shinto universities. The concentrated course, undergraduate, and graduate courses at the Shinto universities combined had only certified 26.1% of the priesthood.[146]

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[141] Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 113; "Zentai tōgi," 182.

[142] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 7.

[143] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 89.

[144] Izawa, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," 93; Izawa, "Shinshoku kōkeisha mondai ni yosete," 5.

[145] The Jinja Honchō survey had multiple questions that yielded data that was obviously unusable. For example, multiple respondents input their current rank as *chokkai* but then indicated that their first rank gained was a *higher* rank, which is not possible. For a discussion of the issues with the data regarding certification specifically, see Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 93.

[146] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 90.

However, as commentators have pointed out, *kōshūkai* were started in the immediate postwar period as an emergency measure to certify priests as quickly as possible.[147] These two tracks of education have led to major disparities in the education level of priests. For example, one issue that was frequently raised by my interviewees (both graduates from the Shinto universities and graduates from *kōshūkai*) was that while university students might have four years to learn ritual technique, *kōshūkai* graduates were expected to memorize all of it in four to five one-day classes scattered over an intensive month of training (see chapter 4). My interlocutors at Kokugakuin University expressed frustration, too, with *kōshūkai* graduates' knowledge of the *Kojiki* and other doctrinal matters; as studying the *Kojiki* had little to no relevance to the everyday administration of the shrine, my interviewees would usually cram it for a few days to pass the test during their training and then not devote any further study to it.[148] An even more cynical version of this sentiment was expressed by an anonymous member of the discussion of the Niigata survey, who said that they had heard that there were people who had gained their certification who didn't even know where Ise Shrine was located.[149] Nor are the Shinto Universities free from issues. The Shinto department at Kōgakkan University has a particularly high fail rate—20% of the department fails to pass their second year.[150] Kokugakuin University has similar issues with students failing out.[151]

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[147] Izawa, "Kaisai shushi setsumei," 93; Sakamoto, "Komento ni," 155-156.

[148] My interviewees have frequently used me as a reference for information about the *Kojiki*, Shinto history, and other "scholarly" topics, much to my consternation.

[149] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 32.

[150] Motozawa, "Komento san," 161-162.

[151] "Zentai tōgi," 167.

Izawa argues for the need to both reform the credentialing system and reinvigorate shrines. One major issue he highlights is that *kōshūkai* don't address many of the issues facing contemporary shrines, such as the aging of parishioners and the declining birth rates.[152] Another major issue is that training at the four-year universities tends to assume that priests will be working as full-time priests after graduation, and thus makes no effort to equip them with skills or certification that might be able to land them a secondary job.[153] One suggestion is for the Shinto department to have gaining additional certification—especially a license as an educator—as part of the curriculum.[154] Others recommend adding classes on business (経営 *keiei*) to training programs.[155] Other suggested measures for combatting the successor problem include setting up a public employment security office (ハローワーク *haarowaaku*) for priests,[156] providing matchmaking services for successors,[157] making *kōshūkai* shorter,[158] creating programs wherein large shrines in an area hire priests from smaller shrines to help supplement their income without impacting their ability to take leave and perform ceremonies at their own

[152] Izawa, "Shinshoku kōkeisha mondai ni yosete," 4.

[153] See, for example, the discussion in Arai, "Saitama-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 124.

[154] Motozawa, "Komento san," 162; "Zentai tōgi," 184.

[155] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 14.

[156] Ishihara, "Yamagata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 139; Sakamoto, "Komento ni," 154; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 51.

[157] "Kōkeisha taisaku kekkon sōdanshitsu secchi jigyō yōkō," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 243-244. See also, Ishihara, "Yamagata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 139; Ueda, "Komento ichi," 148-149; Sakamoto, "Komento ni," 154.

[158] "Zentai tōgi," 215. An anonymous respondent to the most recent Saitama survey suggested either splitting *kōshūkai* in half (so it would be done in two fifteen-day stints) or allowing head priests to take only one level of certification. See Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 7.

shrines,[159] and creating a dispatch system for priests.[160] However, with the exception of the second to last program (which has had a few limited pilots run), these programs are hypothetical and have not been implemented.

How Are Female Priests Related to the Successor Problem?

Now that we understand the demographic crisis facing the Shinto priesthood, as well as the factors animating it, we can return to female priests. Conversations about the successor problem are unavoidably intertwined with conversations about female priests. The increase in female priests, as one participant of the successor problem conference put it, "reflects the precarity of the [current] shrine world."[161]

Looking at Figure 1.5, we can immediately see that the number of female priests has increased every year since their entrance into the priesthood. Conversely, the number of male priests peaked in 2000 (with 19,221 male priests recorded by *Shūkyō nenkan*'s annual survey) and as of 2020 had decreased by more than 1000 (to 18,041).[162] The number of female priests, meanwhile, has increased every year since statistics began to be collected in 1950. Female

[159] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 52. Interestingly, these measures have been implemented in Saitama, but have not prevented the number of successors from decreasing. See discussion in Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 17-18.

[160] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 18.

[161] "Zentai tōgi," 204. See similar comments in Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan," 4-5.

[162] Bunkachō, ed., *Shūkyō nenkan Heisei 12nen ban* (Gyōsei, 2001), https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/h12nenkan.pdf, 51; Bunkachō, ed., *Shūkyō nenkan Reiwa 2nen ban* (Bunkachō, 2020), https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/r02nenkan.pdf, 55.

priests are especially noticeable in rural areas, where depopulation and economic conditions may leave few male priests behind.[163] "Matrilineal" (女系 *jokei*) shrines, where the position of head priest is passed from mother to daughter are becoming increasingly common—one discussant in Saitama reported knowing of around ten within the prefecture.[164]

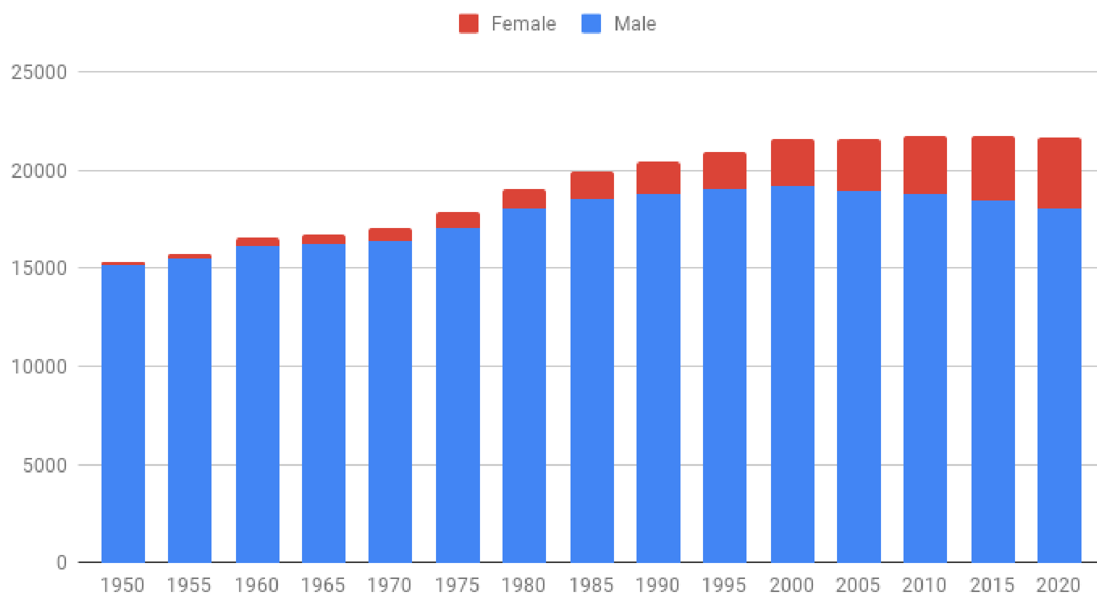

Figure 1.5 The gender composition of the priesthood between 1950 and 2020. [165] *Note the decrease in male priests after 2000.*

According to Jinja Honchō's survey, 88.4% of designated successors were male and 11.6% were female.[166] Some minor regional variation exists (Figure 1.6). Tokyo has the highest

[163] See, for example, the remarks in "Zentai tōgi," 191-192.

[164] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 23. Within my own interview sample, one shrine is matrilineal (Kobayashi's shrine, discussed in chapter 3), while another is going to be passed between two unrelated women (my main field site, discussed in chapter 5 and the conclusion).

[165] All data taken from *Shūkyō nenkan*, excepting the 1950 and 1960 statistics, which have been taken from Jinja Honchō's histories, as I have been unable to obtain copies of *Shūkyō nenkan* from those years.

[166] The Jinja Honchō survey had many design problems—including not being able to distinguish between types of non-responses (the difference between people who were instructed to skip the question vs. those who were supposed to answer but didn't, for example)—but filtering out all non-responses, 88.4% of designated successors were male and 11.6% were female. Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa"*

rate of designated female successors (18.6%) followed by Tōhoku (13.8%). Hokkaido has the lowest (6.3%) followed by Kyushu (8.1%).[167] Prefectural surveys offer a similar spread of 7.1% to 16.9% female.[168]

Figure 1.6 Gender ratio of designated successors by region.[169]

Successor surveys also project an increase in female head priests in the next generation. When Niigata conducted their second successor survey, for example, 10.7% of head priests

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hōkokusho, 109.

[167] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 196. Interestingly, Tokyo had a comparatively high rate *overall* of designated successors while Shikoku had a comparatively low one, despite both having high rates of designated *female* successors. See Murakami, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni tsuite," 197.

[168] In Ehime, 89% of successors were male and 11% were female. Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan," 7. In Yamagata, 91.8% of successors were male and 7.5% were female. Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 11. In Saitama, 91.4% of successors were male and 7.1% were female. Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 6. In Yamaguchi, 84.0% were male and 15.3% were female. Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 5. In Niigata, 83.1% of successors were male and 16.9% were female. Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 5.

[169] Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *"Jinja ・ shinshoku ni kan suru jittai chōsa" hōkokusho*, 196.

within the prefecture were female, whereas 16.9% of the designated successors were female.[170] Similar patterns of projected increase were also found in Yamaguchi and Yamagata.[171] Saitama prefecture was the only of the four that had a lower rate of female successors than currently active female head priests, although there was major geographical variation in rates of projected female priests, from 0% to 18.2% depending on the district (支部 *shibu*).[172] More recent surveys of Saitama suggest that this trend has changed, projecting 10.2% female successors (in 2017)[173] against 7% of current head priests being female (as of 2015).

By examining comments made about female priests in various Jinja Honchō sources, we can identify two major assumptions. First, female priests exist as a subpar substitute for male priests—they only serve because of a lack of male labor caused by societal conditions. In an ideal world, female priests would not exist. Second, female priests exist mainly as interim links in a patrilineal family line. While a shrine may pass into the hands of a woman, the assumption is that it will eventually pass back into male leadership.

Let us examine the first assumption. As we have already seen, in 1946 Jinja Honchō stated that female priests were allowed due to "gender equality and to open the road for the widows of priests who died in the war."[174] However, if we look at commentary from the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, instead we see the argument that female priests were allowed into the

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[170] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 5.

[171] Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 5; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 11.

[172] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 6.

[173] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 22.

[174] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gonenshi*, 39.

priesthood because of the state of emergency caused by the lack of male priests. For example, in "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku" (The shrine world from now on and female priests) published in *Gekkan Wakaki* in 1998, the anonymous author explains,

> It was an era in which, due to the influence of the new constitution which extoled gender equality and the lack of male priests due to death and internment, female priests become necessary for the maintenance of shrines (神社護持 *jinja goji*). […]
>
> From the pragmatic problems such as head priests who could not repatriate due to internment and male successors who were [still] children, the Jinja Honcho council (神社本庁審議会 Jinja Honchō Shingikai), convened in Showa 22-23 [1947-1948], strongly reported in their findings the opinion that female priests were unavoidable as the supervisors of religious corporations, and the following year, according to the decision of the board of trustees (評議員会 *hyōgiinkai*), the word "male" (男子 *danshi*) was erased from the seventy-ninth article of [Jinja Honchō's] charter.[175]

Here the "open[ing] the road for the widows of priests who died in the war" is reframed slightly—rather than being about the women themselves, Jinja Honchō chose to allow women in to protect shrines from going unstaffed due to the absence of men.

We see similar rhetorical moves made in other documents recounting the history of female priests. Ishii Kenji describes female priests in the immediate postwar as "pinch hitters"[176] and being allowed due to a need to "protect shrines."[177] Ujitoko Sadamoto positions female priests as "protecting" shrines from going unstaffed and falling into disrepair.[178] In his remarks on the founding of the National Female Priests' Association (discussed further in chapter 2), Sakurai Katsunoshin, the advisor to the organization, notes that the first group of female priests

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[175] "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku," *Gekkan Wakaki* 582 (1998), 2-3.

[176] "Zentai tōgi," 191.

[177] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 43; Hosokawa Morisada, "Shukuji," in *Setsuritsu 30shūnen kinen shi*, ed. Miyagi-ken Fujin Shinshoku Kyōgikai (1992), 85.

[178] Ujitoko Sadamoto, "Haha no sugata," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 108.

in the postwar period "shouldered the responsibility of protecting their shrines."[179] Yasuda Mitsutoshi, in a presentation on the successor problem, locates the beginning of female priests' existence in the need to serve as interim successors between the war dead and their (male) children.[180] This assertion was repeated to me by countless priests and scholars while I was conducting my fieldwork—female priests were an anomaly, they insisted, caused in an attempt to protect shrines from the extreme conditions at the end of World War II.

A very small number of pieces produced by Jinja Honchō administrators note the "gender equality" reasoning behind opening the priesthood to women. All the examples I have found have been published in Female Priests' Association magazines (discussed in greater depth in the next chapter). For example, Katō Tomoe, the head priest of Hattori Tenjin Shrine and a Jinja Honchō director, notes that "it seems fair to say" that the decision to open the priesthood to women "opened the road to gender equality (男女同権 *danjo dōken*) unexpectedly quickly in the shrine world."[181] Hiraiwa Masatoshi, a Jinja Honchō director, notes that the reason that female priests were allowed into the priesthood, when it had historically been restricted to men, was because "in the previous World War, many priests and successors died, and because of the postwar ideology (思想 *shisō*) of gender equality (男女平等), it was decided that female priests and head priests would make their entrance [into the shrine world]."[182] A small number of commentators additionally touch on the prewar (and pre-Meiji) history of female ritualists in

[179] Sakurai Katsunoshin, "Gohatten o inotte," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 2.

[180] Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 106-107.

[181] Katō Tomoe, "Tomo ni ayumu," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 82.

[182] Hiraiwa Masatoshi, "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku," *Kokoroba* 24 (2013), 1.

shrines. Ogasawara Takeshi, the president of the Okayama Prefecture Jinjachō, for example, notes that while women were originally the "core" of rituals for the *kami*, "at some point, it became the specialty of men (男子専門 *danshi senmon*)."[183] Three different authors discuss Miyamoto Shigetane's activities to allow women to serve as priests in the 1920s and 1930s (see introduction).[184] These remarks are outliers, however—it is much more likely for commentators to note A. the historical rupture caused by the entrance of women into the priesthood and B. their contingent status, precipitated by lack of male labor.

Consequently, female priests are imagined to fall into two categories: daughters and wives. In his comments for the successor conference, for example, Ishii Kenji mentions several models: female priests are successors (usually due to either a lack of male successors or a lack of interest from potential male successors) or the wives or daughters of (male) successors.[185] In his discussion of the results from the Yamagata prefecture survey, he adds that the view that men will definitely take certification is declining as daughters and granddaughters instead take certification and continue the shrine family.[186] Yasuda similarly offers possible scenarios: a son excels in academics and leaves for Tokyo for work and doesn't come back so his younger sister has to inherit the family shrine, an only-child daughter does not marry so she must become the

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[183] Ogasawara Takeshi, "Shukuji," in *Kessei jūshūnen kinen shi Iyasaka*, ed. Okayama-ken Fujin Shinshokukai (1994), 1.

[184] Katō Takahisa, "Joshi shinshoku no yakushin ni omou," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 177-178; Miyazaki Yoshinori, "Joshi shinshokukai e no kitai," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 44; Suzuki Hidetoshi, "Goshukuji ni kaete," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 2.

[185] "Zentai tōgi," 189.

[186] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 11. For more comments on the dissolution of patrilineal norms around succession, see Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 43.

head priest, and the head priest gets too old to take care of the shrine so his wife takes over until their grandchild comes back (presumably from studying or working in another area).[187] Participants in the discussions following prefectural surveys raised narratives that fell into similar patterns: daughters of shrine families or widows/wives of priests.[188] Note here that all these categories are defined first by their relationship to men in a shrine lineage—their grandfathers, fathers, husbands, or brothers—and often specifically by male *absence*.

Female priests are thus allowed when they form a link in an otherwise broken patrilineal lineage—they exist to "protect" shrines. Yasuda Mitsutoshi, for example, imagines contemporary female priests as filling a rupture in the patrilineal lineage caused by depopulation and current working conditions—female priests may be serving as priests until their husbands are able to retire (from full-time work outside of the shrine) or until their sons or grandsons are old enough to take over the shrine.[189] He compares shrine families to merchant families in Kansai, who require adopted husbands (婿 *muko*) in order to ensure continuity; "there is a chance that a shrine family with a beautiful daughter," he says, "will possibly be blessed with successors."[190] Murei Hitoshi, in his discussion of successor surveys nationally and in Nagano Prefecture, writes,

> The current state of the number of priests is that the increase in female priests has supplemented the decrease in male priests, so overall there has been a slight increase. We can say that part of this state of affairs is that daughters and spouses (配偶者 *haigūsha*) of

[187] "Zentai tōgi," 204.

[188] Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 20.

[189] Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 106-107.

[190] Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 108.

> shrine families have continued the line of succession where [there would have been] a breakage in the line of succession or decrease due to male successors of shrine families.[191]

Female priests bridge gaps in shrine lineages that are caused by male absence, reinforcing the image of the priesthood as a family business.

Female priests' status as "pinch hitters" often means that they are the last resort. Okamoto Kenji, in his remarks in the national Female Priests' Association magazine, suggests that that the shrine world has no choice but to employ female priests—in the same way that it has no choice but to employ elderly priests—due to the conditions of contemporary society.[192] One anonymous commenter during the Saitama roundtable said, "I had three children who were all boys, but among my seven grandchildren, they are currently all girls. I'm thinking, 'Can't you just do me a favor and have one more?'"[193] It is not uncommon for wives to serve as the second-in-command to their husbands but cede the head priest position to their sons when they come of age[194]—they play supporting roles to their husbands (and sons) unless they are forced into the head priest's role by the absence of appropriate male successors. Other priests share stories of female priests inspiring their male relatives to join the priesthood. For example, an anonymous commenter in Yamagata recounted that she decided to take certification upon seeing how hard it was for her father to work part-time as a priest and full-time as a civil employee. Two years after receiving certification, she got married. Her father told her husband, "You don't need to become a priest; just come as an adopted son," but her husband decided to take certification after

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[191] Murei, "'Kōkeisha mondai' ni kawaru zenkoku shinshoku no genjō ittan," 5.

[192] Okamoto Kenji, "Kazashi," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 57.

[193] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 24.

[194] Niigata-ken Jinjachō Seishōnen Taisakubu, *Dainikai kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 28. For an example (and counterexample) of this phenomenon, see chapter 3.

watching his wife and father-in-law work.[195] While women are necessary for keeping shrines from going unstaffed in these stories, their persuading men to join the priesthood is treated as their true accomplishment.

Alternatively, we could think of female priests not just as *protecting* familial succession but as *warding off* non-hereditary succession. For example, in response to a question regarding whether it would be permissible to pass custody of the shrine to a third-party in the 2017 Saitama survey, write-in responses included: "If it was the spouse of my daughter, I think it would be fine"; "As much as possible, [should] pass [the position] to a person connected by blood. Gender (男女 *danjo*) doesn't matter"; and "If it's an adopted son, there's no problem."[196] A spousal respondent on a question about letting a third-party succeed conveyed a similar sentiment: "Regardless of gender (男女を問わず *danjo o towazu*), it [should] be a person connected by blood."[197] A successor respondent wrote,

> I don't know about large shrines, but there are female priests (女性神主 *josei kannushi*) at shrines that are rooted in their regions, so as much as possible I think that it's good to administer [shrines] from generation to generation. If by chance there isn't a child, I think it's important to first have a meeting with the family and have everyone talk together.[198]

Given the choice between passing the shrine into a daughter or wife's hands or passing the shrine to an unrelated third-party, it is clearly preferable to let a woman take the lead.

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[195] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 54.

[196] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 24. For an explanation of marriage structures in Japan, see chapter 3.

[197] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 31.

[198] Saitama-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, "'Shinshoku jittai chōsa' hōkokusho," 36.

Tellingly, discussions about opening the priesthood tend to assume that it will be open first to "women" and then to people from "ordinary families." Ishii Kenji, for example, says, "I think it would be good to open the framework of the priesthood in the shrine world to women and normal people. However, in reality that seems fairly difficult."[199] Priests from "ordinary families" are often spoken of as being male—in his comments at the "successor problem" conference, for example, Arai raises the possibility that priests he hires who are not from shrine lineages may get married to women from the area and settle down there.[200] The education committee in Hiroshima offered one of the few examples of women from outside shrine lineages being suggested as successors, as they suggested tapping into "women who like shrines, called 'shrine girls' (神社女子 *jinja joshi*)" as well as "interested people from the area who think shrines are important" as potential sources of successors.[201]

However, even marrying into a shrine family does not fully absolve female priests born into "ordinary" families of their outsider status. Participants in the successor conferences raised concerns about the number of women from "ordinary" families who married into shrine families and thus "know nothing" about shrines while being put in an administrative position (and sometimes being expected to take over the shrine upon their husband's death).[202] While I have found no data to support this assertion, some commentators have insisted that it used to be that shrine daughters married into other shrine families.[203] One recommendation has been to create a

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[199] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 36.

[200] "Zentai tōgi," 185.

[201] Kyōka Iinkai, "Chiiki no hito to kangaeru kaso chiiki jinja no kōkeisha mondai ni tsuite," 5.

[202] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 31.

[203] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 28; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 58. Okada Momoko, the author of *Jinja wakaoku*

network, similar to those employed by temple wives, to disseminate information among shrine wives.[204] My interviewees raised similar concerns about women who married into shrine families and had not been raised within the shrine—they worried that they were at a disadvantage due to their lack of familiarity with the shrine, the *kami*, and the parishioners (see chapters 3 and 5). We can see here the primacy of biological family being reinforced—a wife (not from a shrine lineage) or (adopted) husband is not ideal but will do if no biological children can take over the shrine. Thus, the hierarchy of female priests, from most to least desirable is daughters of priests, wives of priests, and then women unattached to a shrine lineage (who are so undesirable as to not merit mention in most of these materials).

However, perhaps even more important than their ability to ward off non-hereditary succession is female priests' provision of un- or undercompensated labor to their family shrines. In his discussion of the Yamagata prefecture survey results, Ishii opines, "The pattern of men working outside [the home] and women protecting the shrine is emerging."[205] Similarly, in the analysis section for the Yamagata survey, the author[206] writes,

> In the shrine world, as the birth rate declines and the age of marriage increases further, the first thing to think about is [transitioning] from 'male succession' to 'female

nikki: torii wo kugureba bessekai (see chapter 3), is mentioned specifically as an example of a situation that would not have happened in the past during the Saitama roundtable.

[204] Ishii, *Saitama-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 31.

[205] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 10. An anonymous participant also uses similar language in the roundtable. Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 43.

The language of protection is especially notable as it directly parallels language around "guarding the house." Goldstein-Gidoni explains: "Whereas men are expected to guard or protect the house by providing for the family, in return they prefer that their wives remain indoors. Women should guard the 'household,' meaning the house and family, from within. The phrasing has a traditional flavor as the household (*ie*) is portrayed as being protected from the world of 'society' (*shakai*), which is depicted in harsh and intimidating terms." Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan: An Ethnography of Real Lives and Consumerized Domesticity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 90.

[206] While Ishii Kenji was on the survey team (and may have written these remarks), it is unclear who authored the analysis section (or if it was co-authored by multiple members of the survey team).

> succession.' In particular, at shrines [that cannot support a] full-time [priest], the increase of female head priests is a development precipitated by economic factors.[207]

The transition from male to female succession is thus a function not only of available personnel (there are not enough men) but also of the economic conditions of shrines (women do not need to be compensated at the same levels as men or at all, because they are not expected to be the breadwinners for their families). This transition from full-time male to part-time (or lower-compensated) female labor can also be seen in the Japanese corporate world (see chapter 2).

To offer a specific example of what this arrangement may look like, an anonymous commentator in Yamagata prefecture offered the example of his own household—he took over the family shrine from his father, but also works full-time. His wife also has certification and takes care of the shrine during the day. However, certain ceremonies, such as the major festivals (例祭 *reisai*) for the shrine or ground purification ceremonies (地鎮祭 *jichinsai*),[208] need the head priest, so he used to take time off work for major festivals or scheduled ground purification ceremonies before his workday started. However, as he got older, he was promoted at work, which made it harder for him to take time off work, so now sometimes his wife has to serve as the "proxy" (代理 *dairi*) for the head priest.[209] These situations were also common among my interviewees (some examples are discussed in chapter 3)—women took over the daily operations of their shrines while their husbands worked full-time outside of the shrine (and sometimes avoided becoming priests at all).

[207] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 12.

[208] See chapter 5 for a discussion of both these ceremonies.

[209] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 40.

However, we also must remember that official statistics cannot capture the number of women actually working within shrines—some women (especially the wives of head priests) do not have certification (or do have certification but are not officially registered as priests working for the shrine) but do the work of a priest.[210] Historically, there has been tension between "female priests" and "priests' wives" (see introduction), who often do the same work and have very similar demographics; one has certification (and therefore legitimacy) while the other does not.[211] Given how the shrine is conflated with and collapsed into the household, it is no surprise that if men need to leave the home to secure income for the family, women are expected to stay behind to "protect" the shrine as an extension of their (uncompensated) domestic labor as housewives (see chapters 2 and 3). Whether these women have certification (or are registered as priests at the shrine) is not always relevant.

Female priests are thus positioned as a solution to the "successor problem" as they help solve all three of the factors contributing to the problem. First, female priests provide un- or undercompensated labor at shrines, allowing the men of the family to focus on earning a livable income without leaving the shrine unstaffed. Second, they expand the pool of potential successors from only sons to both sons and daughters, helping to fight against the demographic changes impacting the priesthood. Finally, although more implicit than explicit in these sources, they may have more flexible schedules than their male relatives, especially if they are housewives, which allows them to circumvent some of the obstacles posed by the rigorous training schedule of the *kōshūkai* (discussed further in chapter 3). Although Jinja Honchō's

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[210] For an example, see "Zentai tōgi," 192.

[211] For example, Tokyo still does not have a Female Priests' Association in part because of these tensions—the pre-existing group was for priests' wives and transitioning to a Female Priests' Association would require excluding many of the original members.

gender ideology balks at women's inclusion in the priesthood, as we shall see in the next chapter, it is also undeniable that female priests are needed to keep shrines (especially small shrines) staffed.

The Successor Problem Beyond Shinto

The successor problem is not unique to contemporary Shinto, and many other religions in Japan have employed similar strategies of surveys and conferences to grasp the scope of the issue and suggest solutions. The Sōtō sect of Buddhism, for example, had been doing surveys on the successor problem for forty years as of 2008, and representatives from Shinto, Buddhist, and New Religious Movements have met for interreligious conferences on the successor problem.[212] In this section, we will explore what commonalities the successor problem in Shinto has with other Japanese religions as well as how their strategies have converged or diverged.

To explore how the successor problem is affecting other Japanese religions, let us take a closer look at temple Buddhism. Temple Buddhism has faced similar issues to Shinto, as applicants to the priesthood have decreased and empty temples have increased. However, as Ishii Kenji has pointed out, Buddhist sects tend to have slightly higher rates of successors than Shinto.[213] Interestingly, the Buddhist priesthood is also slightly younger than the Shinto

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[212] Kobayashi, "Jinjakai ni okeru kōkeisha busoku ni kansuru ishiki," 66.

[213] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 9. Christianity and New Religious Movements, as he points out, have lower rates than Shinto, but also may not be as locked into familial succession, so they may not be a fair comparison point.

A 1990 survey found that 30% of temples were missing a successor; see Stephen G. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 81.

priesthood; the average age for temple priests (住職 *jūshoku*) is in their fifties, while the average age of Shinto priests is 55.[214]

Covell lays out three reasons for the lack of successors in temple Buddhism:

> First, the relaxation of restrictions against clerical marriage has led to a de facto system of temple inheritance, effectively choking off entrance into the priesthood from the laity. Second, the financial and managerial hardships that rural temples face make them unattractive postings. Third, there are numerous alternatives to the priesthood for people who desire to dedicate their lives to Buddhism.[215]

The first and second reasons are familiar from our discussion of the successor problem in Shinto. More recent surveys of temple priests found that the three major reasons for not having successors were not having disciples, not having children, and economic instability,[216] which were also major factors in the successor problem in Shinto.

Let us first look at the issue of not having children. Temple Buddhism is slightly less hereditary than Shinto. Writing in 2005, Covell reports that "[a]pproximately 74 percent of male priests are from temple households"—almost all temples with an economically viable base "are passed on from father to son."[217] (Remember that roughly 85% of Shinto shrines are passed from parent to child, with another 8.1% passing the shrine to a relative.) Buddhist temples operate under a similar position of patrilineal succession, wherein a temple family is charged

[214] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 16.

[215] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 81.

[216] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 23-25.

[217] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 82. In the Sōtō sect, 73.2% of successors were temple-born, as of 1985. See Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 16-17. In the Tendai sect, Covell reports that about one in five priests is lay-born, and two-thirds of priests train under their fathers. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 91.

with the administration of a shrine.[218] Covell describes the management of the average temple as "little different from that of a family business."[219]

Temple successors report similar familial and social pressures to protect the temple as shrine priests,[220] and some of them go through "long and trying emotional periods before they are comfortable in taking over their father's position."[221] Jessica Starling found that

> the scales weighing individual desires against social obligations tend to tip in favor of the continuity of the stem-family (*ie*) and the temple community it supports. […] [T]he obligation to protect the temple across generations and not to disappoint parishioners still weighs heavily on those born in or married into a temple.[222]

Some Buddhist sects also have successor education programs in place, where children have to help out at their family's temple,[223] similar to the programs that have (somewhat unsuccessfully) been run by Jinja Honchō.

Like Shinto shrines, when there is no male successor, a son-in-law will be adopted into a temple family.[224] Buddhists priests coming from a lay (rather than temple family) background are considered disadvantaged, due to their lack of familiarity with the local community,[225] a sentiment we have also seen expressed toward Shinto priests from "ordinary" families.

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[218] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 125-126.

[219] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 142.

[220] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 83-84.

[221] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 84.

[222] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 152.

[223] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 28-29.

[224] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 82.

[225] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 193.

Economic issues are also a major issue for Buddhist priests, with rural temples making far less than urban ones, and about 60% of priests serving part-time.[226] Buddhist priests often support themselves by administering to multiple temples, and may be resistant to relinquishing temples to new priests.[227] They are similarly facing depopulation in rural areas, which has threatened temple income.[228] The financial instability has created a situation in which priests find it difficult to encourage their own children to take over the temple or hunt for an outside successor, and as a result many rural temples have wound up without a head priest (i.e. in a situation roughly equivalent to *kenmusha*).[229]

However, there are some marked differences between Shinto and Buddhism. One major difference between temple and shrine families that shrine-affiliated commentators frequently highlight is that temple support networks may pay for or subsidize temple successors' educations.[230] Ishii, similarly, has noticed a trend toward priests graduating from sect universities rather than getting their higher education elsewhere and then taking short certification courses.[231] In comparison, the number of applicants to the Shinto department had been decreasing for five years as of 1998.[232] He also notes that many Buddhist successors go

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[226] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 20-22.

[227] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 84.

[228] Paulina K. Kolata, "The Story Beyond UNESCO: Local Buddhist Temples and the Heritage of Survival in Regional Japan," in *Sacred Heritage in Japan*, ed. Mark Teeuwen and Aike P. Rots (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2020), 167; Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 32.

[229] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 32. Kolata discusses a case in which a priest died, leaving a daughter, who is training to become the head priest but has failed the qualifying examination four times. As a result, the temple is currently being taken care of a different local priest. Kolata, "The Story Beyond UNESCO," 170.

[230] Ishii, *Yamaguchi-ken ・ kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 23-24; Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 60.

[231] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 30-31.

[232] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 31.

onto graduate school, whereas very few Shinto successors do.[233] Buddhist universities also serve as a place for female temple successors to meet men who would be willing to marry into their families and continue the patriline.[234] Buddhist universities thus seem to play a larger role in Buddhist networks—providing more education and serving as a place for successors to meet potential partners—than Shinto universities play in shrine networks.

We can see that the same demographic pressures—depopulation, urbanization, the greying of society (especially in rural areas), and the economic unviability of small religious institutions that rely on the financial support of a shrinking parishioner base—that impact the Shinto priesthood are affecting the Buddhist priesthood as well. The question, then, is whether Buddhist institutions (and other Japanese religions facing similar conditions) have taken a similar approach of integrating women into the priesthood to make up the deficit.

Let us start by comparing Jinja Honchō's rate of female priests with female clergy in other religions. As commentators in the shrine world have noted, in comparison with "Shinto-type" New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Japan, the rate of female clergy is still very low in Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto.[235] Using data from the 2020 edition of *Shūkyō nenkan*, we can see that Jinja Honchō's rates of female clergy are shocking low in comparison to NRMs (Figure 1.7). However, looking at a scattershot of data from Buddhist sects tells a very different story. Across all Buddhist groups surveyed in *Shūkyō nenkan*, only 5.3% of the clergy were female,[236]

[233] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 30. He does note that being highly educated might make priests less likely to understand the worries of the masses (一般民衆 *ippan minshū*). Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 30.

[234] Ishii, *Kōkeisha mondai no genjō to mondaiten*, 31.

[235] Katō, "Joshi shinshoku no yakushin ni omou," 177.

[236] Bunkachō, ed., *Shūkyō nenkan Reiwa 2nen ban*, 67.
While discussing this project with Niwa Nobuko, who wrote a monograph on female priests in Nichiren-shū, in

and looking at a sampling of major sects (Figure 1.8) puts Jinja Honchō on par or above the highest rates of women in the clergy.

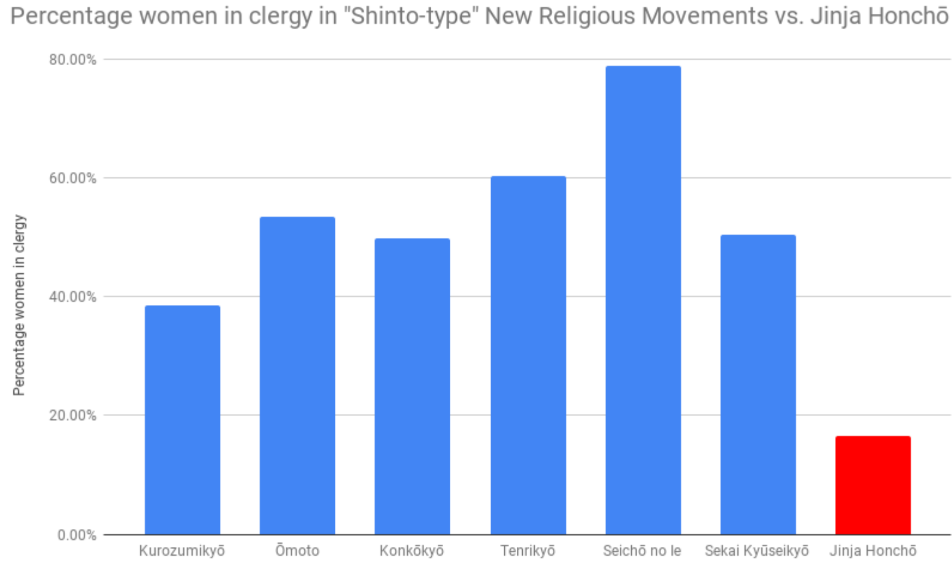

Figure 1.7 Percentage women in clergy in "Shinto-type" New Religious Movements vs. Jinja Honchō. Data from the 2020 edition of Shūkyō nenkan.

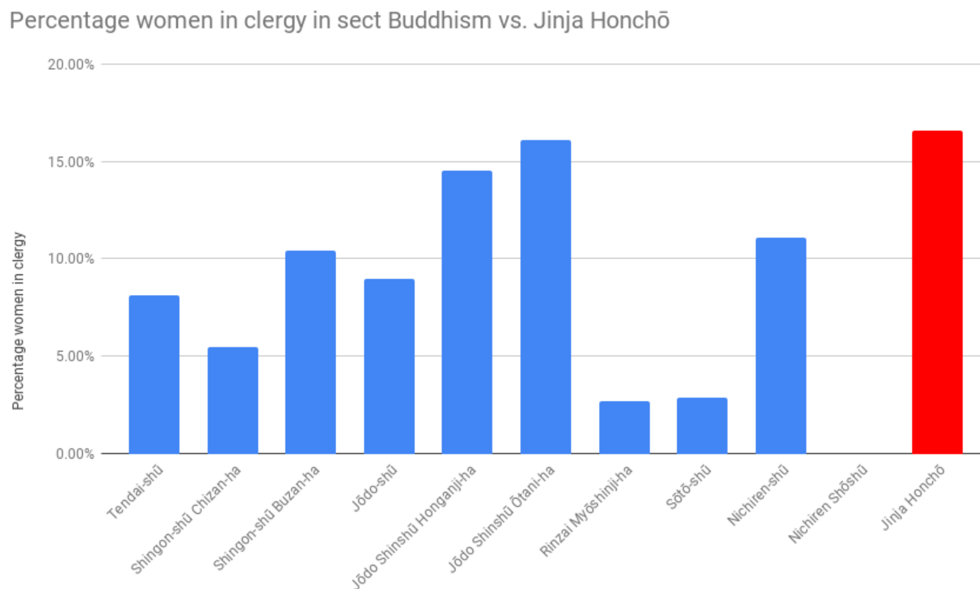

Figure 1.8 Percentage women in clergy in sect Buddhism vs. Jinja Honchō. Data from the 2020 edition of Shūkyō nenkan.

2017, she exclaimed over how high the rates of female priests in the Shinto priesthood were.

One reason for this variation may be the discrepancies in definitions of clergy—the term used in *Shūkyō nenkan* is *kyōshi* (教師), which literally translates to "teacher." Some groups may count lay members with certain credentials or standing in the community as "teachers,"[237] while others may adopt more narrow definitions. Another complicating factor for some Buddhist groups is that women are sometimes not able to gain their credentials through the same avenues as their male colleagues and are offered a more limited number of training centers and programs.[238]

Let us start by looking at Buddhism's integration (or not) of women. Interestingly, the integration of women into Buddhist priesthoods pre-dates the end of World War II in some sects. Both the Honganji-ha and the Ōtani-ha of Jōdo Shinshū, for example, allowed women to become clergy during the war (1931 for Honganji-ha and 1942 for the Ōtani-ha).[239] Similar to Shinto, women were allowed to serve as priests based on their "obligations as wives and daughters."[240] In the Ōtani-ha, women-only administrations of the *kyōshi* (clerical) exam were given the designation of "temporary female *kyōshi* (*rinji josei kyōshi*)," which signaled women's ordination to fill "the void left by male priests who had left for war."[241] Female priests retained their credentials after the war, but were not allowed to become full priests (*jūshoku*) until many decades later. Starling argues, "In this sense, it was only in the capacity as an intermediary or

[237] See, for example, Timothy Smith, "'A *Yōboku* among *Yōboku*': Institutional Hierarchies and Theological Equalities across Tenrikyō's Past and Present," American Academy of Religion, November 25, 2019.

[238] See, for example, Niwa Nobuko, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku: Nichiren-shū josei sōryō no jirei kara* (Tokyo: Kōyō Shobō, 2019), 23.

[239] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 113-114.

[240] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 127-128.

[241] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 114. See also Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 115.

place-holding administrator—whether as daughter, mother, or widow of the absent *jūshoku*—that women were seen as legitimate priests."[242] We can see similar themes here to what we see in Jinja Honchō Shinto—allowing women to fill roles previously reserved for men due to a labor shortage caused by the war, but couching their participation in their familial roles—albeit shifted five to fifteen years earlier.

Interestingly, the Presbyterian and Reformed Church in Japan experienced a very similar trajectory in allowing women to be ordained. Yamamoto explains, "it was not until 1920 that the 34th General Assembly amended the constitution to read 'elders are to be chosen from members of the church concerned' instead of 'from male members' of the church. With that hurdle crossed, there was now no exclusionary language left in the church constitution to bar women from ordination."[243] The first Christian woman ordained in Japan was in 1933, but the war "led to a new dependence on women and to their expanded roles in ministry."[244] While able-bodied men were conscripted, "women were often called to be ministers of churches, which had lost their pastors to the war effort."[245] In many cases, "churches were only looking for a substitute for male ministers, who were in short supply."[246] After the war, many women who had served as pastors had to relinquish their pastorates to repatriated men.[247] Here, we again see a strikingly similar situation to what we can see in Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto—the incorporation of

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[242] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 114.

[243] Kikuko Yamamoto and Barbara Dunn Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding: A History of the Ordination of Women in Japan* (Claremont: The Society of Women Clergy for Theological Studies in Japan, 1999), 11.

[244] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, unpaginated introduction.

[245] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 24.

[246] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 25.

[247] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 26.

women into the clergy not through explicit inclusion but by striking exclusionary language, the reliance on women in the absence of male labor due to the war, and the assumption that female clergy would relinquish their positions to eligible men. The timeline, however, is similar to what we see with Buddhist temples, as women were integrated during the war rather than after it.

Female Buddhist clergy—whether priests or temple wives—are defined by their familial relationships (see also chapter 3). As Starling explains, "It is a woman's position in the family that empowers her—as the sole adult body in the temple—to act as a priest, whether or not she has obtained official ordination."[248] However, similarly, "it is only in the *absence* of a male body that a wife is deemed an acceptable priest. When a husband or a son that has come of age is available, the man in the family is consistently preferred as a ritual performer."[249] Covell notes the trend of increasing temple daughters seeking priestly ordination, especially in the absence of a male heir, but also notes a large gap between the number of female Buddhist priests serving in head priest positions vs. lower positions,[250] similar to what we see in Jinja Honchō-affiliated Shinto (see also chapter 2). Niwa Nobuko too notes the high rate of female religionists[251] in Nichiren-shū playing "supportive roles" (補佐的役割 *hosateki yakuwari*). She notes, for example, that 32% of women were recorded in priestly roles (住職・担任・教導

[248] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 127-128. For a discussion of female clergy who are married to male priests in Nichiren-shū, see Niwa, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku*, 33.

[249] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 109.

[250] Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 129.

[251] The survey she discusses uses the term 教師 (*kyōshi*).

jūshoku, *tannin*, and *kyōdō*), leaving the other 66% filling other roles, including a large number (105 respondents) serving as unregistered priests.[252]

Similarly, in the postwar, women pastors were also "often called to small struggling churches, previously established, but no longer able to carry on their activities or to support a minister during World War II."[253] This trend of female clergy taking leadership of underfunded, marginal communities can also be seen in Shinto. However, Protestant Christianity experienced a similar decrease in men entering seminary, leading to an anticipated shortage of ministers, which required rethinking the image of the male minister. As of 1995, 40% of licensed clergy were women.[254] However, in 1993, Yasogawa Masayo wrote,

> Nevertheless, the situation for women ministers has not yet improved much. The number of women seminary graduates is increasing, but the places for them to work are few. While there are some openings as assistants to male clergy, it is quite difficult to be appointed as the sole minister of a church, treated on the same basis as a male counterpart would be.[255]

In fact, many of the early ordained Christian women in Japan fall into familiar patterns—the wives of pastors, either serving to lessen the load of their busy husbands[256] or serving in place of their late husbands.[257]

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[252] Niwa, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku*, 37.

[253] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 29. Yamamoto writes, "Although remarkable changes in attitudes toward women in ministry had taken place in the post-war period, the response to the survey made clear that most women pastors were still located in the small and struggling churches." Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 33.

[254] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 37.

[255] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 37.

[256] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 16-17, 29-30.

[257] Yamamoto and Mensendiek, ed., *Grace Abounding*, 18.

Interestingly, relying on female labor while simultaneously marginalizing it is not limited to clergy positions. Soka Gakkai built their organization centered on the nuclear family, which "ensured that women, defined as wives and mothers, became Soka Gakkai's most important practitioners."[258] In the postwar period, McLaughlin argues, "the group has simultaneously depended on women to energize the organization as it marginalized them."[259] While in the 1950s the Gakkai taught women that they were intrinsically flawed through karmic burdens specific to their gender, they were also appointed to important administrative positions.[260] However, once the Gakkai began expanding, "women's domesticity was emphasized with increasing conviction and female adherents were relegated to women-only roles in the group's administration,"[261] such as the Young Women's and Married Women's Divisions.[262] Currently, Soka Gakkai's day-to-day operations depend on their female members, but they are absent from the higher levels of administration.[263] However, McLaughlin suggests that Soka Gakkai's "gender-based administrative conventions" might be threatened by shifting national demographics.[264]

We can see many familiar patterns that appear when considering the integration of women into the Shinto priesthood appearing in other religions in Japan—the reliance on female

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[258] Levi McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 138.

[259] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 148.

[260] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 149.

[261] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 150.

[262] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 149.

[263] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 138. See also McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 155.

[264] McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, 168.

labor to fill a deficit in male labor, women being empowered to assume positions of power based on their familial relationships (and responsibilities), and a marginalization of women that pushes them into economically disadvantageous assistant positions. These trends hold true outside of the religious realm as well, as we shall see in chapter 2, as female workers are pushed into part-time, contingent, poorly compensated positions to shore up a failing male labor force. One major difference between Shinto and other Japanese religions, however, is the timing—while other Japanese religions integrated women into the priesthood in the face of wartime labor shortages caused by conscription, Jinja Honchō waited until the war was over and then blamed labor shortages caused by casualties. If nothing else, this temporal shift may add credence to the "gender equality" explanation for women's entrance to the priesthood—although it was likely an attempt to please Occupation forces that was dropped as soon as they withdrew.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with the charter article that allowed women into the priesthood—and the two deleted characters that allowed them to serve as head priests. While commentary in the wake of that decision explained that it was intended to allow the widows of priests who died during World War II to serve as well as to promote gender equality, male absence has marked the discourse surrounding female priests far more than gender equality. In this figuration, female priests are needed to offset a demographic shift, as shrine families have had fewer children and shrine children have fled the priesthood for less economically precarious careers. Female priests provide cheap labor that preserves the family lineage but are still a subpar substitute for the men they are replacing or assisting. These patterns are similar to those we see within other Japanese religions being wracked by demographic shifts, but the timing of women's entrance to the

priesthood (during the postwar, likely to appease Occupation forces, rather than when wartime labor shortages were at their peak) and the percentage of women in the priesthood (far higher than Buddhist sects, despite their similar structures of succession) set Shinto apart.

Now that we understand the condition of the Shinto priesthood in contemporary Japan, we can build on this base to ask more conceptual questions. Why did Jinja Honchō drop "gender equality" from their discussion of female priests? How does Jinja Honchō imagine the roles, responsibilities, and drawbacks of female priests? Why do female priests mainly serve as assistants? And how do Jinja Honchō's gender ideologies interact with Japanese labor law? We turn to these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 2
Jinja Honchō and the "Female Priest Problem"

In 1998, the Basic Shrine Problems Research Group (神社基本問題研究会 Jinja Kihon Mondai Kenkyūkai) released a report identifying the nine biggest issues facing contemporary Shinto. The group was created for Jinja Honchō's 50th anniversary to build a common knowledge of issues facing the shrine world,[1] and met fifteen times between November 1996 and March 1998.[2] They published their final report in the pages of *Gekkan Wakaki* on June 1, 1998. The nine problems identified by the Research Group were:[3]

1. The basic attitude toward the imperial house, [the Ise] shrines (神宮 *jingū*), and the state[4]
2. The position of shrines as [a matter of] individual belief
3. The shrine system[5]
4. The economic base of shrines
5. The functioning of Jinja Honchō
6. The protection and inheritance of shrines
7. The female priest problem
8. Unresolved issues with rituals[6]
9. Fundamental matters [related to] Shinto moral suasion (教化 *kyōka*)[7]

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[1] "Zentai tōgi," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 207.

[2] "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," *Gekkan Wakaki* 585 (1998), 4-5.

[3] "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 5-9.

[4] Although the term "*jingū*" tends to refer to the Ise Shrines (伊勢神宮 Ise Jingū), Yasukuni Shrine is discussed at greater length in the report. "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 5.

[5] Specifically, the Research Group was critical of the "State Shinto thesis," and urged the revision of the Religious Corporations Law so that the state could resume support of shrines. "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 6.

[6] In particular, they identified issues with *senzasai* (遷座祭 ceremonies transferring the shrine of a *kami*) and *shinsōsai* (神葬祭 Shinto funerals). "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 8-9.

[7] I follow Garon's translation of the term here—see Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7-8.

Many items on this list will be familiar to students of modern Japanese religion, and other scholars have discussed many of Jinja Honchō's policy positions, especially with regards to the state, elsewhere.[8]

Let us focus our attention for the moment on "the female priest problem." Interestingly, it is the only one of these items identified as a "problem" (問題 *mondai*) in the title of its section—the others tend to use the much more neutral language "regarding [subject]" (について *ni tsuite*) or "the way [subject] is" (の在り方 *no arikata*).

The section on female priests is short, so I translate it here in its entirety:

> **⑦ [The] female priest problem**
> **(Including [issues] related to labor law and shrine work (神社奉務 *jinja hōmu*))**
> What issues can we think of regarding female priests in relation to shrine rituals? Can menstrual pollution (月の忌み *tsuki no imi*) and male and female ritual roles be clarified? Is there not distance (隔たり *hedatari*) between the point of view of a society that wishes for the social advancement of women and that of the family system[9] (the role of women [婦人 *fujin*] within the household)? Keeping in mind the restrictions of current laws, how can the structure of female priests' work (女子神職の奉務の在り方 *joshi shinshoku no hōmu no arikata*) be reconciled with both problems related to labor law and the spiritual nature of ministry and service (**精神的奉仕** *seishinteki hōshi*)?[10]
> 【Contents of the investigation】
> Female priests were given a place in the system after the establishment of Jinja Honchō. Initially, with the background of an emergency situation in which priests had decreased after the war, in order for shrines to be maintained and so that their rituals could be passed on [to the next generation], based on the circumstances of individual shrines, a plan was made to allow women to be employed as priests. Afterward, regulations related to female ritual technique, vestments, and more were set, and an environment where

[8] For just a few examples, see Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 441-473; John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 199-220.

[9] Interestingly, the term used here is *kazoku seido* (家族制度) rather than the more common (especially in conservative rhetoric) *ie seido* (家制度).

[10] "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 7. For a longer explanation of the term "*hōshi*," see chapter 5.

female priests could serve (奉仕 *hōshi*) was established. Women (女子 *joshi*)[11] serving within shrines had a basis in Shinto history and tradition, but the current [situation] of becoming the head (長 *chō*) of a shrine and overseeing all the clerical work of the shrine postdates the establishment of Jinja Honchō. From a historical perspective, one can indicate the differences between the positions of men and women serving at shrines (神明奉仕 *shinmei hōshi*), but that was not due to the recognition of the differing capabilities of men and women.

As female priests have come to be entrusted with the same official duties as men (男子 *danshi*), points to remember when serving (奉仕上の留意点 *hōshi jō no ryūiten*) based on physiological characteristics have been indicated. In traditional folk customs, [menstruation] was designated a tabooed condition, but there was also the Meiji declaration to abolish childbirth pollution (産穢 *san'e*), [so] those standards have become ambiguous. In actuality, it must be noted firstly that the decision as to whether [female priests] are permitted to serve was made at the point when Jinja Honchō allowed female priests.

With the increase of female priests, we should prepare an environment in which they can positively serve.[12]

This report flags many of the themes that weave through this dissertation: the tension between the need for women's labor to staff shrines and gender norms that imagine women's place as the home, the need to navigate women's assumed essential bodily difference, and the conflict between the desire to differentiate roles based on gender and Japanese labor law, which strongly discourages gender discrimination. It also establishes a timeline, which is the currently accepted timeline (see chapter 1), for women's integration into the priesthood.

Although this report was released more than twenty years ago, little to no progress has been made on any of the issues outlined here. One reason for the lack of progress is the lack of interest in female priests, especially in comparison to the other points raised in the report. In articles discussing the report, the "female priest problem" received little to no attention. Hirose Kazutoshi, for example, focused most of his discussion on what he saw as the distortions in

[11] It is worth noting here that "*joshi*" (女子) is not the standard word to refer to women. See the introduction.

[12] "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 8.

Shinto caused by the Shinto Directive and the Allied Occupation, and did not mention female priests at all.[13]

In the previous chapter, we saw how demographic shifts (and conservative politics that prioritize the bloodline) have necessitated the acceptance of female priests. We have seen how female priests are welcomed by Jinja Honchō insofar as they stand as a bulwark against the total collapse of a system predicated on hereditary shrine lineages, but are forever viewed as pinch-hitters, interim successors, and inferior substitutes. In this chapter and chapter 4 we zoom out to explore Jinja Honchō's discursive and administrative handling of female priests. What specifically makes female priests a "problem"?

The Basic Shrine Problems Research Group report offers three issues: menstrual pollution, the conflict between "the social advancement of women" and "the family system," and the conflict between labor law and "the spiritual nature of ministry." While chapter 4 considers how Jinja Honchō deals with the assumed essential difference of the "female" body, this chapter tackles the latter two questions by considering how Jinja Honchō constructs gender norms—and what this means for their imagination of female priests.

Women's Essential Difference

In order to understand the problem posed by female priests, we must first understand Jinja Honchō's stance on gender. Despite their original claim of allowing female priests in order to support gender equality (see chapter 1), Jinja Honchō espouses undeniably conservative gender norms and family structures. They oppose allowing female emperors,[14] for example, and

[13] Hirose Kazutoshi, "Jinja Kihon Mondai Kenkyūkai no sōkatsu (kikō)," *Gekkan Wakaki* 595, 2-3. We see a similar lack of interest in revisions of ritual regulations related to female priests in the 1970s; see chapter 4.

[14] See, for example, Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō rokujūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2011), 219-220.

decry gender-free education as "a destruction of education that tries to deny even the sexual difference between men and women (男女の性差 *danjo no seisa*)."[15] As a result, commentators in the shrine world who speak about female priests tend to make a concerted effort to distance themselves from "radicals" and those advocating for gender equal or "gender-free" environments.[16]

To focus on a single example, Jinja Honchō has organized against *fūfu bessei* (夫婦別姓), a revision to the marital law that would allow spouses to have separate family names.[17] An editorial in *Gekkan Wakaki* from 1998, for example, places the blame for various current societal problems on the Occupation's reframing of the family as a nuclear family rather than stem-family (家 *ie*; see chapter 1) in the postwar period, and argues that allowing spouses to have separate names will create even greater issues.[18] A notice printed in *Gekkan Wakaki* in 1996 lays out a common narrative: Japan has a unique traditional culture based on collectivism, which has been threatened by the recent turn toward individualism. Jinja Honchō, as the protector of "traditional culture" (伝統文化 *dentō bunka*), must oppose the proposed revision to the law as it, "heightens the extreme danger born of the tendency toward extreme individualism, forfeits the

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[15] "Heisei jūrokunen wo kaerimite," *Gekkan wakaki* 666 (2005), 6.

[16] See, for example, Sakamoto Koremaru, "Komento ni," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 155.

[17] For a short history of *fūfu bessei*, see Etsuko Toyoda and David Chapman, "Family Matters: Nippon Kaigi and Keeping Things Normal," *Japanese Studies* 39, no. 3 (2019), 377.

Interestingly, this rejection of separate family names for married couples directly affected two priests of my acquaintance, both of whom were married, but since they were academics, they continued to publish under and use their maiden (rather than legal) family names. Both of them reported being questioned—and, in one case, verbally harassed—by people in the shrine world over their decision.

[18] "Heisei kyūnen o furikaette—kakukai no konnichiteki kadai ni omou," *Gekkan wakaki* 580 (1998), 6.

family's sense of unity, and spurs the destruction of the household." They blame the destruction of the household for many of the social problems plaguing current society. Fascinatingly, the notice then notes that the practice of requiring married couples to adopt the same name began after the Meiji Restoration, but it has become so entrenched in society that it has become "an important component of not only daily life but of spiritual culture (精神文化 *seishin bunka*)," so changing it would require changing the spiritual culture of the Japanese people.[19]

These stances are not limited to Jinja Honchō—they are, Toyoda and Chapman argue, "demonstrative of a larger agenda of conservative nationalism which forces a moral imperative to safeguard traditional and normative notions of family and, ultimately, what it means to be Japanese."[20] For example, Toyoda and Chapman summarize the position espoused by Nippon Kaigi,[21] Japan's largest conservative right-wing organization:

> they believe that women should fulfil their traditional role in rearing children, and men should be responsible for financially supporting the family. They believe that children belong collectively to Japanese society and the nation, and they have a duty to protect and extend their families' blood lineage and culture. The individual rights of family members, therefore, are secondary to the greater social expectations and obligations of child rearing. These obligations can be categorised into three components: the obligation that parents place children's lives above their own; that the family should be a community where traditional family values are passed down from parent to offspring; and children are educated in their duty to contribute to society at home. Nippon Kaigi pundits thus prioritise families as the fundamental element of society within which individuals uncompromisingly fulfil their obligations inside this essential unit.[22]

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[19] "Fūfu besshi (sei) sei ni taisuru kihon kenkai ni tsuite," *Gekkan Wakaki* 558 (1996), 20. The same notice is also reproduced under a slightly different title in Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gojūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2001), 9.

[20] Toyoda and Chapman, "Family Matters," 371.

[21] For more on Nippon Kaigi, see Sachie Mizohata, "Nippon Kaigi: Empire, Contradiction, and Japan's Future," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 14, issue 21, no. 4 (2016), https://apjjf.org/2016/21/Mizohata.html.

[22] Toyoda and Chapman, "Family Matters," 381-382.

For primary sources from Nippon Kaigi, see "[Fūfu bessei mondai] fūfu bessei ni hantai suru kokumin taikai (gaiyō ・ undō hōshin)," *Nippon Kaigi*, published March 20, 2014, accessed August 10, 2021, https://www.nipponkaigi.org/activity/archives/912; "[Fūfu bessei mondai] fūfu bessei ni hantai suru kokumin taikai (tōdansha no hatsugen)," *Nippon Kaigi*, published March 20, 2014, accessed August 10, 2021,

They—along with many other conservative ideologues—equate the preservation of Japanese culture with the preservation of specific family structures and gender roles.[23] For example, the backlash against the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (discussed below) "was centered on public fear and anxiety over the equation of gender equality with the rejection of traditional femininity and masculinity in Japan."[24] This idea often goes hand in hand with the idea of the family as the foundation of the state and the emperor as the patriarch of the Japanese family-state (家族国家 *kazoku kokka*).[25]

To briefly sum up, Jinja Honchō imagines gender roles as locked into the separate spheres of the stem-family (*ie*), a construction which they (sometimes) recognize as being constructed in the Meiji period but nevertheless identify as being "traditional."[26] They oppose the shift toward the nuclear family rather than the stem-family as well as changing gender norms in "mainstream" Japanese society, which they blame on Western individualism generally and the meddling of the Allied Occupation specifically. In their eyes, threatening "traditional" gender roles threatens to destabilize the family, and destabilizing the family threatens the nation-state.

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https://www.nipponkaigi.org/opinion/archives/935.

[23] Etsuko Toyoda, "Japan's Marital System Reform: The Fūfubessei Movement for Individual Rights," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 18, no. 13 (2020), 8; Tomiko Yoda, "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society: Gender, Labor and Capital in Contemporary Japan," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (2000), 878-882. For a discussion of a similar set of ideas espoused by Hayashi Michiyoshi, a conservative social critic and counselor, see Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan: An Ethnography of Real Lives and Consumerized Domesticity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 125-126.

[24] Kumiko Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 68.

[25] See Kathleen S. Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 297.

[26] For more on the construction of women's roles within the family, especially as "good wives" and "wise mothers," see chapter 3.

Jinja Honchō's Advice to Female Priests

We saw in the last chapter how Jinja Honchō speaks of female priests' presence in the priesthood—as pinch-hitters, interim successors, and (subpar) substitutes—but how are female priests imagined and guided to fulfill their roles within the priesthood? How does Jinja Honchō map its gender norms onto female priests? What restrictions and obstacles do these mapped gender norms create for female priests as they navigate the priesthood?

One excellent source for determining the advice and guidance that highly ranked figures within the shrine world dispense to female priests is magazines published by Female Priests' Associations (女子神職会 *joshi shinshokukai* or 婦人神職会 *fujin shinshokukai*; hereafter, FPA).[27] The first FPA was founded in Miyagi Prefecture in 1961 with the next founded in Kyoto in 1970. A national organization was founded in 1989, and as of its twentieth anniversary in 2008 it had 2100 members in 44 prefectures.[28] In addition to the national organization, there are FPAs located in almost every prefecture—as of 2016, there were 44 prefectural FPAs, according to the then-president of the National FPA.

The following section uses invited essays (特別寄稿 *tokubetsu kikō*) as well as congratulatory messages (usually on anniversaries of the founding of the organization) that appear in publications by the National Female Priests' Association (全国女子神職協議会 Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai),[29] the Aichi Prefecture Female Priests' Association (愛知県

[27] The latter is an older term that has mostly fallen out of use within the past 30 years. See introduction.

[28] Monobe Kyōko, "Goaisatsu," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 1.

[29] Odaira Mika and Nakajima Tatsuno helped me procure a full run of the magazine until 2017.

女子神職会 Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai),[30] the Miyagi Prefecture Female Priests' Association (宮城県婦人神職協議会 Miyagi-ken Fujin Shinshoku Kyōgikai), and the Okayama Prefecture Female Priests' Association (岡山県婦人神職会 Okayama-ken Fujin Shinshokukai). These essays and remarks are almost always[31] written by men who are serving Jinja Honcho in an administrative capacity and/or high-ranking priests (usually head priests, but not always) at major shrines. These essays are located near the front, if not on the front page (in the case of most of the invited essays published in *Kokoroba*, the National FPA's magazine), of their respective issues, meaning that they are usually one of the first pieces of text a priest may see when she picks up the magazine.

Let us start by walking through a representative article. In 2005, Tanaka Tsunekiyo, the vice-president of Jinja Honcho, wrote an essay entitled "Expectations for women who are

[30] Two of the priests at my main field site in Aichi Prefecture kindly lent me their copies of materials.

[31] There are a very small number of exceptions: Izumoi Aki, an author and illustrator known for writing about Japanese mythology, has contributed two essays that were published in *Kokoroba*, the National FPA's magazine. See Izumoi Aki, "Joshi shinshoku no minasama e," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 94; Izumoi Aki, "Joshi shinshokura no uta ni yosete," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 150-151. The content broadly conforms to what we can see in other essays in *Kokoroba*, with an added emphasis on women's inherent mythological power due to their association with Amaterasu and other mythological women. Fujimoto Katsuki, the president of Shintō Seiji Renmei (神道政治連盟 the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership), also contributed an article; see Fujimoto Katsuki, "Shimei no omosa, tōtosa," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 120. His essay similarly stresses the need to utilize "women's power" (女性力 *joseiryoku*) effectively. Two presidents of the National Reverent Housewives Alliance (全国敬神婦人連合会 Zenkoku Keishin Fujin Rengō Kai), Kuni Masako and Kitashirakawa Keiko, have contributed their congratulations during the National FPA's fifteenth and twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations, respectively. Kuni Masako, "Raihin shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 215-216; Kitashirakawa Keiko, "Shukuji," *Kokoroba* 25 (2016), 5. Their remarks stress the commonalities between the women of the two organizations and women's important role in solving the many social issues concerning youth. Arimura Haruko, a member of the House of Councilors, also contributed her congratulations in 2016. Arimura Haruko, "Shukuji," *Kokoroba* 25 (2016), 6-7. She similarly notes women's roles as caregivers (both to children and the elderly) and the special vantage point they can bring to their activities.

priests" (神職たる女性に期待するもの *shinshoku taru josei ni kitai suru mono*), which was published in *Kokoroba*. In it, he noted that while the phrase "female priests" was in common use, it made him feel uncomfortable. "To put it very simply, I do not think that there is male or female when it comes to priests," he wrote. He noted the importance of the *naishōten* (内掌典 female ritualists who serve in the shrines in the imperial palace; see introduction) in performing rituals associated with the emperor and then continued that while the differentiation (区別 *kubetsu*) between "female priests" and males (男子 *danshi*) was unnecessary, women were taking care of shrines as "women who are priests" (神職たる女性 *shinshoku taru josei*). He then noted that self-styled feminist organizations were pushing separate family names for married couples and "gender-free" (ジェンダーフリー *jendaa furii*), and that these developments were antithetical to "Japanese people's traditional sense of community," and therefore threatened to destroy the state itself. He complained,

> [The feminist organizations] denounce even very reasonable (当たり前 *atarimae*) statements such as "men are masculine, women are feminine" as sexism (性差別 *sei sabetsu*), and think that men and women should be treated the same no matter the circumstances, and in extreme cases they even want to change "men and women" (男女 *danjo*, a common compound to refer to gender) to "women and men" (女男).[32]

He criticized schools for having co-ed physical education classes, which reframed natural gendered differences in physical strength as "individual differences." Kataoka went so far as to question whether feminists would demand that the mountain his shrine was located on,

[32] Tanaka Tsunekiyo, "Shinshoku taru josei ni kitai suru mono," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 223.

Otokoyama (男山 literally "man mountain"), be renamed "Onnayama" (女山 literally "woman mountain"). He then suggested, "the most effective method to cause the [feminist] movement to decline would be if you [the members of the National FPA], as women, offered counterarguments."[33] He encouraged the 1900 members of the National FPA to fire the starting shot to eradicate the feminists, and then apologized if they have already begun this process and he was unaware of it.[34]

While some of Tanaka's arguments are unique—I found no other articles fearing that Otokoyama will be renamed, for example—the general themes resonate with the dozens of articles I surveyed. As we shall see, framing movements for gender equality as destroying or obfuscating the "natural" differences between men and women is Jinja Honchō's modus operandi. Tanaka fears the destruction of Japan's "traditional" culture via the contestation of its "traditional" gender norms, so he raises a series of strawmen to persuade female priests to fight back.

But what does any of this have to do with female priests? After all, the only remarks Tanaka makes that are explicitly about female priests are his assertion that there is no "male or female" when it comes to priests and his semantic distinction between "female priests" (女子神職 *joshi shinshoku*) and "women who are priests" (神職たる女性 *shinshoku taru josei*). However, it is precisely this distinction that sheds light on how female priests are imagined by Jinja Honchō: they are women first and priests second, and their ability to engage with the priesthood is always mediated by their womanhood.

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[33] Tsunekiyo, "Shinshoku taru josei ni kitai suru mono," 223.

[34] Tsunekiyo, "Shinshoku taru josei ni kitai suru mono," 223-224.

We already saw in the last chapter how female priests are often positioned as mothers, wives, and daughters in discussions of the successor problem, and we can see similar trends in FPA publications. Kuni Kuniaki, Jinja Honcho administrator, in his congratulations on the twentieth anniversary of the National FPA, noted the increase in youth violence, and said,

> In these conditions, we priests must shoulder the burden of transmitting our country's traditions to the youth, and we are called to explain the faith and spirituality of Shinto. On this point, I expect all of you, who are priests, mothers, and wives, to explain [them] with soft, easy-to-understand words.[35]

Katō Tomoe, then vice-president of Jinja Honcho, similarly reminded his listeners that "Above all, all of you, while being priests, are shouldering the important responsibilities of having a household (御家庭 *gokatei*), as mothers, as wives."[36] Hiraiwa Masatoshi, a Jinja Honchō director, argued:

> Setting aside whether you get licensed as a priest or not, I hope that all of you get married as early as possible, birth and raise children, and then as women, as mothers, as humans, leverage your experiences and sensibilities (感性 *kansei*) in your activities.[37]

Sako Kazukiyo, the chairman of the board of Kōgakkan University and head priest of Matsuo Shrine, shared ten guidelines that had been decided by a gathering of wives of priests in an unspecified prefecture, arguing that they were also applicable to female priests. Rules 1, 2, and 9 concern propitiating the shrine family and raising a successor, while rule 4 concerns performing household rituals (家庭祭祀 *katei saishi*) correctly. Rule 3 concerns understanding the tenets of Shinto. Rules 5, 6, and 10 concern caring for the shrine's grounds and parishioners. The

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[35] Kuni Kuniaki, "Setsuritsu nijū shūnen o shukushite" in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 4.

[36] Katō Tomoe, "Shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 148.

[37] Hiraiwa Masatoshi, "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku," *Kokoroba* 24 (2013), 1.

remaining two rules are broad suggestions about correct mindset (thinking deeply about what it means to be rich or poor and having a heart that is willing to correct itself).[38] The majority of these rules would be incomprehensible to a female priest serving at a large shrine—but it is obvious that Sako was not imagining addressing his remarks to such a priest. Isogai Yōichi, the president of the Miyagi Prefecture Jinjachō, made a similar rhetorical move in his remarks to the Miyagi Prefecture FPA, emphasizing the importance of their roles as wives (婦人 *fujin*).[39] Countless more examples exist.[40] One reason for this identification may be simple association—several of the men writing mention their mothers or grandmothers serving as priests.[41] However, beyond personal experience, the categories of "female priest" and "wife" (especially "wife to a priest") are heavily conflated within the shrine world.

It should come as no surprise, then, that discourse on female priests tends to focus on their essential difference *as* women. For example, in the twentieth anniversary issue of the Aichi Prefecture Female Priests' Association's magazine, the then-head of the Aichi Prefecture Jinjachō, Ogushi Kazuo, wrote:

> There should be absolutely no gender discrimination (男女差別 *danjo sabetsu*).[42] However, I think it is good if there is differentiation (区別 *kubetsu*). There is reason to

[38] Sako Kazukiyo, "Aru beki yō wa," *Kokoroba* 21 (2009), 1.

[39] Isogai Yōichi, "Shukuji," in *Setsuritsu 30shūnen kinen shi*, ed. Miyagi-ken Fujin Shinshoku Kyōgikai (1992), 86.

[40] Kutsuwada Katsuya, "Gokentō o inotte," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 160; Kusaba Terushi, "Haha naru daichi," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 235; Ogushi Kazuo, "Goaisatsu," in *Setsuritsu jūgoshūnen kinen gō Ogatama*, ed. Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai (2008), 1.

[41] Ujitoko Sadamoto, "Haha no sugata," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 108; Kutsuwada, "Gokentō o inotte," 160.

[42] It is worth noting that the English word "gender" is more inclusive than the Japanese word "*danjo*" (男女) which only includes male and female (and excludes non-binary genders). "*Danjo sabetsu*" (男女差別) could more

think that male and female priests are of the same rank (同等 *dōtō*) but do not have the same nature (同質 *dōshitsu*). It is my dearest wish that female priests each leverage their special characteristics and engage in activities.[43]

In a similar vein, during a conference on the "successor problem" hosted by Jinja Honchō in 2011, one of the participants described how he made his daughters and wife do the cleaning at their family shrine, and added, "I think that's not gender discrimination (男女差別 *danjo sabetsu*); it's the sexual difference between men and women (男女の性差 *danjo no seisa*)."[44] Katō Tomoe, in his remarks for the National FPA, discussed "overcoming the differences between men and women."[45]

The division between "discrimination" and "differentiation,"[46] the insistence that male and female priests are somehow inherently different, and the wish that female priests "leverage their special characteristics" (特性を活かす or 特性を生かす, both read *tokusei o ikasu*) appear again and again in these materials. For example, five years earlier, Ogushi wrote,

> Recently I have often heard the phrases "promotion of a gender-equal society" and "gender-free movement." If [we] are inclined to do that, it appears to be a phenomenon wherein we embrace the extreme of ignoring the special characteristics of the male and female sexes. The trend of completely repudiating "manliness" (男らしく *otoko rashiku*) and "womanliness" (女らしく *onna rashiku*) is deeply lamentable.

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accurately be translated as "discrimination between male and female," and that is the spirit in which the term is used. I use "gender" as a translation here for the sake of legibility, not in an attempt to reinscribe the gender binary.

[43] Ogushi Kazuo, "Shukuji," in *Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai setsuritsu nijūshūnen kinenshi Ogatama*, ed. Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai (2013), 3.

[44] "Zentai tōgi," 181.

[45] Katō Tomoe, "Tomo ni ayumu," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 82.

[46] It should be noted that this turn of phrase is not limited to the shrine world—it also appears in Buddhist spaces. See, for example, Lindsey E. DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," in *Sacred Heritage in Japan*, ed. Mark Teeuwen and Aike P. Rots (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2020), 75-76.

> However, in the traditional shrine world, it has been like this until now, but from now on as well I think that—female priests from a woman's perspective and male priests from a man's perspective—all priests [should] leverage their special characteristics to be active and bring prosperity to this world [the shrine world].[47]

We see here very similar anxieties to those expressed by Tanaka—that contemporary social movements have threatened to erase "natural" gender difference—but rather than asking female priests to strike back against these dastardly feminists, Ogushi instead encourages them to further entrench and perform that "natural" difference. Other Jinja Honchō officials encouraged female priests to "leverage their sensibilities as women" (女性ならではの感性を活かし *josei nara de wa no kansei o ikashi*), to find or employ "[a style of] ministry particular to female priests" (女子神職ならではの奉務 *joshi shinshoku nara de wa no hōmu*),[48] and to bring their perspective as women (女性の視点 *josei no shiten*) to their moral suasion activities (教化活動 *kyōka katsudō*),[49] among numerous other examples of similar language.[50]

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[47] Ogushi Kazuo, "Shukuji," in *Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai setsuritsu jūshūnen kinen shi Ogatama*, ed. Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai (2003), 3.

[48] Kuni Kuniaki, "Shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 148. The exact same language appears in Kitashirakawa Michihisa, "Raihin shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 215.

[49] Yatabe Masami, "Ima, sara naru kibō o komete," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 191.

[50] See, for example, "Joshi shinshoku chūō kenshūkai hōkoku," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 14; Kutsuwada Katsuya, "Gokentō o inotte," 160; Katō Takahisa, "Joshi shinshoku no yakushin ni omou," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 178; Kudō Izu, "Raihin shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 215; Kataoka Teruo, "Kishikata o kaerimite," *Kokoroba* 22 (2011), 1; Takatsukasa Naotake, "Shukuji," *Kokoroba* 25 (2016), 3; Hosokawa Morisada, "Shukuji," in *Setsuritsu 30shūnen kinen shi*, ed. Miyagi-ken Fujin Shinshoku Kyōgikai (1992), 85; Ogushi, "Goaisatsu," 1.

Hiraiwa Masatoshi uses the somewhat rare "leverage their strong points and complement their weak points" (長所を生かし欠点を補い合って *chōsho o ikashi ketten o oginaiatte*). Hiraiwa Masatoshi, "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku," 1.

What are women's "special characteristics"? As might be expected, female priests' strengths tend to be identified closely with the household and the family.[51] For example, Mori, a participant at the successor problems conference (discussed in chapter 1), argued that visitors to shrines are looking for "the power of empathy" (共感力 *kyōkanryoku*), and that women are uniquely positioned to offer them that empathy due to their experiences as mothers. Mori went on to argue that we should expect the same from men, who will be able to offer their experiences as fathers and members of society (社会人 *shakaijin*).[52] Female priests tend to be identified as particularly good at ceremonies involving the family, such as *shichigosan* (七五三 a coming-of-age festival for children age seven, five, and three) and the first visit of a newborn baby to the shrine (お宮参り *omiyamairi* or 初宮詣 *hatsumiyamōde*).[53] Female priests also tend to be described as better at interfacing with parishioners,[54] and more detail-oriented than men.[55] Ishihara, a priest from Yamagata, for example, said that when his daughters and wife pick out amulets and other goods to be sold at the shrine, they sell well, while the goods he picks out tend not to do very well.[56] Ogushi Kazuo, the president of the Aichi Prefecture Jinjachō, made the

[51] Women are so closely identified with the home that when Tokugawa Yasuhisa, the head priest of Yasukuni Shrine, was asked to contribute an essay to the National FPA's magazine in 2016, he opened his essay by explaining that he didn't know what to write about, and then he spent the remainder of the essay discussing *ozōni*, a soup containing *mochi* and vegetables that is normally eaten at New Year's. At no point did he explain how this subject was relevant to female priests. Tokugawa Yasuhisa, "Ozōni," *Kokoroba* 27 (2016), 1.

[52] "Zentai tōgi," 198. Why Mori believes that women cannot offer their experiences as fully-fledged members of society is unclear, but perhaps reflective of the assumption that women will be housewives while men work outside the home.

[53] "Zentai tōgi," 198.

[54] Kataoka, "Kishikata o kaerimite," 1.

[55] Katō, "Tomo ni ayumu," 82; Kudō, "Raihin shukuji," 215; Kataoka, "Kishikata o kaerimite," 1.

[56] "Zentai tōgi," 180-181. This exact claim is repeated by an anonymous commentator—possibly Ishihara—

somewhat vague pronouncement that shrines where female priests are serving "make one feel refreshed [in a way] male priests don't."[57] Reading these remarks, one might imagine a motherly, empathetic, detail-oriented female priest, who puts visitors at ease.

Female priests also tend to be associated more closely with the home. Speakers to the FPAs often note a cluster of societal problems—the dissolution of the family and concomitant rise of individualism, the rise in juvenile delinquency and youth violence, and the deficiencies of the current educational system—as problems that female priests are especially well-positioned to solve.[58] Jinja Honchō officials also tend to emphasize the importance of female priests in propagating household rituals (家のまつり *ie no matsuri* or 家庭祭祀 *katei saishi*) and respect for ancestors.[59] For example, Kataoka Teru, the president of the Mie Prefecture Jinjachō, suggests that female priests have an important role as people who can "speak directly with the households of parishioners, especially the wives (ご婦人方 *gofujin kata*)."[60] Again, the image of the domestic, empathetic female priest holds sway.

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during the Yamagata roundtable. See Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2009), 44.

[57] Ogushi, "Shukuji" (2013), 3.

[58] See, for a handful of examples: Kuni, "Setsuritsu nijū shūnen o shukushite," 4; Katō, "Tomo ni ayumu," 82; Ujitoko, "Haha no sugata," 108; Katō, "Shukuji," 148; Kutsuwada, "Gokentō o inotte," 160; Kudō, "Raihin shukuji," 215; Oshiki Kōsuke, "Kaihō hakkō o iwai shite," in *Setsuritsu 30shūnen kinen shi*, ed. Miyagi-ken Fujin Shinshoku Kyōgikai (1992), 34.

[59] See, for example, "Joshi shinshoku chūō kenshūkai hōkoku," 14; Katō, "Tomo ni ayumu," 82.

[60] Kataoka Teruo, "Raihin shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 216. Oshiki Kōsuke uses a very similar argument, although he adds that they will also be able to speak to children; see Oshiki, "Kaihō hakkō o iwai shite," 34.

Female priests are also positioned as having an important role to play in correcting home education (家庭教育 *katei kyōiku*), both in their own homes and in the homes of their parishioners.[61] For example, Sakurai Katsunoshin, chairman of the board for Kōgakkan University, noted members of the National FPA's important roles *as mothers* in "creating the next generation," and teaching children appropriate gratitude to the *kami*.[62] Ogushi Kazuo, president of the Aichi Prefecture Jinjachō, similarly noted the importance of teaching the next generation filial piety, and bemoaned the destruction of ethics education in the postwar period.[63] This emphasis on home education is especially interesting, given the central role home education plays in potential solutions to the successor problem (see chapter 1) and the association of mothers with education in the postwar period (see chapter 3). Female priests are positioned as the essential link between the past and the future—they can teach their children to preserve "traditional" culture and practices.

At the most literal level, female priests are identified with their capacity (if not mandate) to give birth to the next generation—both of humans more generally and priests specifically. For example, Hiraiwa Masatoshi, a Jinja Honcho director, wrote that there is no need to discriminate between men and women, but then continued, "However, this is not to say that men and women are entirely the same, as that is certainly not the case; rather, there are quite large differences between them." He argued that

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[61] Katō, "Shukuji," 148; Kudō, "Raihin shukuji," 215; Oshiki, "Kaihō hakkō o iwai shite," 34-35; Isogai, "Shukuji," 86.

[62] Sakurai Katsunoshin, "Shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 149. Sakurai expresses similar ideas in Sakurai Katsunoshin, "Raihin shukuji," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 216. A similar sentiment is quoted approvingly by Tanaka as well; see Tanaka, "Shinshoku taru josei ni kitai suru mono," 224.

[63] Ogushi, "Goaisatsu," 1.

> women must be pregnant with, breastfeed, and raise children, who are the treasures of the household (家庭 *katei*) and the country (国家 *kokka*). While men also should of course participate in childrearing, no matter what the burden on women is large.[64]

He noted that because women must have children as young as possible, this can pose a handicap to their promotion.[65] Note the use of the imperative here: women *must* give birth to and raise children. Again, we see gender norms framed as a biological imperative—without women giving birth to the next generation, the family will collapse, which will lead to the collapse of the nation (framed, again, with the characters designating the nation as a family). This biological imperative supersedes women's duties as priests.

Returning briefly to the sources discussed in the previous chapter, commentators at the successor conferences tend to stress that there is no need to encourage the increase of female priests. Ueda Toshinori, for example, said,

> In the case of female priests, I think we should leave it to nature. Isn't it fine not to think "We should do something to increase the number of female priests"? It's just that it's undeniable that because of a variety of conditions [the number of female priests] is naturally increasing.[66]

Sakamoto Koremaru similarly noted that women's recent social advancement has not been natural but rather planned socially, and said, "I have my own thoughts about whether this is good or bad, but this problem is unresolved."[67] One of the most common comments on the "female priest problem," across sources, is simply that the number of female priests (both head priests and otherwise) is increasing and will continue to increase into the future, sometimes alongside a

[64] Hiraiwa, "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku," 1.

[65] Hiraiwa, "Kore kara no jinjakai to joshi shinshoku," 1.

[66] "Zentai tōgi," 192.

[67] "Zentai tōgi," 201.

note that the population of male priests is staying stable or declining.[68] When we understand how female priests' presence in the priesthood is problematized—due to their essential difference from men—we can better understand how an increase in their presence without a framework built to accommodate both their priestly and familial duties can be seen as a threat to the integrity of the shrine world, the family, and the Japanese nation.

Again, these ideas are not unique to Jinja Honchō but more generally espoused by conservative groups. Abe's "womenomics" policies (discussed in greater depth below), for example, have promoted "activities that make good use of the special characteristics of women" and have envisioned no life path for women other than motherhood.[69] The Ministry of Education also created curricula based on women's difference or "special characteristics" (特性 *tokusei*), in what Uno has described as an extension of prewar ideals of "Good Wife, Wise Mother."[70] This is part of a trend since the 1990s that Japanese feminists refer to as *seibetsu tokusei ron* (性別特性論 theory of characteristics [innate to] the sexes) or *danjo tokusei ron* (男女特性論 theory of characteristics [innate to] men and women).[71]

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[68] See, for example, Yasuda Mitsutoshi, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 103-105.

[69] Tomomi Yamaguchi, "Will Women Shine if Toilets Shine? The Abe Government's Convoluted 'Womenomics,'" *CSG Newsletter 18* (2015), http://web.icu.ac.jp/cgs_e/2015/09/will-women-shine-if-toilets-shine-the-abe-governments-convoluted-womenomics.html.
For more on womenomics, see Emma Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," *Social Science Japan Journal* 20 (2017).

[70] Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" 306.

[71] See, for example, Nihon Josei Gakkai Jendaa Kenkyūkai, ed., *Q&A danjo kyōdō sankaku/jendaa furii ・ basshingu: bakkurasshu e no tettei hanron* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2006); Yamaguchi Tomomi, "Okashii zo! 'Danjo byōdō kyōiku = seibetsu tokusei ron' setsu," *Feminizumu no rekishi to riron*, June 14, 2011, accessed June 5, 2019, https://webfemi.wordpress.com/2011/06/14/okashiizo/; Saitō Masami, "'Seibutsuteki tokusei' tte nani?" *Jendaa to media ・ burogu*, June 19, 2006, accessed June 5, 2019, https://discour.hatenablog.com/entry/20060619.

In the 1990s and 2000s, conservatives mounted a number of campaigns against legislative measures that seemed to be forwarding gender equality or a "gender-free" society.[72] As Osawa explains, "[c]onservatives argued that the state's gender equality ideal is in fact the radical feminist idea of a gender-free society that allegedly seeks to eradicate all the differences between men and women, including segregated gender roles."[73] In 2013, the then-board chairman of Nippon Kaigi Brazil wrote in an opinion piece for Nippon Kaigi's website, arguing that women should use

> the special characteristics inherent to women to do the work that men cannot. […] Where is the theory that men and women are equal coming from? By nature men and women's ways of thinking, bodies, and motivations for being born into this world are different.

Komori goes on to say that women have the power to bear and raise children, protect the ancestors, and open up the future; this is not work that men can perform.[74] Similar statements, including calls to "respect the special characteristics of men and women" (男女の特性 *danjo no tokusei*)," can be found elsewhere on Nippon Kaigi's website.[75]

Jinja Honchō insists on the essential difference between men and women, which leads to the rejection of "gender-free" or "gender equal" movements. Male and female priests cannot fill

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[72] Kimiko Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out: Conservative Women Defending Convention," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 124-125; Yuki Tsuji, "Women and the Liberal Democratic Party in Transition," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 146-148. See also Toyoda, "Japan's Marital System Reform: The Fūfubessei Movement for Individual Rights," 8; Toyoda and Chapman, "Family Matters: Nippon Kaigi and Keeping Things Normal."

[73] Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out," 125. See also Toyoda and Chapman, "Family Matters: Nippon Kaigi and Keeping Things Normal," 386.

[74] Komori Hiroshi, "[Burajiru kara no teigen] Yamato nadeshiko wa sekai no hokori," *Nippon Kaigi*, published December 12, 2013, accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.nipponkaigi.org/opinion/archives/6296.

[75] Nippon Kaigi, "'Shin kyōiku kihon hō' Nihon no kyōiku ga ōkiku kawarimasu," *Nippon Kaigi*, accessed June 1, 2019, http://www.nipponkaigi.org/opinion/archives/1163. See also Nippon Kaigi, "Nippon Kaigi no katsudō hōshin," *Nippon Kaigi*, accessed June 1, 2019, http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/katsudo. Nippon Kaigi's Women's Association's official website/blog can be viewed at Nihon Josei no Kai (Kōshiki), *Nihon Josei no Kai kōshiki burogu*, accessed June 1, 2019, https://ameblo.jp/nihonjyoseinokai/.

the same roles, as that would obscure the "natural" differences between men and women, which threatens the stability of the family and the nation. Instead, female priests must leverage their "special characteristics" in order to perform a role that is "appropriate" to their gender. Importantly, this role is linked to their familial role—both because of their importance in contributing to the future of the Japanese race and because of the conflation of the priesthood with the shrine family.

Gender Equality in the Workforce and Japanese Labor Law

The Basic Shrine Problems Research Group report asks, "Keeping in mind the restrictions of current laws, how can the structure of female priests' work be reconciled with both problems related to labor law and the spiritual nature of ministry?"[76] Now that we understand Jinja Honchō's gender ideology, this question becomes easier to parse: given Jinja Honchō's belief in the essential differences of men and women (and the need for women to perform roles befitting their "special characteristics"), how can shrines follow labor law that demands gender equality?

Here we must briefly discuss women's position in the postwar labor market. Article 24 of the postwar constitution established (in theory) the ideal of gender equality and helped normalize nuclear families as the predominant familial structure. Large corporations, however, reinforced the gender division through a variety of means, including the institution of the "living wage" and employee benefits designed for regular male workers and their homemaking wives. State-instituted tax and welfare programs, too, favored families with husbands who worked full-

[76] "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," 7.

time and wives who either didn't work outside the home or had low-paying part-time work.[77] Postwar high growth relied on women's work as housewives—the state, in conjunction with Japanese business "embarked on a program of active domesticization of women," which subsidized women's stay-at-home work.[78] Regardless of whether they worked, women were (and still are) expected to perform all the domestic labor,[79] and married women's paid labor was understood to both supplement a male breadwinner's wage and be an extension of her maternal function.[80]

However, the 1960s and 1970s marked a change in the participation of women in the labor market, as Japanese industries invented the part-time job in an attempt to correct labor shortages (and avoid immigrant labor). This led to a segregated track system—men were full-time workers with lifetime employment while women were temporary part-time workers who were expendable. Since the mid-1970s, both young female workers and married women reentering the job market have held the majority of low-wage, dead-end jobs.[81]

Further expansion of irregular labor since the economic downturn in the 1990s has further widened the gender gap, creating what Andrew Gordon describes as a new "dual structure" of employment, where inequalities between regular and non-regular employees are

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[77] Tomiko Yoda, "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society," 874-875, 891-892.

[78] Amy Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife: Alcohol, Codependency, and the Politics of Nurturance in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 74.

[79] See, for example, Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 76-80.

[80] See Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 40-41; Yoda, "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society," 892-895.

[81] For a classic study, see Mary C. Brinton, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 129-140. For more recent work, see Andrew Gordon, "New and Enduring Dual Structure of Employment in Japan: The Rise of Non-Regular Labor, 1980s-2010s," *Social Science Japan Journal* 20, no. 1 (2017), 9-36.

further compounded by gender inequalities.[82] These non-regular female employees are often the first on the chopping block during economic crises, as we saw in the disproportionate layoffs of women at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.[83]

As a result, the postwar labor system has wound up gendered, based on a (shrinking) core of male workers with stable employment that are increasingly supported by a non-regular workforce that is mostly female.[84] The number of women in the workforce has risen 45% between 1960 and 2012, and, as of 2015, women made up 42.3% of the Japanese workforce. However, female employment still follows the well-known "M-curve"—entering the workforce out of college, dropping out to have children, and then reentering the workforce (usually in a non-regular position) once the children are old enough to be sent to school or daycare—albeit with a less steep drop than in earlier decades.[85]

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[82] Gordon, "New and Enduring Dual Structure of Employment in Japan: The Rise of Non-Regular Labor, 1980s-2010s."

[83] 710,000 of the 970,000 workers laid off in April 2020 were women. Mark Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013-2020: Tokenism, Gradualism, or Failed Strategy?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 19, no. 4 (2021), https://apjjf.org/2021/4/Crawford.html.

[84] Crawford reports that in 2019, 56.0% of women workers and 22.8% of male workers were serving in non-regular jobs. Mark Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013-2020."

[85] Helen Macnaughtan, "Womenomics for Japan: Is the Abe Policy for Gendered Employment Viable in an Era of Precarity?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, issue 13, no. 1 (2015), https://apjjf.org/2015/13/12/Helen-Macnaughtan/4302.html. As Macnaughtan notes, the M-curve is flattening and moving to the right, illustrating that women are A. not dropping out of the workforce while having children quite as often and/or B. delaying or foregoing marriage or childbearing.

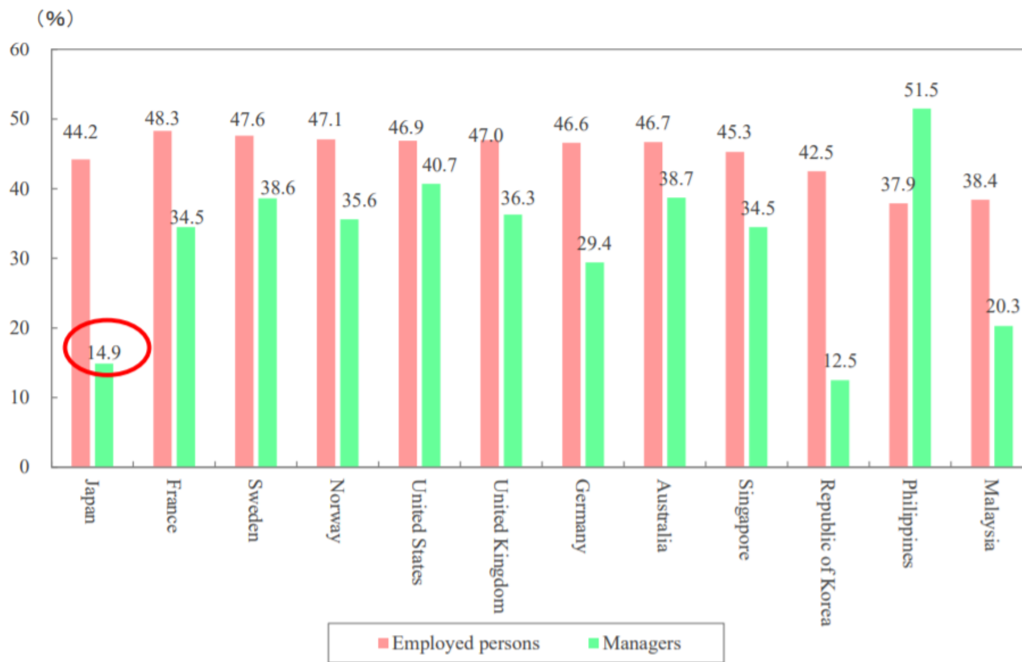

Figure 2.1 Proportion of employed women and women in managerial positions. Data from 2019.[86]

As a result, Japan has a very low number of women in managerial positions (Figure 2.1). Nemoto points out that although 42% of employees in Japan in 2009 were women, most were part-time, temporary, or contract workers.[87] Women only composed about 22% of the career-tracker workers hired in 2014.[88] Women managers were even rarer—in private corporations in 2017, women were 18.6% of lower managers, 9.3% of middle management, and 6.6% of

[86] Image from Gender Equality Bureau, *White Paper on Gender Equality 2019: Summary* (2019), http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/whitepaper/pdf/ewp2019.pdf, 20.

[87] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 44. For a comparison of women's participation in the labor force in Japan and South Korea, see Florian Paulsen, "Gender-related Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce," *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 19, no. 3 (2019), http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcjs/vol19/iss3/paulsen.html.

[88] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 47.

department heads.[89] Paulsen reports similar numbers in 2019—13% of managers in Japan were female, in comparison to 36.2% in the United Kingdom and 40.5% in the United States.[90] Women take longer to be promoted—in some cases taking their entire careers to achieve positions that men achieve between their eleventh and fifteenth years of service.[91] The women who rise in the ranks of corporations the fastest tend to be unmarried, as they "can most easily conform to the masculine standard of working life."[92]

In the 1960s and 1970s, "an increasing number of women were successful in suing their employers for sexual discrimination."[93] These lawsuits, pressure from domestic women's groups, and "external pressure on Japan to create an anti-sex discrimination law to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)," led to the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1986. The EEOL combined two earlier laws—the 1975 Working Women's Welfare Law and the 1947 Labor Standards Law—with some revisions.[94]

However, the EEOL appears to have had minimal effects on women's employment opportunities. Compliance with the original law's anti-discrimination provisions was not mandatory until the 1997 revision of the law. Even under the revised law, punishments are

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[89] Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013-2020."
These numbers are slightly increased from what Nemoto reports for 2010: women were "only 13.7 percent of all subsection chiefs (*kakaricho*), 7.0 percent of section chiefs (*kacho*), and 4.2 percent of department heads (*bucho*) or general managers." Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 45.

[90] Paulsen, "Gender-related Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce."

[91] Glenda S. Roberts, "Leaning *Out* for the Long Span: What Holds Women Back from Promotion in Japan?" *Japan Forum* 32, no. 4 (2020), 556-557.

[92] Roberts, "Leaning *Out* for the Long Span," 571.

[93] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 98. See also Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 56.

[94] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 98.

minimal and not effectively enforced,[95] and they do not address informal "glass ceilings."[96] While the 2007 revision of the EEOL "prohibited employers from engaging in disadvantageous treatment, such as terminating a woman's employment during pregnancy or within a year after giving birth, or terminating her for taking child-care leave," it had no effective enforcement mechanism and did not mandate positive action.[97] Although employers were no longer allowed to have gendered hiring tracks, they simply rebranded the tracks (into "comprehensive" and "general" tracks) and continued hiring women into the lower track.[98] The EEOL also fails to recognize the structural barriers facing women, such as "a gendered higher-education system, a gendered job-entrance system, and gendered wage discrepancies rooted in male dominance in management positions."[99]

Furthermore, feminists have raised concerns that these revisions have made the vested rights of privileged regular employees more visible while pushing temporary and irregular women workers into marginal statuses.[100] Simply put, the EEOL "created conditions under which women were now granted permission to engage in male-style working practices."[101] Many women did not take this offer, as male-style working practices (especially long working

[95] As Nemoto reports, the 1997 revision threatens to publish the names of noncomplying employers, but the ministry has not actually published the names of any violators. Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 53.

[96] For an overview of the literature, see Amy Borovoy, "Not 'A Doll's House': Public Uses of Domesticity in Japan," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement* 20/21 (2001), 102; Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 53.

[97] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 54. See also Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013-2020"; Stephanie Assmann, "Gender Equality in Japan: The Equal Employment Opportunity Law Revisited," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12, issue 45, no. 2 (2014), https://apjjf.org/2014/12/45/Stephanie-Assmann/4211.html.

[98] Gordon, "New and Enduring Dual Structure of Employment in Japan," 26-28.

[99] Assmann, "Gender Equality in Japan."

[100] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 37, 53. See also Assmann, "Gender Equality in Japan."

[101] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 99.

hours and transfers to company branches in different parts of the country) were incompatible with women's gendered familial roles (discussed further in chapter 3). Given the choice between forgoing marriage and children to climb the corporate ladder or remaining in contingent, part-time positions that allow more leeway for raising a family, many women chose the latter. Consequently, since the EEOL, the largest growth in jobs for women has been in part-time work.[102] Approximately half of medium and large companies still utilize a track system; in 2012, women were less than 12% of graduate recruits into career tracks at medium and large organizations.[103] The courts have typically claimed that "double-track hiring and the corresponding pay gap do not constitute sex discrimination,"[104] once again failing to address the difference in experiences of full-time female employees and part-time, contingent female employees.

The Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society was implemented in 1999. The Basic Law "encourages businesses and local councils to establish gender targets in decision-making bodies."[105] By 2008, all prefectures and nearly 1,000 cities had done so.[106] However, similar to the EEOL, it lacks any type of enforcement.[107] The 2010 Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality also established numerical targets,[108] and in 2015, the Law to Promote Women's Employment

[102] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 99.

[103] Macnaughtan, "Womenomics for Japan."

[104] Kumiko Nemoto, "When Culture Resists Progress: Masculine Organizational Culture and Its Impacts on the Vertical Segregation of Women in Japanese Companies," *Work, Employment and Society* 27, no. 1 (2013), 156.

[105] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 97. See also Assmann, "Gender Equality in Japan."

[106] Gregory W. Noble, "Staffing the State with Women," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 232.

[107] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 54.

[108] Assmann, "Gender Equality in Japan."

was passed, which obliged companies with over 300 employees to implement "Action Plans." Again, however, there were no penalties for companies that did not follow the law.[109]

Despite the passage of numerous laws that should correct gender imbalances and gender discrimination in the workplace, Japan ranks one of the most gender-unequal countries. In 2020, it was 121st of 153 in the Global Gender Gap Report,[110] in 2022 it ranked second from the bottom in *The Economist*'s glass-ceiling index,[111] and between 2014 and 2017, Japan had the third highest OECD median gender wage gap.[112] Many factors contribute to sex segregation in the workplace: the continuing belief (reinforced by government tax, pension, and welfare policies) in the male-breadwinner familial model; the ideology of separate spheres; the system of life-long employment and seniority pay, which penalizes women who temporarily leave the labor force to have children; track systems of employment, where women are relegated to assistant jobs with limited opportunities; the demand for long work hours and overwork; penalization (through taxation) of women who earn as much or more than their husbands; and the exclusion of women from positions of power and normalization of women's low status.[113] Paulsen notes that while men and women are "to the greatest extent equal before the law […] 'discriminatory customary, religious, or traditional practices', that is, structural and attitudinal discrimination

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[109] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 98.

[110] Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013-2020." For further analysis of Japan's place on the Gender Gap Index, see Assmann, "Gender Equality in Japan."

[111] "The Economist's Glass-Ceiling Index," *The Economist*, March 7, 2022, https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/glass-ceiling-index.

[112] Paulsen, "Gender-related Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce."

[113] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 2-13. See also Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 98-128, 163-200; Allison Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections: Divorce and the Romance of Independence in Contemporary Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 43-45.

towards women, seem to perpetuate gender inequality."[114] In particular, Paulsen notes "synergistic effects of traditional gender roles and a lack of corporate compliance working against empowerment."[115]

But What About "Womenomics"?

Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's "womenomics" policies have drawn particular attention in recent years. As part of this policy, Abe urged "the business and public sectors to increase the ratio of women managers and leaders to 30 percent by 2020," a call which was echoed by Keidanren, the Japanese business federation.[116] Abe has explained the motivation behind these policies:

> Some may be put off by the fact the conservative politician Abe Shinzō is promoting a "society where women shine," but I see this not as a form of social policy as in the past, but rather as one important pillar of economic policy. All the women who have not been fully utilized as a human resource constitute, one might say, a mountain of treasure.[117]

The integration of women into the workplace is motivated entirely by demographic and economic challenges—the need for an injection of new labor into a faltering economy[118]—rather than a desire for gender equality. Again, these measures are voluntary, and companies are asked rather than mandated to comply.

However, treating women as a potential untapped reservoir of labor was not a new strategy. We have already discussed the integration of women into the workplace in the early

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[114] Paulsen, "Gender-related Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce."

[115] Paulsen, "Gender-related Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce."

[116] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 1.

[117] Quoted in Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 372.

[118] Macnaughtan, "Womenomics for Japan."

1960s to avoid immigrant labor. The Koizumi administration also made similar recommendations in the early 2000s (although without a catchy slogan).[119] As Macnaughtan argues, the "system of highly gendered employment" that was established in the 1960s "continues today" under the guise of womenomics.

> The government once again wants more women to work as a means to fill a perceived employment gap and support a core male labour force. […] Abe's brand of womenomics has little intention to question the gendered status quo of an employment system that allocates productive roles to men and reproductive roles to women. […] In sum, the womenomics being prescribed for Japan assumes an implicit gender bias: the assumption that core male employment is normative.[120]

We can see a parallel here between womenomics and the successor problem facing the shrine world. In both cases, the imagined solution involves adding female labor to support a normatively male labor force without challenging or reorienting the gender ideology that animates the system. We might also note the parallel in turning to female labor to ward off "outside" labor—immigrant labor in the mainstream labor force and priests from "ordinary" families in the shrine world (see chapter 1).

Furthermore, policies to increase women's participation in the labor force, as many scholars have pointed out, must be understood in the context of the declining birth rate. Japan's fertility rate has declined since the 1970s, and the Japanese population is predicted to shrink (and grey) significantly if current conditions continue.[121] As Steel argues, "state interest in increasing female participation in the labor market stems from concerns about an aging population and the

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[119] Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections*, 13.

[120] Macnaughtan, "Womenomics for Japan."

[121] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 97.

negative implications that aging populations have for living standards and public finances."[122] "According to official logic," Dalton argues,

> by having more women in the workforce, not only will the GDP rise, the fertility rate might also rise, and the problems associated with a declining working population resulting from the ageing society will also be addressed. The official interest in gender equality occurring within the corridors of Japanese bureaucracy and industry should be viewed within this context.[123]

Goldstein-Gidoni similarly suggests that "the advanced policies for gender equality since the 1990s have been in fact *pronatal* policies more than a product of a genuine attempt to produce a gender-equal society."[124] As Peng notes, however, the state's policies have failed to have an appreciable effect on fertility rates. This may, in part, be due to

> a fundamental weakness in the state's perception of the problem, because it continues to define the problem of gender relations in terms of their adverse effects on fertility and the aging of the society—not that gender inequality is a problem in itself.[125]

We can note again the parallels to the successor problem—the focus on women's labor as a stopgap for a failing male labor force and the pressure on women to reproduce (so that the gender balance of the labor force might eventually be corrected). We saw these trends in other Japanese religions facing the successor problem, and now we see them continuing (in slightly different forms) in the mainstream labor force.

Despite the lack of enforcement, given Jinja Honchō's positioning of itself as a bastion of tradition against the encroachment of a mainstream society that demands the erasure of gender difference, we can see how laws like the EEOL and policies like "womenomics" might seem to

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[122] Gill Steel, "Women's Work at Home and in the Workplace," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 34.

[123] Dalton, "Womenomics, 'Equality' and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine," 97.

[124] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 196-197. Emphasis in original.

[125] Ito Peng, "Social Care in Crisis: Gender, Demography, and Welfare State Restructuring in Japan," *Social Politics* 9, no. 3 (2002), 435.

pose a threat to "business as usual" within the shrine world. With more knowledge of both Jinja Honchō's rhetoric and trends in mainstream Japanese labor markets, let us examine two areas where "gender equality" and gender ideology collide.

Who Gets to Be Head Priest?

In the previous chapter, we saw how female priests are cast as stopgaps to make up for a deficit in male labor. However, as Ochi Miwa has already discussed,[126] looking at the statistics for the priesthood raises questions about the factuality of this assertion.[127]

In the postwar period, more than half of male priests have served as head priests (Figure 2.2). In 1955, 80.14% of male priests served as head priest nationally, with regional variation between 91.38% (Niigata) and 70.16% (Hokkaido). As of 2015, the national average was 52.35%, with regional variation between 64.53% (Saga) and 23.53% (Okinawa).[128]

[126] Ochi Miwa, "Shinshoku kōkeisha mondai ni okeru josei no yakuwari ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo Kiyō* 20 (2015), 64. In the following section, I discuss a larger range of data than Ochi analyzes.

[127] All statistics in the following analysis come from Jinja Honchō's official histories, released at five-year intervals since 1950. See Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1951); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1956); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1961); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1966); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1971); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1976); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1981); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō yonjūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1986); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō yonjūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1991); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gojūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1996); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gojūgonenshi*; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō rokujūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2006); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō rokujūgonenshi*; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nanajūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2016).

[128] Okinawa is somewhat of an outlier in this respect—the second lowest prefectural rate is Kanagawa with 37.26%.

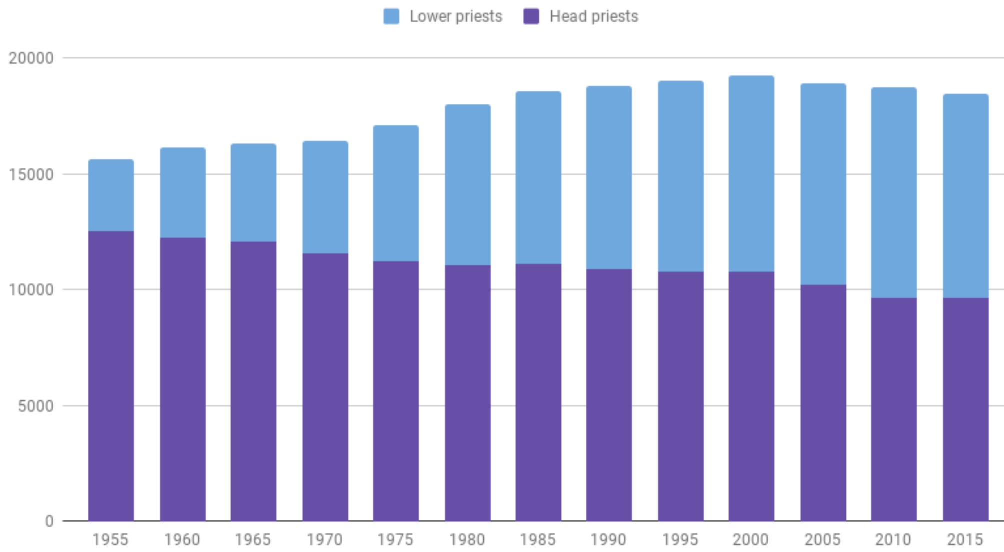

Figure 2.2 Roles served by male priests. Data taken from Jinja Honchō's histories.

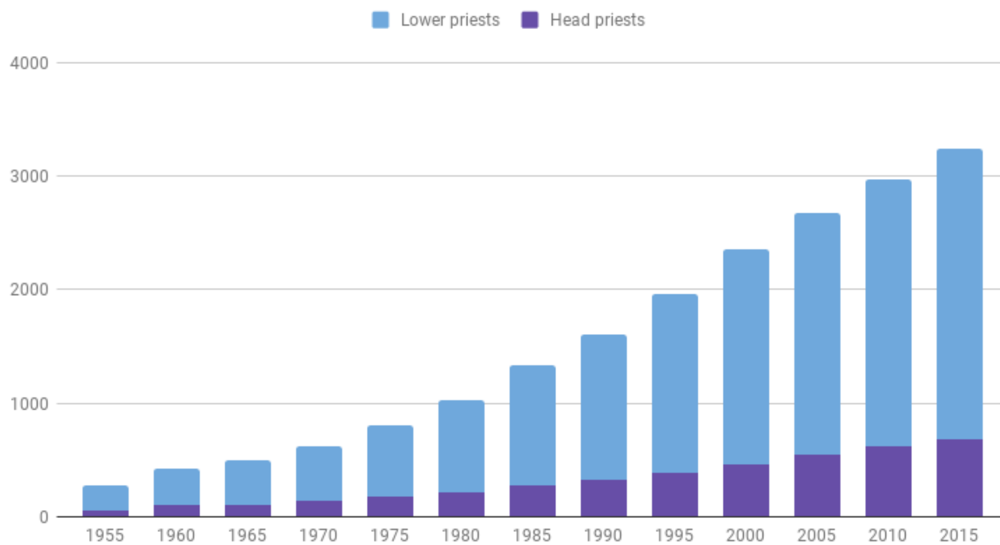

Figure 2.3 Roles served by female priests. Data taken from Jinja Honchō's histories.

By comparison, only about 20% of female priests serve as head priest (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4)—in 1955 the national rate was 21.01% while as of 2015 it was 21.17%. As with male priests, regional variation exists—in Yamaguchi 41.18% of female priests serve as head priests, whereas in Kanagawa only 11.22% do. By using the percentages of male and female priests

serving in each prefecture, we can discover that Hokkaido has the largest gap between the percentages of male priests (54.41%) and female priests (19.64%) serving as head priests, whereas Yamaguchi has the smallest gap (58.75% male and 41.18% female).[129]

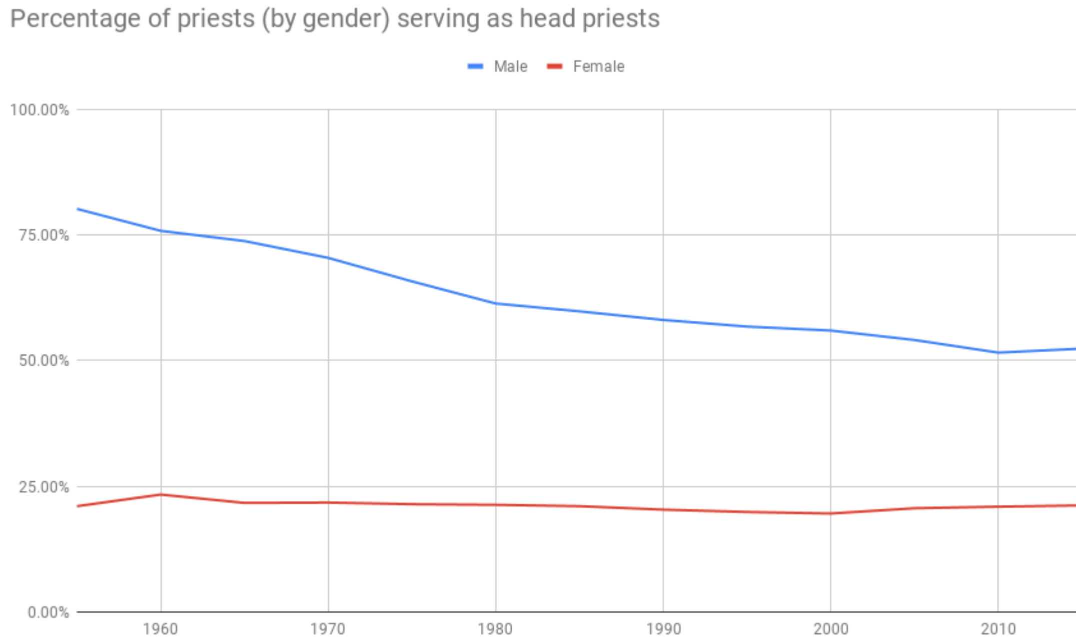

Figure 2.4 Comparison of national averages of percentages of male and female priests serving as head priest over time. Data taken from Jinja Honchō's histories.

As a result, only 6.64% of head priests were female in 2015 (see Figure 2.5). There is substantial regional variation—Okinawa[130] (20%), Aomori (11.02%), Mie (9.03%), and Hyogo (9.67%) have the highest rates, while Miyazaki (1.93%), Gifu (2.69%), and Gunma (2.74%) have the lowest (see Figure 2.6).

[129] Okinawa, again an outlier, has 23.53% of male priests and 25.00% of female priests serving as head priests. Lest the reader be too excited by this gender parity, remember that this is a sample size of n = 21, so four male head priests and one female head priest.

[130] Again, because n=5, this means that there was one female head priest and four male head priests in Okinawa.

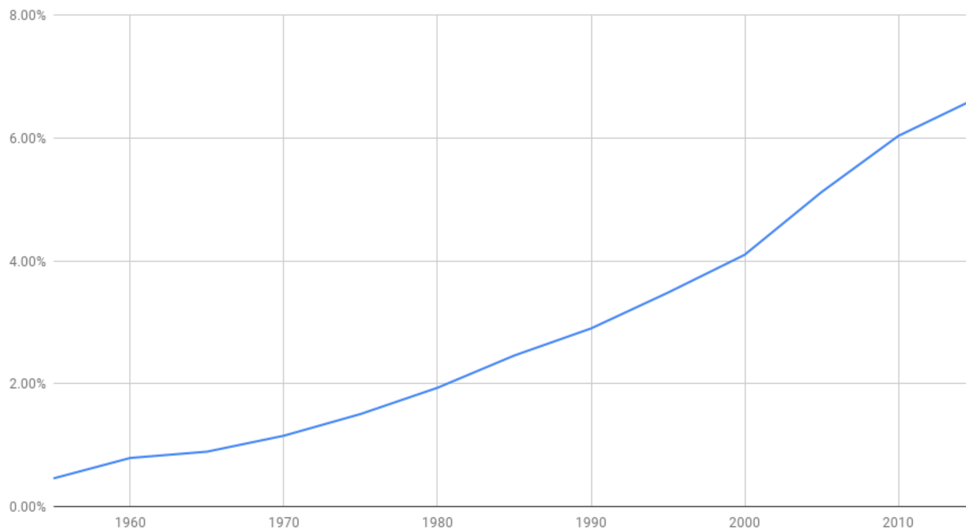

Figure 2.5 Percentage of head priests who are female, 1955-2015. Data taken from Jinja Honchō's histories.

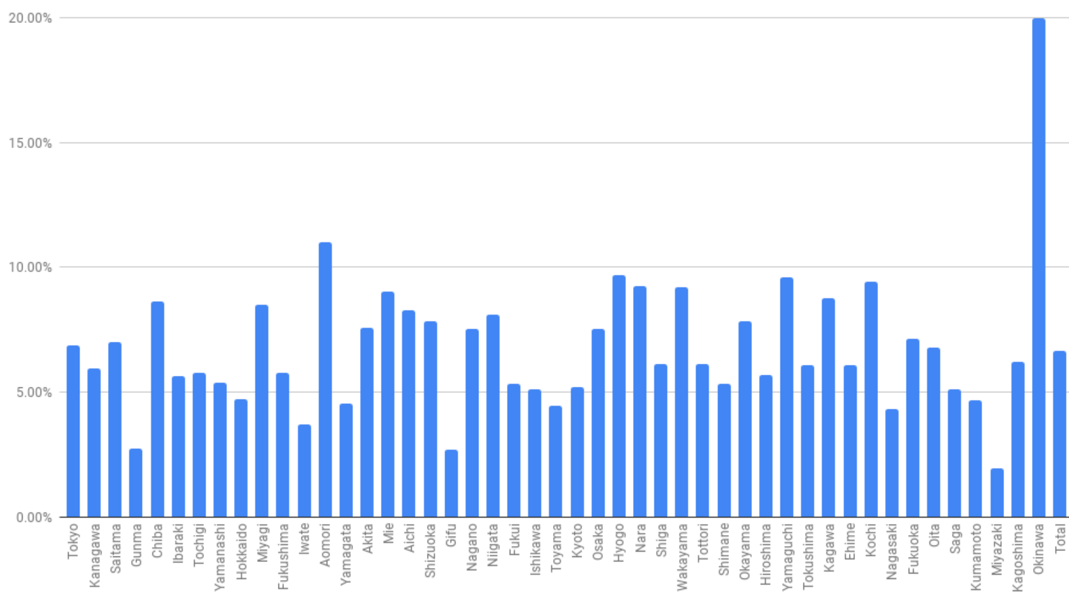

Figure 2.6 Percentage of head priests who are female, by prefecture. Data from 2015.

If female priests were only necessary for the time being to make up for a shortage of (male) labor, one would expect that the percentage of female priests serving as head priests would be *much* higher. Instead, 80% of female priests are serving in positions other than head

priest—while some of them may be serving under women, such as Kobayashi and Okada (discussed in chapter 3), the vast majority are serving underneath male priests.

This arrangement of labor, however, makes sense, given both Jinja Honchō's rhetoric about female priests and the economic problems plaguing the priesthood, as discussed in the previous chapter. Female priests have different "special characteristics" than their male colleagues, and so they should not (or *cannot*) replace them, except where the only other choice is letting the shrine go unstaffed or letting it pass out of the family's hands. Instead, female priests are assisting male priests or supplementing male labor—serving as the second-in-command to a (male) head priest who is only available on weekends, freeing up her male family members to work outside the home while she tends to the shrine (for little or no pay). In a sense, female priests are scaffolding to support a priesthood that might collapse with the absence of male priests. However, by assuming subordinate positions, they maintain the supremacy of the male priest, no matter how infrequently he may be available.

We can already see many resonances with the patterns we can see in the "mainstream" Japanese workforce—the utilization of a (poorly compensated, contingent) female workforce to bolster a failing (male) workforce, increasing the participation of women in the workforce for economic reasons rather than out of a desire to promote gender equality, and the integration of women into the workforce to ward off "outside" labor (immigrants in the mainstream Japanese workforce, non-hereditary succession in the shrine world). The employment and promotion patterns of female priests in the shrine world can thus be said to mirror those of female workers in the Japanese corporate world. Even the gender ideology that keeps them in subordinate positions to men is mirrored (albeit with a larger focus on maintaining "tradition" in the shrine world).

We might remember, however, that the shrine world is, as discussed in chapter 1, split in two. On one hand, there are larger shrines, especially *beppyōsha*, that employ large numbers of priests, including those from "ordinary" families, and often operate like a small- or midsized companies. On the other hand, there are smaller shrines that are often run more like family businesses. While few ethnographic accounts of family businesses exist,[131] we might guess that the tendency of men holding the position of head priest (even if mainly as a ceremonial role) is related to the paternalism of the *ie* ideology that often holds sway over family businesses, discussed in the last chapter. Comparing their experiences with women in the mainstream labor market may thus require some caveats, given the different structures of employment. What of female priests in large shrines, then? Do their experiences match what we see in the mainstream labor market, or are they different?

Where Can Female Priests Work?

The impression (or perhaps desire) that female priests exist to fill a labor shortage leads to another issue—the lack of shrines (especially major shrines) willing to hire female priests.[132] As one of the participants of the successor problem conference noted, there are two kinds of female priests: those who come from shrine families and those who do not. While those from shrine families may experience resistance from their parishioners at first, eventually the people around them will come to support them.[133] However, the real problem, in his opinion, was female students who entered college in the hope of becoming female priests, because there are

[131] Kondo's ethnography of a sweets factory in Tokyo is the closest example that comes to mind, but that is an ethnography of a small company rather than a business run entirely by members of a family. See Kondo, *Crafting Selves*.

[132] Motozawa Masafumi, "Komento san," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 163.

[133] See chapter 5 for a complication of this narrative.

very few *beppyōsha* that are willing to take female priests—only one or two in each area (地区 *chiku*).[134] Other participants also noted the difficulties women from "ordinary" families faced in finding jobs.[135]

Male priests and Jinja Honchō administrators tend to couch discriminatory hiring practices as being for either economic or safety reasons. For example, Katō Tomoe, a managing director of Jinja Honcho and the head priest of Hattori Tenjin Shrine, noted in 1995 that the environment was harsh to women, as many shrines refused to hire women due to the cost of buying new vestments for women and building changing rooms for them, as well as the desire to avoid having women stay at the shrine for overnight shifts (宿直 *shukuchoku*). He noted that due to these restrictions, many women who planned to become priests could only find work as *miko* or clerical workers.[136] Many shrines and administrative offices have single-gender changing rooms and toilets for priests and cite the cost of renovations as one reason to avoid hiring female priests.[137] Training (研修 *kenshū*) with an overnight component may be held at facilities with no locks on the bedroom doors, which, commentators point out, may pose a security risk to female participants. Some major shrines also require priests to stay at the shrine overnight, which is considered too dangerous for female priests.[138] In her 2010 chapter, Ochi

[134] "Zentai tōgi," 198-199.

[135] See, for example, "Zentai tōgi," 202.

[136] Katō, "Tomo ni ayumu," 82.

[137] See, for example, the discussion in "Zentai tōgi," 200.
Interestingly, my main field site has cited this reason for the lack of *male* priests—the entire staff is currently female, so hiring a man would mean having to create a second changing room solely for him. See the conclusion.

[138] See, for example, Yasuda, "Niigata-ken no shinshoku kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa kara mieru mono," 105; "Zentai tōgi," 191; Ogasawara Takeshi, "Shukuji," in *Kessei jūshūnen kinen shi Iyasaka*, ed. Okayama-ken Fujin Shinshokukai (1994), 1.

Miwa lists the reasons that large shrines tend not to hire female priests: overnight shifts, the economic cost of extra facilities and vestments, concern about aligning male and female ritual technique in ceremonies (see chapter 4), and the feeling that *miko* were already fulfilling the same roles that female priests could fill.[139] The last point is particularly interesting (and has been repeated to me by male priests at large shrines), as it once again illustrates that female priests are women first and priests second. *Miko* (as women) can bring the same "special characteristics" as female priests to shrines—never mind that they have neither the certification nor the education to perform the priest's role.

In interviews, when I ask what problems face female priests, many interviewees (especially those not from shrine families) respond the lack of employment opportunities for women. For example, of the five students I interviewed, four were concerned that after graduation they would not be able to find jobs. (The last was from a shrine family.) Two more interviewees, both not from shrine families, were unable to find jobs as priests even though they had received certification, although both continued to work within shrines—one as a part-time "assistant," performing some of the duties of the other priests without an official position (or equal pay), and one as a clerical worker (事務員 *jimuin*). Many of my interviewees (especially those from four-year programs) had stories of female classmates who had been forced to take work as *miko* upon graduation or who could not find work and wound up leaving the shrine world entirely. Hotta, who graduated from Kōgakkan University in 2014, reported that although there were eighteen women in her year, only three to five of them were able to find work as

[139] Ochi Miwa, "Joshi shinshoku—josei no shinshutsu wa aru no ka," in *Shintō wa doko e iku ka*, ed. Ishii Kenji (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2010), 107.

priests after graduation. Of the women interviewed for this project, almost every woman not born or married into a shrine family was hired by a female head priest.[140]

The lack of shrines willing to hire women is especially acute for older (non-college-age) women—while some younger women might be able to snag positions at smaller shrines (or more women-friendly large shrines) after graduation, older women, who decide to enter the priesthood after retirement, have very few options.[141] Yamashita, who is discussed in greater depth in chapter 3, entered the priesthood in her fifties, but she entered specifically to fill a position at her neighborhood shrine. Maruki, on the other hand, could not find a position as a priest. Her interest in Shinto was sparked when she moved to Europe with her husband because his company transferred him to an overseas branch office. Her experience living in a completely different culture reinforced her internal sense of "Japanese-ness," which increased her interest in learning about Shinto, which she considers an essential part of Japanese culture. She decided to get her bachelor's degree at Kokugakuin University in her fifties, and as part of her studies, she discovered that she was descended from an ancient shrine lineage (which had left the shrine world to farm in the 10th century). She felt very strongly that she had been led "back" to the priesthood by the *kami*. Despite her conviction—as well as her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Kokugakuin University—she has been unable to find a job as a priest. She blames the insular nature of the shrine world; while older people from shrine lineages might be able to get credentialed and enter the priesthood later in life, no shrine wants to hire a non-affiliated woman over the age of forty.

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[140] Three of my interviewees were exceptions. Two gained their positions through community connections, while one was working at Shimogamo Shrine, discussed below.

[141] "Zentai tōgi," 205.

Unfortunately, these ageist challenges are not unique to women hoping to enter the priesthood. Alexy discusses the case of Mae, who was denied a job despite having the qualifications and the test that went well, because "[s]he was simply too old for the position."[142] As Alexy points out, such ageist discrimination is not illegal or uncommon in Japan.

However, even putting aside the "economic" or ageist reasons to deny employment to women, some head priests at major shrines categorically refuse to hire women for ideological reasons. In the special edition of *Ogatama* released for the fifteenth anniversary of the Aichi FPA, Usui Sadamitsu, then-head priest of Aichi Gokoku Shrine (the second largest shrine in Nagoya), wrote,

> Why do I not employ female priests? [I] hear voices severely scolding me [about this]. [They call me] without dignity and duplicitous, questioning my character. […] [I] acknowledge this audacious censure and [here] record my excuses.
> I do not think that Shinto is a religion like in the West—it is nothing but a "religion of the *ie*." The widows of soldiers after the war, the contemporary priest daughters of [families that have no other heirs due to] declining birth rates (少子化神職子女 *shōshika shinshoku shijo*), or the wives of priest families (神職家 *shinshokuke*)—there is no doubt that these women walking the path of the female priest to [fulfill] their destiny of protecting the "religion of the *ie*" is correct.
> However, even though people tell me that because they have certification as priests I should open the door to employing young women, [the young women] will probably someday become wives, and that "religion of the *ie*" is Shinto, is it not? So, that consideration [for their future] is natural, is it not? I am scolded so much by feminists about the injustice of my consideration, but I cannot consent to the "ambitions" of women who wish to become female priests. […]
> We should not wish for the breakdown of the *ie*.
> We are encountering a problem so large we cannot yet understand it. This is my excuse.[143]

Usui lays out the conservative party line here—women's destiny and proper role is to protect the *ie* from inside the home, so the only appropriate way for them to be priests is if being a priest

[142] Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections*, 135.

[143] Usui Sadamitsu, "<Kōshi no sensei> joshi shinshoku-san e no omoi ire," in *Setsuritsu jūgoshūnen kinen gō Ogatama*, ed. Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai (2008), 2.

protects the home. Female priests are then precluded from serving at major shrines—which are not staffed by a single family—as doing so would remove them from the home they are meant to protect. Usui uses the inevitability of marriage as another barrier to women's participation within the priesthood—it is kinder, he argues, to plan for their futures as wives than to hire them and either prevent them from marrying or force them to quit once they are married.

It is worth noting that Usui has consistently expressed negative remarks regarding the presence of female priests,[144] and that his remarks were solicited specifically for the Aichi Prefecture FPA's publication. He notes, in fact, at the beginning of both his pieces, that he was asked to write for them. What does this level of vitriol being solicited (and then published) by a FPA tell us about the shrine world? We know that Usui was criticized by others in the shrine world,[145] but he continued to be offered a platform by the very women with whom he was in conflict. We might blame the marginal status of FPAs, or we might think about how normalized Usui's rhetoric is within the shrine world.

While these views may seem extreme, they are consonant with the Japanese labor market as a whole. As Gill Steel explains, the lifelong employment system requires that if "women regular employees hope to climb the corporate ladder, they need either to opt not to have children or to take very little maternity leave and then be prepared to accept all assignments and work long hours."[146] Similarly, "second generation employment discrimination" has arisen—especially stemming from "supervisors' skeptical attitudes about women's career trajectories, the

[144] See, for example, Usui Sadamitsu, "Sara naru funtō o koinegau," in *Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai setsuritsu nijūshūnen kinenshi Ogatama*, ed. Aichi-ken Joshi Shinshokukai (2013), 5. I have also met and interviewed Usui.

[145] In addition to the criticism he is responding to in the opening of his essay, he was obliquely criticized by several of my interviewees in Aichi Prefecture, who tended to cite the opinions of "some priests" (and then quote opinions that were obviously his).

[146] Steel, "Women's Work at Home and in the Workplace," 30.

limited assignments supervisors give women, and demands for after-work socializing as particularly exclusionary for many women workers."[147]

Nemoto's research suggests that the assumption that women will retire upon marriage has been destabilized, especially with the trend toward late marriage,[148] but despite this trend, women "generally work in low-level, irregular positions with lower wages (these include part-time, temporary, contract, and agency supplied employees, some of whom do similar work to regular employees, but for lower compensation and with little security)."[149] This situation seems to mirror that of the shrine world, wherein women "assist" absent men, sometimes performing more work than their supposed superiors, but without recognition as head priests. Companies also tend to hire a large number of educated women as temporary workers for assistant positions (much like graduates from the Shinto universities are forced into *miko* and administrative positions),[150] and male managers legitimize "statistical discrimination and gender biases based on the ideology of separate spheres."[151]

Nemoto argues that the "cultural dominance of housewife femininity in Japan even extends to the workplace, where it is manifested in the roles of caretaker, helper, and assistant. The gender ideology is so strong in Japan that workplace sex segregation is often seen as the consequence of men and women's essential differences."[152] She found that "women workers are

[147] Steel, "Women's Work at Home and in the Workplace," 30. See also Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 201-217.

[148] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 50-51.

[149] Steel, "Women's Work at Home and in the Workplace," 35.

[150] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 103.

[151] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 27.

[152] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 132.

perceived as less productive than men because of the likelihood that they will interrupt their careers because of their caretaker roles."[153] Among her interviewees, she found some had a perception that "firms are forced to hire more women than men mostly because men are in short supply and women workers are cheaper."[154]

Ultimately, working women are often fighting against the assumption that all women are (house)wives and mothers. In part, this is due to a trend of emphasizing women as wives and mothers both in state policy[155] and by individual politicians. In 2007, for example, Yanagisawa Hakuo, then health minister, referred to women as "childbearing machines" and deduced that since "the number of childbearing machines and devices is fixed, all we can ask for is for [Japanese women] to do their best per head."[156] Then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, too took the opportunity to remind women of their that "giving birth and raising children is a noble occupation." He added, "Together with the public, I would like to reconfirm the magnificence of family and of housework."[157] Other politicians have taken more blatantly coercive pronatalist approaches, calling women who live after menopause "sinful" or suggesting that women who do not reproduce should not be eligible for pensions.[158] In comparison, Usui's statements about all women being destined to become wives and mothers do not seem quite as extreme.

However, the realities of the labor market are such that "even staunch supporters of female domesticity condone, rather grudgingly, women's activities outside the home," as the

[153] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 133.

[154] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 135.

[155] Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" 294-295.

[156] Quoted in Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 194.

[157] Quoted in Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 194.

[158] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 194-195.

alternative would be "unfilled jobs and impoverished local community life." They instead "constantly warned working wives and mothers not to neglect their home responsibilities."[159] In Kondo's ethnography of a confectionary shop, she similarly found that women's part-time work outside the home was "permissible, even desirable, so long as the women's expressed motivations were guided by culturally shaped definitions of domesticity."[160] We can hear echoes of shrine world rhetoric here as well—female priests are permissible as long as they are entering the priesthood in order to protect their families, but when they enter for "selfish" or "ambitious" reasons that might conflict with their duties to their families, they are problematic. Or we could reframe this sentiment along the lines of the split in the shrine world—it is permissible for female priests to support their *ie* through serving (preferably in an assistant role) at a small family shrine, but it is not permissible for female priests to enter the more corporate workplace of the large shrine because then they are neglecting the *ie*.

We can see how mainstream norms regarding gendered labor—in which women must forgo marriage and childbearing to climb the corporate ladder—are twisted and reinterpreted within the shrine world. Since women within the shrine world are seen first and foremost for their childbearing potential, forgoing children and marriage is not an option for female priests. This mandate to bear children bars female priests from serving within large shrines, which are structured more like corporations and are not staffed by a hereditary shrine lineage. Instead, female priests are *only* appropriate within their family shrines, where their duties as priests and their duties as family members are most consonant. Women serving as priests to "protect" their family shrines are admirable, despite the unfortunate circumstances, whereas women who are

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[159] Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" 316.

[160] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 285.

serving outside of their family shrines are breaking gender norms, which threatens the stability of the family and the nation. While the successor problem might be a "family occupation problem," as we saw in the last chapter, female priests are only permissible within the priesthood if it *is* a family occupation.

But What About the Exceptions?

However, this is not to say that all head priests of large shrines agree with Usui. Two head priests of major shrines—Fujiwara Masayoshi, the head priest of Morioka Hachimangū, and Kataoka Teruo, the head priest of Futamiokitama Shrine—specifically mentioned hiring female priests in their pieces for *Kokoroba*, the magazine of the National FPA. Fujiwara wrote,

> Seven years ago, I took the leap and hired a female priest. Because I was trying to hire a female priest for the first time in the shrine's history, I knew that there would be some resistance and confusion from the surrounding [people]. However, I did not hesitate even a little bit and proceeded with the hiring according to plan. I think that she [the female priest] had more than a little concern, but we overcame that and she has worked for us just as I hoped. Even now, I do not think that my decision at the time was wrong.[161]

Kataoka's remarks were much briefer, simply noting that he had hired a female priest.[162]

My interviewees—especially those who attended one of the Shinto universities—often speak of major shrines that hire or have hired women. Several of my interviewees remember speaking to female priests at major shrines where they were conducting a short-term internship (実習 *jisshū*). Kanda, for example, a recent college grad who was hired at a major shrine, spoke about completing her internship at Dewa Sanzan, and hearing stories from a female priest working there, which cemented her desire to become a priest herself. The more politically or

[161] Fujiwara Masayoshi, "Shikai e no shinpū no kitai," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha, 2008), 70.

[162] Kataoka Teruo, "Kishikata o kaerimite," 1.

academically connected priests would often track which shrines had hired their first female priest—Yasukuni Shrine hired their first in 2017, as I was immediately informed by one of my interlocutors when I arrived for my year at Kokugakuin University.

One major shrine that has decided to hire women is Shimogamo Shrine in Kyoto. One of my interviewees put me in touch with her friend Nijima, a male priest working at the shrine, who extended an invitation from the head priest to have me visit Kyoto and interview one of the female priests as well as speak to the head priest. Unfortunately, I wound up being unable to speak to the head priest, due to a last-minute conflict, but Nijima offered me a copy of the head priest's book and pointed out the chapter which included information on female ritualists at the shrine.

As of summer 2018, Shimogamo Shrine employed one female priest. However, rather than giving female priests one of the ranks commonly assigned to priests within shrines such as *gonnegi* (権禰宜) or *negi* (禰宜),[163] they are referred to by a separate system of terms: *zōshime* (雑仕女) (for the lower rank) and *inkonome* (忌子女) (for the upper rank). These names are drawn from the terms used for female ritualists employed at Shimogamo Shrine before the Meiji period (1868-1912), which included *uneme* (采女), *zōshime*, and *inkonome*.[164] These ritualists were traditionally drawn from specific clans and were involved in both the preparation of offerings for and performance of a variety of ceremonies.[165] These positions were standardized

[163] See chapter 3 for a longer explanation of these terms.

[164] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa* (Kyoto: Keizaikai, 2007), 117. For more on female ritualists prior to the Meiji period, see the introduction.

[165] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa*, 117-118.

in 677 CE, and *inkonome* and *zōshime* were regulated officials appointed by the imperial court.[166]

The system was officially abolished at the start of the Meiji period, with the abolition of hereditary shrine lineages (see the introduction).[167] According to Nijima, Araki Naoto, the current head priest of Shimogamo Shrine, reinstated the position twenty to thirty years prior. As a result, Araki proudly declares in his book that "[t]his position (役柄 *yakugara*) has not changed until the present day," although he does note that today Shimogamo Shrine employs "women who have priestly credentials but absolutely no connection to the old system."[168]

Araki—and Nijima, when I spoke with him—thus presented the decision to hire women as a return to a tradition that had been abolished in the Meiji period. Because the (re)integration of women was presented as a return to tradition—and the Aoi Matsuri, one of the major festivals of the shrine, already features women in major ritual positions (even if they are not priests per se)—Nijima said that there was no resistance from the parishioners.

Whether the female priests themselves experienced such a smooth integration was unclear. Nijima sat in on my interview with his colleague, who had been hired only months earlier, and she was obviously reticent to express any kind of negative sentiment in his presence. Compounding matters, Nijima would interrupt and "correct" her answers to many questions. She suggested that she was given more clerical busywork and less ritual work than her male colleagues, for example, which Nijima hurriedly corrected, naming the many other ritual functions she performed that she had "forgotten." I was hesitant to push and imperil her position

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[166] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa*, 118.

[167] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa*, 118.

[168] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa*, 118.

at the shrine, and consequently left the interview feeling that I had received the PR-approved narrative.

Regardless of the experiences of female priests at the shrine, Shimogamo Shrine presents an example of how a major shrine might employ female priests without destabilizing Jinja Honchō's prevailing gender ideology. Shimogamo Shrine employs female priests not for the sake of gender equality but in a return to an unsullied, pre-Meiji tradition—Araki lays out pages and pages of documentation proving the historical provenance of the roles (with only brief mentions of their contemporary forms) in his book.[169] Male and female priests have different roles—in addition to their positions having different names, female priests do not perform the overnight shift at the shrine, which supposedly bars women from employment at many major shrines. The gender balance at the shrine was still quite uneven—at the time of interview, one of the female priests had just quit, so there were seventeen priests at the shrine, only one of whom was a woman, but Nijima said that they usually had two women among twenty priests. Female priests exist to fill a specific, gendered position at Shimogamo Shrine for the sake of tradition, circumventing many of the potential objections to women's presence in the priesthood.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by asking why the Basic Shrine Problems Research Group named the "female priest problem" as one of the nine most pressing issues facing contemporary Shinto. We have seen now that Jinja Honchō administrators and highly ranked priests at major shrines see men and women as inherently different and consider the erasure of gendered difference a threat to both the family and the nation. They therefore believe that women cannot fill "male"

[169] Araki Naoto, *Kan'asohi no yuniwa*, 116-124.

roles without modification. However, they recognize that shrines rely on female labor, so they cannot outright bar women from serving as priests. Instead, they encourage female priests to "leverage their special characteristics," expect women to assist their male superiors, or refuse outright to hire women to major shrines. They create a priesthood that is often gender-segregated, with women serving different roles than men in practice (and sometimes in name).

However, we have also seen that these practices are not unique to the shrine world. The mainstream Japanese labor market has similarly marginalized women's labor, relying on women in low-paid, part-time positions in order to bolster a labor force being wracked by demographic shifts. Women within corporations are similarly seen as not equal to men, and although anti-discrimination legislation exists, it often lacks effective enforcement. In both corporations and public discourse, women are reduced to their reproductive capacities, and women who prioritize their families are penalized. One of the major differences between the shrine world and the mainstream labor market is that the tie between the family and the shrine makes women's participation marginally more acceptable at small, family-run shrines but unacceptable (unless there is a historical precedent) at larger shrines that have no family shrine lineage.

How do female priests imagine their roles within the priesthood? Do they agree with Jinja Honchō's gender ideology, or do they contest or subvert it? What sources do they draw on to explain their identities as priests, as women, and as female priests? We turn to these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 3
Female Priests and "Normal Women"

When I was first putting together my interview guide for this project during the summer of 2015, I asked the priests at my main field site (discussed in greater depth in chapter 5) if they had any recommendations for questions. As we sat in the office during a lull between visitors, one of the priests pulled me aside to chat. "Dana-chan," she said seriously, "here's what I want you to ask: Can female priests really live as normal women (普通の女性 *futsū no josei*)?" Somewhat taken aback, I asked her what she meant. She explained that she felt being a priest meant that she couldn't "live as a normal woman." She wasn't sure if that experience was unique to her or more generally experienced by female priests—and she had no forum in which it would be appropriate to discuss—so she wanted me to find out and report back.

In this chapter, I entangle the context for this question by examining the ways that female priests define their own identities. I raise three major points. First, female priests' entrance into the priesthood is often shaped by familial pressures, leading female priests to define their identities as priests as an extension of or in opposition to their identities as daughters, wives, and mothers in families. This trend remains true *regardless* of the priest's reason for entering the priesthood and her familial ties. Second, rather than fighting for an equal access, gender-neutral priesthood, female priests use strategic gender essentialism to argue for their own place within the priesthood, mirroring "official" negative rhetoric released by Jinja Honchō (discussed in chapters 1 and 2) but twisting it into positive reasons for inclusion. Finally, the preceding two factors can lead to female priests highlighting a tension or conflict between their duties as priests and their duties as women, expressed, for example, as the "normal woman" question, which was posed to me. How much tension female priests feel between their identities as "woman" and

"priest" is often influenced by how closely they see their role as a priest as an extension of their duties as a family member.

Japanese Women as Daughters, Wives, and Mothers

When I describe my project, many of my respondents (both Japanese and American) tend to exclaim over how "unique" the shrine world is. They tend to focus on what they perceive as the extreme conservativism of Shinto and the related extreme conservatism of gender norms within the shrine world. On one particularly memorable occasion, I presented a portion of my research for the X-Gender Research Group in Tokyo, and the other students were quick to express their own shock and surprise at this glimpse into "another world" that was unfamiliar even to those of them who had grown up in Japan. "I would die," one of them told me during the Q&A, "if I had to be around these people."

While I do not discount the discomfort the ethnographer may experience within the shrine world (see below), I also have seen the ways that discounting the experiences of female priests (and the experience of gender within the shrine world more generally) as "extreme" or "outliers" often turns into an excuse to ignore their voices, to declare their decisions and beliefs the result of "brainwashing" or "false consciousness," or to remove them from discussions of gender in Japan as "they don't really count." It is undeniable that gender norms in the shrine world can be constraining at best and violent at worst; it is equally undeniable that studying these norms and the ways that female priests navigate them will enrich our understanding of gender in Japan.

I argue that the gender norms espoused by the shrine world are not unique—they are variations on narratives we can see elsewhere (in non-religious contexts) in Japanese society and in (both Japanese and non-Japanese) conservative religious contexts. However, they are not simply transplanted without modification—they are adapted and warped by the context of the shrine world. In order to understand the ways in which female Shinto priests define their own identities (especially in relation to mainstream gender norms), it is important not only to understand the gender norms espoused by Jinja Honchō (see chapters 1 and 2) and within shrine communities more generally (see chapter 5), but also to understand the ways in which Japanese women define their identities. As previous research has shown, relational identities are particularly resonant in Japan, and "Japanese stories of self-construction emphasize a woman's life as a single thread in a richly texture fabric of relationships."[1] I focus here on three relational identities that (as we shall see) hold great importance in female priests' narratives—daughter, wife, and mother.

The emphasis on "the mother" as women's most important role is a relatively recent development in Japan. As previous scholarship has shown, the ideal of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (良妻賢母 *ryōsai kenbo*) was promoted in the late nineteenth century by statesmen, intellectuals, and educators. This reimagining of women's roles was a departure from early modern views of the "breeding mother," which emphasized women's reproductive role but did not assign her an important role in child-rearing. Between 1890 and 1910 the Japanese state pieced together a policy that Nolte and Hastings have described as based on two assumptions:

[1] Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 33. For studies of relationally defined identities outside of Japan see, for example, Suad Joseph, "Introduction: Theories and Dynamics of Gender, Self, and Identity in Arab Families," in *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity*, ed. Suad Joseph (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

"that the family was an essential building block of the national structure and that the management of the household was increasingly in women's hands."[2] "Home" and "society" were increasingly divided and the physical space of the home was reimagined in the Meiji period, creating the feminized vocation "housewife" (主婦 *shufu*). The state barred women from officially participating in politics but welcomed their participation in social reform and community movements in their roles as wives and mothers. However, the emphasis was primarily on women as good wives—that is, shrewd managers of the household—rather than wise mothers, until the 1930s.[3]

After Japan's defeat in World War II, overt attempts by the state to mandate the ideal of "good wife, wise mother" decreased, although as Uno has convincingly shown, the ideal continued to hold ideological sway. Motherhood ascended over wifehood, as families were more likely to be nuclear (removing the wife from her mother-in-law's supervision), the diffusion of labor-saving appliances reduced the burden of household chores on the wife, and the rise of employment for wages decreased the proportion of housewives working for family businesses.[4] In the late 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of middle-class women were able to become

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[2] Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 171.

[3] For more on "good wife, wise mother" and the creation of the category of housewife, see Tomiko Yoda, "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society: Gender, Labor and Capital in Contemporary Japan," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (2000), 867-868; Nolte and Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910"; Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space and Bourgeois Culture 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 55-94; Kathleen Uno, "Womanhood, War, and Empire: Transmutations of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' Before 1931," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 493-519.

[4] Kathleen S. Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 304.

"professional housewives" (専業主婦 *sengyō shufu*).[5] Postwar movements such as the New Life Movement, a loosely connected set of initiatives by corporations, women's groups, and government offices that were intended to "rationalize" the household, naturalized "a model of gender relations in which women of all social strata managed the home, while men managed the workplace."[6] As men became salaried employees outside the home, their wives also took over both the management of the household and as mediators between the state and society.[7] This created a system in which there was a disconnection between gendered spheres of influence, and both spouses "were supported, in social terms, by the other's complementary set of responsibilities."[8]

Postwar reforms to the educational system also led to mothers' importance in education and nurturance being emphasized. With the father away and working long hours (and families increasingly nuclear), the mother became the primary caregiver. Previous scholarship has traced the ways in which mothers have come to be identified as essential to their children's educational success, as well as the ways in which the ideal of motherhood and the "motherly instinct" (母性 *bosei*) have become increasingly fetishized.[9] Women's education, too, has been grounded in the assumption that "women's difference or 'special character' (*tokusei*) as wives and mothers slated

[5] Amy Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife: Alcohol, Codependency, and the Politics of Nurturance in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 19-20.

[6] Andrew Gordon, "Managing the Japanese Household: The New Life Movement in Postwar Japan," *Social Politics* 4, no. 2 (1997), 245.

[7] Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 178-205.

[8] Allison Alexy, *Intimate Disconnections: Divorce and the Romance of Independence in Contemporary Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 47.

[9] Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife*, 67-85, 137-160; Yoda, "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society."

them for the home."[10] Attempts to institute "gender-free" education have been met with a backlash by conservative activists, pundits, and politicians (see chapter 2).[11]

Uno has traced the enduring legacy of "good wife, wise mother" into the 1980s, as it continued to influence state policies and was adopted by women in activism,[12] and Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni has argued that legacy continues to the present day, as the ideal of the "model housewife" is a modernized version of "good wife, wise mother."[13] She argues that the social order in corporate Japan has come to be characterized by "the single role principle"—"in very simple words, men are *wholly* salarymen, and women are *totally* professional housewives."[14] Both men and women are expected to "guard the house"—the men provide for the family by working outside the home while women guard the household from within.[15] Similarly, Borovoy argues that "State sponsorship and endorsement of motherhood in Japan makes it difficult for Japanese women to 'say no' to motherhood"[16] and that "[f]or many women, with the exception of a small but growing number of elite, highly educated women, motherhood continues to be the only role that offers them support, stability, and some measure of social recognition."[17] For

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[10] Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" 306.

[11] Yuki Tsuji, "Women and the Liberal Democratic Party in Transition," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 146-147; Nihon Josei Gakkai Jendaa Kenkyūkai, ed., *Q & A danjo kyōdō sankaku/jendaa furii basshingu: bakkurasshu e no tettei hanron* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2006); Yamaguchi Tomomi, "Okashii zo! 'Danjo byōdō kyōiku = seibetsu tokusei ron' setsu," *Feminizumu no rekishi to riron*, June 14, 2011, accessed June 5, 2019. https://webfemi.wordpress.com/2011/06/14/okashiizo/.

[12] Uno, "The Death of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" 293-322.

[13] Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan: An Ethnography of Real Lives and Consumerized Domesticity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 69.

[14] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 100.

[15] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 90.

[16] Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife*, 169.

[17] Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife*, 168. For a more recent study, see Florian Paulsen, "Gender-related

women, "marriage and bearing children are usually considered as the final crucial steps for becoming full social persons."[18]

Recent studies of the gender gap in Japan have argued that the previous system—in which women performed almost all of the labor in the home—has begun to diversify.[19] Beginning in the 1990s, there have been more dual-income households than ones in which women were housewives.[20] Marriage rates have declined—while 50% of men and 32% of women ages 24-34 were unmarried in 1975, by 2000, 68% of men and 56% of women in the same age bracket were unmarried.[21] As Nemoto has found, women may distance themselves

> from (1) marriage in general, when viewed as incompatible with their jobs, (2) marriage with a sexist man, (3) marriage with a man who had rejected them, and (4) marriage with a 'nonmasculine' man who had less income or education, or both, than they did,[22]

although most women continue to see marriage as important and aspirational.

However, women continue to do virtually all the housework, and tend to see this split of domestic labor as fair.[23] Yamato has found two major factors that contribute to middle-aged Japanese women's attitudes toward division of labor in the home: a belief in gender-linked role

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Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce," *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 19, no. 3 (2019), accessed September 19, 2020, http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcjs/vol19/iss3/paulsen.html.

[18] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 67.

[19] Gill Steel, "Introduction: Changing Women's and Men's Lives in Japan," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 3.

[20] Steel, "Introduction," 8.

[21] Kumiko Nemoto, "Postponed Marriage: Exploring Women's Views of Matrimony and Work in Japan," *Gender & Society* 22, no. 2 (2008), 220.

[22] Kumiko Nemoto, "Why Women Won't Wed," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 69-70.

[23] Gill Steel, "Women's Work at Home and in the Workplace," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 38; Paulsen, "Gender-related Discrimination in the Japanese and South Korean Workforce."

assignment (i.e. "men should work outside the home while women should work within it") and a belief that women have an inherent mothering instinct. Women who support gender equality may still subscribe to the second belief. Higher education may weaken the first belief but does not appear to have an impact on the mothering norm, although employment does.[24] While younger women may no longer value domesticity as highly as their mothers and are more likely to seek out wage labor for economic self-sufficiency and professional prestige, there is "much evidence to suggest that even this younger generation experiences considerable ambivalence in deprioritizing the work of mothering and caregiving."[25] Women are still expected to devote themselves to childcare full-time, at least for the first three years of children's lives[26]—they may return to the workforce once children are in preschool, leading to the M-curve pattern of female employment, discussed in chapter 2. Women may prioritize not disrupting other family members' schedules over the economic benefits of working outside the home.[27] As already discussed in chapter 2, national policies have also often constrained women in Japan, emphasizing their roles as mothers and caretakers, while high-ranking government officials have expressed pronatalist views equating women with their reproductive potential.[28]

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[24] Yamato Reiko, "Seibetsu yakuwari bungyō ishiki no futatsu no jigen: 'sei ni yoru yakuwari furiwake' to 'ai ni yoru saiseisan yakuwari,'" *Soshioroji* 40, no. 1 (1995). See also Yuko Ogasawa, "Working Women's Husbands as Helpers or Partners," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019).

[25] Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife*, 33.

[26] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 14.

[27] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 70.

[28] For overviews of comments from the first decade of the millennium, see Nemoto, "Postponed Marriage," 222; Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 189-212. For more recent examples, see Tomomi Yamaguchi, "Will Women Shine if Toilets Shine? The Abe Government's Convoluted 'Womenomics,'" *CSG Newsletter* 18 (2015), http://web.icu.ac.jp/cgs_e/2015/09/will-women-shine-if-toilets-shine-the-abe-governments-convoluted-womenomics.html. See chapter 2 for further explanations of these comments.

One major difference between the gendered experiences of female priests and their compatriots in Japanese society more generally is the emphasis on their roles as daughters. This difference in emphasis is caused by two factors. First, as we have seen in chapter 1, the shrine world is currently facing a critical lack of successors, making daughters an important alternative to male successors. Second, as we have seen in chapters 1 and 2, Jinja Honchō stresses the older family structure of the *ie* (家) or stem-family over the nuclear family, which has been the predominant family structure in Japan since the 1970s. Kondo describes the *ie* as "characteristic of the Japanese households engaged in small family enterprises and of families with some sort of substantial cultural-economic capital at stake."[29] *Ie* are

> best understood as *corporate groups* that hold property (for example, land, a reputation, an art, or 'cultural capital') in perpetuity. They are units of production and/or consumption, encompassing the roles of corporation/enterprise/household.[30]

Succession in an *ie* often means succession to a position in an organization (such as the position of head priest), and the needs and continuity of the *ie* take precedence over individual desires.[31] Succession in a shrine family requires a child—preferably a son, but sometimes a daughter—to take over the shrine, while marrying and producing a successor in the next generation. In order to preserve the family name, a daughter's husband must be adopted into the family.[32] For these reasons, the importance of the daughter's role may seem unusually inflated for priests who grow up outside of the shrine world—and may, as we will see, feel unfairly constraining for daughters

[29] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 121.

[30] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 122.

[31] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 124.

[32] For an overview of this marriage practice, see Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 131. See also Ochiai Emiko, *The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan* (Tokyo: LTCB International Library Foundation, 1996), 147-167.

of shrine lineages, who (unfavorably) compare their duties to their family with those of their peers.

Female Priests and Family Ties

Given the ways that women are positioned within Japanese society more generally, it is unsurprising that family holds an important place in almost all female priests' narratives. Published autobiographies of female priests often explicitly highlight the author's familial position in their titles, for example—Matsuoka Rie's *"Jinja no musume" ganbaru!: bijin kannushi no Atagoyama dayori*[33] (Do your best, "shrine daughter"!: dispatches from a beautiful priest in Atagoyama) highlights her position as the titular "shrine daughter," while Okada Momoko's *Jinja wakaoku nikki: torii wo kugureba bessekai*[34] (Diary of a young shrine wife: a different world if you pass through the shrine gate) and Nakagawa Toshiko's *Fukujūsō: otera kara omiya e yomeiri shita bangaku no ichi fujin shinshoku no jijoden*[35] (Pheasant's eye [the flower]: autobiography of a lady priest who was educated late after marrying into a shrine from a temple) position the author as a wife. Mainstream news coverage also frequently makes note of female priests' relationships to other (usually male) priests previously or currently serving at the shrine.

Broadly speaking, female priests can be divided into three categories based on their reasons for entering the priesthood—those who were born into shrine families, those who

[33] Matsuoka Rie, *"Jinja no musume" ganbaru!: bijin kannushi no Atagoyama dayori* (Hara Shobō, 2004).

[34] Okada Momoko, *Jinja wakaoku nikki: torii wo kugureba bessekai* (Shōdensha, 2004).

[35] Nakagawa Toshiko, *Fukujūsō: otera kara omiya e yomeiri shita bangaku no ichi fujin shinshoku no jijoden* (Tokyo: Teppozu Inari Jinja, 2002).

married into shrine families,[36] and those from so-called "ordinary families" (一般家族 *ippan kazoku*) who decided to become priests based solely on personal interest. Unfortunately, no statistics for the whole priesthood are available, although the statistics for my interviewees are listed in Figure 3.1. For each group, I discuss two examples of each narrative to illustrate the ways that similar pressures and concerns animate priests' narratives, even when their circumstances vary widely.

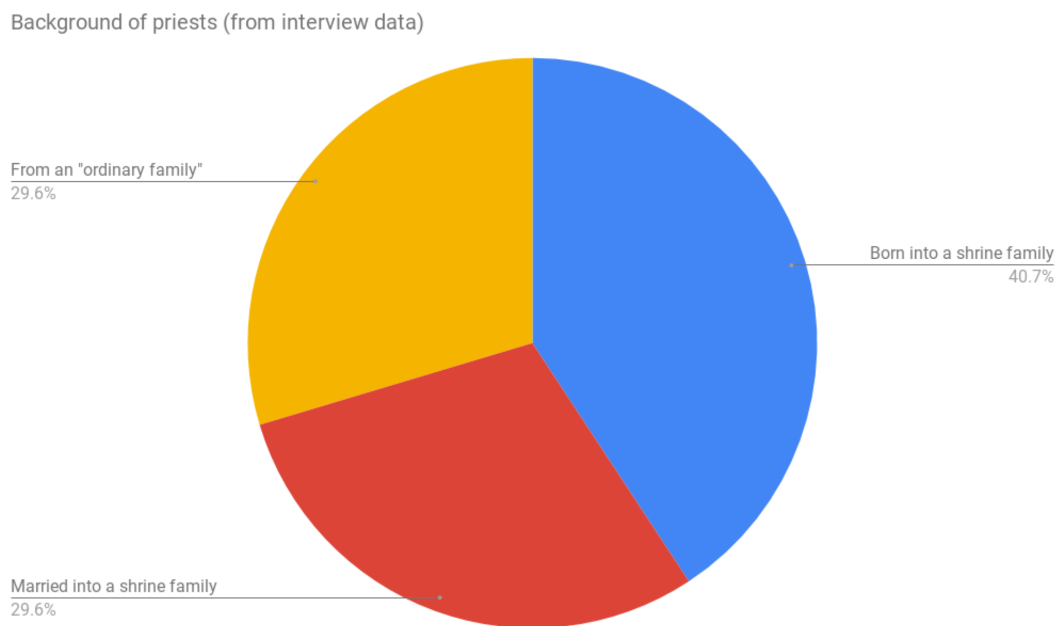

Figure 3.1 Background of priests interviewed for this dissertation.

I conducted one formal recorded interview (two to three hours long) with each woman featured here and have subsequently followed up through correspondence and more informal chats. I have tried to maintain the speech patterns of my interviewees in my translated transcripts below—the only exceptions are places where translating literally would either make

[36] It is possible to separate the second category into those born into "ordinary families" who married into shrine families and those born into shrine families who married into shrine families, but I have combined these two groups in the following analysis, as their experiences tend to be similar.

the sentence incomprehensible in English or where the number of filler words and/or verbal stalling makes direct translation untenable. None of my interviewees had a prepared narrative, so they frequently looped back to add details or started a story but suddenly leaped to a different topic entirely mid-sentence. I have tried to maintain in my translation the fragmented and often colloquial nature of their speech, as well as the moments when they modified their language to be more intelligible to a non-native speaker. While this approach makes for less elegant quotations, I hope that it properly reflects both my positionality as interviewer and the ways my interviewees are often still processing how best to convey their experiences in words.[37]

Two final notes about terminology are in order before we dive into female priests' stories. First, when describing the shrines where my interviewees are employed, I refer to shrines that my interviewees call "*taisha*" as "large shrines," whereas I refer to "*minsha*" or "*shōsha*" as "small shrines" or "midsized shrines," depending on the size of shrine grounds and facilities, the number of shrine representatives, and the income of the shrine.[38] Second, different shrines have different role titles for their priests, which makes translating terms difficult. At smaller shrines, the roles from highest to lowest are commonly head priest (宮司 *gūji*), *negi* (禰宜), and *gonnegi* (権禰宜), but some larger shrines either insert *gongūji* (権宮司) between head

[37] In this respect, I follow Mark Rowe, who aims to always let priests "speak in their own voices." See Mark Rowe, "Charting Known Territory: Female Buddhist Priests," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 80.

[38] Specifically, I use "midsize" to refer to shrines that A. have large enough shrine grounds to have buildings and facilities beyond the bare minimum (usually including a large enough space to comfortably be able to host community meetings and events), B. have more than the requisite six shrine representatives (see chapter 5), and C. produce enough income to support one or more full-time priests. Some of my interviewees would refer to particular shrines as "*chūgata*" (中型 midsized) or "*kogata*" (小型 small-sized), mirroring the terms used to refer to corporations, and my classification of shrines as midsized or small reproduces these categorizations.

See chapter 1 for definitions of *taisha*, *minsha*, and *shōsha*.

priest and *negi* or replace *negi* with *gongūji*.[39] Further complicating matters, no shrine is *required* to have a *negi*; at my main field site, for example, there was one head priest and two *gonnegi*. When I asked why this was the case, the head priest explained that they didn't feel like paying the additional fee to officially register the second-in-command as a *negi*. Head priests play a different role than other priests—they lead all rituals with more than one priest and must have a higher level of certification than other priests (see chapter 1). Whether *negi* and *gonnegi* play different roles varies from shrine to shrine. Some shrines may additionally expect the successor (後継者 *kōkeisha*, see chapter 1) to play a different role, regardless of the official title of their role. A *gonnegi* successor may wind up playing a more similar role to his head priest father than his *negi* mother, for example.

Female Priests as Daughters

First, there are female priests who were born into shrine families, often referred to as *shake-umare* (社家生まれ born into a shrine family) or *jinja shusshin* (神社出身 originating from a shrine). Some of these women serve as priests alongside their other family members, often supporting a parent who serves as the head priest. For example, Tsuda (in her late thirties when I interviewed her) serves as a *gonnegi* at her family's shrine alongside her father (the head priest), sister (the *negi*), and brother-in-law (the designated successor). Tsuda's husband also has certification and helps at the shrine but isn't officially listed as a priest, because shrines must pay fees to Jinja Honchō based on the number of priests they have registered, and moving from four

[39] Some particularly large and politically important shrines (for example, the Ise Shrines) preserve Meiji-era naming conventions and maintain a rank above head priest: the *daigūji* (大宮司).

to five priests would bump the shrine up into the next bracket. Tsuda's family shrine is a small shrine located in a relatively urban area (within easy commuting distance of a larger city, where most of her family works). Her family shrine does not provide enough income to support the family, so all the priests at her shrine have other jobs. They must balance their differing schedules to make sure that the shrine always has at least one priest covering it. Tsuda describes her interest in Shinto as being sparked by growing up in a shrine family—for her, the shrine and the family are deeply entwined.

The category of female priests who are born into shrine families that receives the most attention, however, are women who have no siblings (or no siblings who are willing to become priests), meaning that they are the only eligible successor to the lineage. For example, Kobayashi (in her forties when I interviewed her) was born into a shrine family and is the only child of the then-current head priest, her mother.[40] Kobayashi's family shrine is a small shrine located in a rural area and does not generate enough income to support a full-time priest.

Kobayashi had only been serving as a priest for three years when I interviewed her. She is a divorced mother of three; her ex-husband married into the family (婿入り *mukoiri*), so she had kept her family name. She had previously prioritized her work (she owns a small business), but since her mother is getting older, her mother asked her to get certified. She described herself as feeling resignation—"I thought, well, it can't be helped (仕方がない *shikata ga nai*)." She explained further:

> Everyone said, "You'll be the successor." From the time I was little I was always told, "You'll be the successor." Conversely, I was good at sports. I was good at drawing too, right? And I could play piano very well. And, actually, I was a good student. But, no

[40] Kobayashi's mother retired recently, and Kobayashi now serves as head priest. I interviewed Kobayashi's mother about a week after I interviewed Kobayashi, and I have supplemented with information from that interview here.

> matter how much I excelled [at other things], for example, there was nothing aside from the shrine. (laughs) […] So inside of myself I [felt] like there was no other way for me to live, like I was a bird in a cage. So I really rebelled against my mother.

Kobayashi's relationship with her mother soured for many years in her teens and early twenties as she tried to escape the shrine that she felt was trapping her.

Her breakthrough occurred when she went on a grave visit during her forties, when she realized that "I wasn't just rebelling against my mother" but also all her ancestors. She came to understand that

> Probably I was born where I wanted to be. Um, I chose to be born [in this family]. I came to understand that before I was born, my soul thought, "I'm going to succeed here!" and came here, so, so, probably, right? I felt that I had no choice but to succeed.

Kobayashi defines her existence as a priest as one generation of a shrine lineage stretching back centuries. She fought against her fate before becoming resigned to it, repeating over and over, "It can't be helped." If she had a choice in this path, she made that choice before birth—simply the act of being born into her family consigned her to her current path with no possible alternative. While the language she uses is bleaker than Tsuda's, they both see their work as priests as inexorably entwined with their families of origin.

Female Priests as Wives and Mothers

A second major group of female priests is those who married into shrine families. Within this category, two major patterns emerge. In the first, a woman marries into a shrine family and then gains certification in order to assist her husband or son, who serves as head priest. For example, Murakami (in her sixties when I interviewed her) was born into an "ordinary" family but had an arranged marriage to a man from a shrine family. Her husband's family shrine is a

small shrine located in a historically impoverished area on the outskirts of a major city, and it does not generate enough income to support a full-time priest. At the time of her marriage, her father-in-law was serving as head priest while her husband was *negi*. She explained:

> My children were born. The first was a girl, but… At that time I didn't have much awareness [of the shrine], but I gave birth to the next [child], a boy, a year later. I suddenly began to feel that this child was going to have to succeed [to the position of head priest]. So, that said, my husband worked [full-time] while occasionally helping [his] father with things at the shrine. But I'm a person from Kyushu, and I was born into [an area with] a custom, a practice where after you get married, you enter the household (家庭 *katei*) and you support your husband, who is working outside, from inside the house. I was raised that way, so I thought that supporting [my husband] should be my main [purpose]. But I saw my child's face, and I started questioning a little bit whether my child would, in the same way [as my husband], work [full-time outside the shrine] while inheriting the shrine. I didn't think that I could take care of the shrine, of the *kami*, myself, so I thought, "I have to be in a position where I can help him [my son] do that." So when my children went to elementary school, since my husband's parents were still healthy, I left my children in their care, and I went by myself to Tokyo. (laughs) I went to get certification as a priest, right?

Murakami positions her entrance into the priesthood not for her own sake, but for the sake of her son, as she wanted to raise him to be a good successor. She currently serves at the shrine with her husband and her (now adult) son. She imagines her own position as a supplement to a patriarchal lineage—she did not understand my question when I asked whether she had encouraged her daughter to enter the priesthood as well, and when her husband vacates the position of head priest her son will take over while she will continue to serve as an assistant.

The other major pattern for female priests who have married into shrine families—and again the pattern that receives much more media attention and is considered more "prototypical" among my interviewees—is women who serve as priests in place of their husbands. This substitution may be because the husband doesn't have time to serve as a priest—Kobayashi's mother, for example, wound up getting certification because her husband, who works full-time in a company, was not able to take the month off work that he would need to complete the training

course.[41] However, in some cases a woman must substitute for her husband as her husband is deceased. This case is considered more prototypical—when I tell people in the shrine world that I am studying female priests, they frequently name women whose husbands have died and women who have no siblings as the only two types of female priests who exist.

Kotani (in her sixties when I interviewed her) was born into a shrine family and was arranged to marry a man from another shrine family in her mid-twenties. Her husband's family shrine is a midsized shrine in an urban area and generates enough income to support multiple full-time priests. When she first came to the shrine, her father-in-law was the head priest, while her husband was the *negi*. Being from a shrine family and a graduate of Kokugakuin University's Shinto department, Kotani had certification (it was, in her words, "expected"), but "[a]s soon as I came here as a bride, I gave birth to children, so because raising children was really the most important thing, um, I didn't function (機能 *kinō*) as a priest at all." Once her children had gotten bigger, she was tasked mainly with behind the scenes work at the shrine, such as helping in the kitchen.

However, her husband was diagnosed with cancer. While he was ill, she gradually become more involved with the shrine as her husband "left it to me to do things like the account books and the shrine management." When her husband passed away, Kotani took over his position. She served as *negi* until her father-in-law's death ten years later, when she became the head priest. She has continued to serve in that role for more than a decade, with her son joining

[41] At that time, she was working as a teacher, and the August training course fell conveniently during her summer break. For more on certification, see chapter 1.

her as the *negi* after his graduation from college. She has hired a third priest (no relation to the family), as well.

There was, however, no guarantee that Kotani would assume the head priest's position after her father-in-law's death—it is not unusual for women to cede the head priest's position to their sons or another suitable male relative, as we have already seen in Murakami's case. However, Kotani decided to remain the head priest even after her son was old enough to take over the position "because I have this kind of personality." She explains,

> I thought that certainly if [my husband] had lived a long time there were lots of things he would have wanted to do, so I thought, "Well, I'll serve as head priest for my husband's portion as well." So, um, I hated not having an existence. I'm also a legitimate head priest! […] So, I thought, "I'm the 17th generation priest [at this shrine], and I'm legitimately working as [the 17th] generation, and I want to complete the work in my own way," so I hated [the idea of] being a makeshift [head priest] until my son grew up.

Kotani fought directly against one of the most common assumptions about female priests—that they are mainly there to provide labor until a qualified man can take over.[42] However, Kotani justified staying in the position of head priest through two familial ties—namely her connection to her husband (whose "portion" she decided to serve) and to the previous generations of the Kotani family. Like Murakami, she defines her own position as a priest by her tie to the patriarchal line into which she married.

Female Priests from "Ordinary" Families

The final group of priests are those who have no connection to pre-existing shrine lineages, but rather enter the priesthood due to their own interest. People associated with the

[42] See chapter 1 for further discussion.

shrine world, especially those who are from shrine lineages themselves, have often assured me that there are "almost no" female priests from this category, but almost 30% of my interviewees as well as the majority of the students I have interviewed fall into it. Whether this is representative of the priesthood as a whole is unclear, as no large-scale demographic surveys exist, but the assertion that there are "almost no" female priests from "ordinary" family backgrounds who have not married into shrine families is false.

Interviewees have listed several factors that led their developing interest in entering the priesthood: an interest in traditional art forms (such as *kagura*) or Japanese history; experience serving as a *miko*, usually in high school or college; international travel, study abroad experience, or time spent living abroad reinforcing their identity as Japanese leading to their interest in Shinto, which they identified as a uniquely Japanese (or essentially Japanese) religion;[43] and more.

While one would expect that those who were born or married into shrine families would highlight their identities within families in their personal narratives, the same trend can be seen in those from "ordinary" families. For example, Okada graduated from a two-year junior college, and was employed full-time as a *miko* at a major shrine in an urban area. She rose to the position of head *miko* (巫女長 *mikochō*), before retiring when she was twenty-five years old.[44]

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[43] Interestingly, Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni has noted a similar nationalistic turn in discussions of Japanese cuisine by a notable "charisma housewife": "Kurihara writes a kind of memo of her personal thoughts: she relates how she, who had always had a strong yearning for the West and for Western style, started to get a sense that 'Japan is great, Japanese people are wonderful' only after she began working with other countries. It was not merely the greatness of traditional Japanese food that Kurihara rediscovered through her encounter with the West; it was also the Japanese mentality." Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 220-221.

[44] Many major shrines that employ full-time *miko* have compulsory retirement at age twenty-five.

During her time working at the shrine she was inspired to become a priest. However, when she went to the head priest to announce her intentions,

> At that time, what the head priest said was "It's better for you not to get certified." I was told, "[I] won't recommend you."[45] As for why that was, as expected, it was because I was a woman. Because I'm a woman, first of all, rather than being a priest, first of all, […],[46] um, he was the one who told me that first of all, as a woman, for the sake of humanity (人類 *jinrui*), isn't it more important to give birth to children and connect to the next generation (次の世代に繋いでいく *tsugi no sedai ni tsunaide iku*)? I think that is certainly correct. Yes, so, at that time, I spoke with the head priest, and the head priest said no. So I briefly gave up [on becoming a priest].

We have seen similar rhetoric, especially coming out of major shrines, in chapter 2. Major shrines are hesitant to hire women, and female priests are positioned as legitimate only when filling a labor gap within their family shrine. Women like Okada who become priests because of personal interest rather than a familial commitment are antithetical to this ideology.

After several years working odd jobs and getting married to a man with no connection to the shrine world, Okada began working (first as a *miko* and then as an administrative assistant) at a midsized shrine in the same city. The head priest of that shrine was a woman, and seeing her work, Okada was inspired to try again to become a priest. While the head priest was reluctant at first, she eventually gave Okada permission to take the one-month training course. However, her decision to become a priest had repercussions on her relationship with her in-laws. She called her father-in-law to announce her intention to become a priest and reassure him that changing her religion (her husband's family is Sōtō Buddhist) wouldn't bar her from the family grave. However, her father-in-law objected, because he misunderstood her saying, "Once I get *chokkai*

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[45] A recommendation from a head priest is necessary to be allowed to take the one-month training course; see chapter 1 for further details.

[46] Here Okada identified the head priest in question as someone I knew, details of which have been omitted here for privacy reasons.

(直階 the lowest level of certification), I'll seriously think about children," as her announcing that she had no intention of having children. Her husband provided additional resistance, as, in her words, he felt that "I would be superior, if I was the only one who studied and got certification; it would mean that I would be above him." Despite her husband and in-laws' protests, she completed the lowest level of certification. She divorced her husband a month later. While she wants to get remarried and (more importantly to her) have children, she does not want to quit working at the shrine, and she has yet to find a marriage partner who would accommodate that wish.

As a contrasting example, Yamashita (in her seventies when I interviewed her) was not born into a shrine family, but due to tensions between the soon-to-be head priest and the parishioners of a midsized shrine in her urban neighborhood, the parishioners were looking for someone new to take over the shrine. One of Yamashita's friends, who was a parishioner, asked her whether she would consider being a priest. She had only been to the shrine once before, so she decided to go a second time. "As I stepped through the *torii* (鳥居 shrine gate)," she explained, "bam! I felt my mother and father [floating above] my shoulders, and I thought, 'Oh, this place is good, my parents are happy for me.'" She went to her friend:

> I said, "Please let me think about it." As for why, if I became a priest, that would inconvenience my family. If I decided to do it, I would be unable to do various things for my family. Since I have this type of personality, if I did this, my family[-related] things would become strange, I would become unable to do them, so I said, "Please let me think about it," and, yeah, I convened a family meeting. […] My daughters' and my husband's opinion was "ah, well, since it's related to the *kami*, please do it," so I wound up answering [to the friend], "Well, let me do it then."

Even now, she insists that she's only able to serve as a priest full-time because she has the cooperation of her family—her husband has taken over cooking, and her adult daughters help

with the housework. She, like Okada, feels that being a priest conflicts with her duties to her family, but her family is more accommodating than Okada's.

As we can see, regardless of their background, female priests forefront their positions within their families—and specifically within their stem-family lineage rather than merely a nuclear family—in their personal narratives. While some understand their entering the priesthood as a duty to their familial lineage, others worry that being a priest conflicts with their duties to their family. We should note, however, that that the tensions shaping their experience as priests do not always fit neatly into categories based on their familial role—shrine daughters' experiences are not necessarily similar to each other. Instead, whether the female priest is expected to play a supportive role (like Tsuda and Murakami) or as a replacement for a missing man (like Kobayashi and Kotani) is a much better determinant of the pressures they experience. The obligation to assist one's existing family is a very different type of pressure than the obligation to succeed to the position of head priest (or let the shrine fall out of the family's hands).

The integral role of the family in religious life is not unique to Shinto, however. In her study of *bōmori*, Jōdo Shinshū temple wives, Jessica Starling refers to family as the "connective tissue of Buddhist communities."[47] In Jōdo Shinshū (as in many other Buddhist sects), priestly vocation is grounded in family obligation,[48] and almost all female priests are the daughters, mothers, and wives (or widows) of resident priests.[49] Many of the patterns we can identify

[47] Jessica Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home: Domestic Religion in the Contemporary Jōdo Shinshū* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 3.

[48] See Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 21-34. See also Stephen G. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 82-84.

[49] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 108.

among female Shinto priests can also be found among *bōmori* and female Buddhist priests: gaining more knowledge or certification in order to assist their husbands (or their husband's family),[50] serving in ritual roles when their husbands are busy (with other ritual duties or a full-time job) or otherwise unavailable,[51] being pressured into taking over the family temple as the sole successor,[52] and serving as an intermediary successor between male relatives.[53] The similarity between the successor patterns in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines (see chapter 1) may explain some of these similarities—both types of religious institutions tend to be operated by familial lineages that are themselves influenced by cultural norms around family structure and distribution of labor.

Schrimpf additionally identifies several factors as contributing to lay-born women seeking ordination—early interest in religions; "an outstanding experience that changed the narrator's perspective on life before attaining adulthood," especially encounters with death at an early age; and fascinations with specific people or scriptures.[54] While these explanations are similar to those we might see for women from "ordinary" families who decided to enter the Shinto priesthood, we should also make note of some differences. Both involve encounters with something that shifts one's perspective, but the Shinto case of encountering the world outside Japan and feeling one's Japanese-ness particularly acutely might help explain why my interviewees from "ordinary" families are especially likely to regurgitate Jinja Honchō's position

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[50] See, for example, Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 83-86.

[51] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 110.

[52] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 143-152; Mark Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 80-83.

[53] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 86-89; Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 124-127.

[54] Monika Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?: Self-Understandings of Ordained Buddhist Women in Contemporary Japan," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 4 (2015), 197.

that Shinto is the heart of the Japanese people, unchanged since time immemorial. We might also notice the ways the women interested in Buddhism are attracted to scriptures and people while the women interested in Shinto are attracted to art forms and history—things that are proximate to Shinto but not necessarily a core component of the work priests perform (see chapter 5).

Do Female Priests Experience "Gender Discrimination"?

In chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the ways in which Jinja Honchō engages gender essentialist rhetoric in order to frame female priests as fundamentally different than male priests, necessitating the creation of separate norms of dress, behavior, and movement through space (see also chapter 4). This gender essentialist rhetoric is sometimes framed as "gender differentiation" (男女区別 *danjo kubetsu*) not "gender discrimination" (男女差別 *danjo sabetsu*).

Female priests engage in similar circumlocution. The first time I heard the phrase "gender differentiation" was during an interview with a priest in her twenties who explained that while her own family operated on principles of "gender equality" (男女平等 *danjo byōdō*), the shrine world was not like that. "Rather than gender discrimination (男女差別 *danjo sabetsu*) it's gender differentiation (男女区別 *danjo kubetsu*)," she explained. Among my interviewees, I noticed a tendency to avoid the word "discrimination" (差別 *sabetsu*) when talking about their own experiences or the experiences of female priests as a whole. When I asked, "Have you ever had problems because you are a female priest?" interviewees would offer a laundry list of negative experiences they had had (discussed in greater depth in chapter 5), ranging from being

turned away from ground purification ceremonies to being excluded from training or events to sexual harassment. However, when I asked the same people, "Have you ever experienced gender discrimination?" many would immediately respond, "No, I have not," including the people who had previously offered examples of problems they had experienced. While there were some people who used the word "gender discrimination" (see chapter 5), it was much more common for women to frame their marginalization within the shrine world as a product of a "male society" (男性社会 *dansei shakai*), the shrine world being "male-centric" (男性中心 *dansei chūshin*), or "*danson johi*" (男尊女卑), a Confucian phrase meaning "respecting men and treating women as base" that refers to the subordination of women. Some of my more spitfire interviewees referred to the shrine world as "feudalistic" (封建的 *hōkenteki*), while others opted to refer to it as stuck in the Shōwa period (1925-1989).[55]

Some interviewees, additionally, resisted using the word "discrimination" at all. For example, in the interviews I conducted in 2015 and 2016, I asked whether interviewees saw a connection between feminism and being a female priest. I wound up removing the question in 2017, as most of my interviewees did not recognize the word "feminism" (フェミニズム). Iida, a college-educated head priest in her sixties, asked me to define feminism. When I responded that there were various types of feminism, but many of them are interested in promoting gender equality and reducing gender discrimination, she interrupted me:

> I can't say that there's no discrimination. […] But, discrimination, the word "discrimination," hmm. […] You can't call it discrimination. The poor (かわいそう *kawaisō*) male priests. They're coming to understand [female priests]! It's not

[55] Starling found similar language of temporal lag when interviewing for her project on *bōmori*; see Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 152.

> discrimination, but they're, they're coming to understand [us]. I think the word "discrimination" is inappropriate. [...] It makes me feel that the other side (向こう *mukō*) will be confused. And, well, when I was young, my male priest *senpai*[56] were, well, they were the same generation as my grandfather, but they were kind! So, in any case, I don't want to use the word "discrimination." I think it [creates] confusion.

One can surmise from Iida's linguistic slipping and sliding that the word "discrimination" may seem more threatening to my interviewees than the experiences that it describes. They may think it implies intentionality or requires naming particular offenders rather than highlighting structural or cultural forces contributing to their exclusion. Earlier in this interview, in fact, Iida was quite vocal about the ways in which she thought female priests had historically been treated unfairly (by being barred from certain types of training, for example) and the obstacles (such as sexual harassment) they continued to face in the workplace.

Many women additionally believe that it is appropriate for them to be treated differently than male priests. Hori, a Kōgakkan University graduate in her twenties, who (due to not being from a shrine family) was not able to find a job as a priest upon graduation, explained,

> I think that because I am a woman there are many things that cannot be helped. In society right now, I think [the ideas of] gender equality[57] are, yes, they're strong, but, nevertheless, shrines aren't like that. Since the other party (相手 *aite*) are *kami*, and, well, there's history, so no matter what you do, there are certain portions [of shrine work] that you can't be lenient about. But, since I learned about that in college, I have no resistance to it, but, as expected, from other people's perspective, I think that there are a lot of things that make you wonder, "Why?" I'm really glad I went to college and came into contact [with that idea]! I'm glad I studied [it].

Here Hori uses historical misogyny to explain why women continue to be excluded from shrines—while the rest of the world may be operating under an ideology of gender equality, shrines must continue to embody and enact ancient practices (which, as she was taught, require

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[56] A senior at work or school, here referring to priests more senior than her (working at different shrines).

[57] Here she used two separate terms for gender equality: *danjo kintō* (男女均等) and *danjo byōdō* (男女平等).

women's exclusion).[58] We again see the idea that the shrine world is temporally lagging in comparison to the rest of society, but Hori frames it as a quality inherent to the type of work (serving the *kami*) that must be performed at shrines.

Some of my interviewees took a further step to decry gender equality as misguided and shortsighted at best and detestable at worst. For example, one interviewee told me, "I am against gender equality (男女平等反対 *danjo byōdō hantai*). Rather than trying to make men and women the same, people should leverage their special characteristics (特性を生かした方がいい *tokusei o ikashita hō ga ii*)." The phrase "*tokusei o ikasu*" (特性を生かす or 特性を活かす), which we have seen in chapter 2 is used by Jinja Honchō to refer to women utilizing their "special characteristics," was frequently invoked by my interviewees.

I have no intention of arguing that female priests are wrong about or mischaracterizing their own experiences. As discussed in the introduction, I take my cue from Saba Mahmood, who has suggested that rather than attributing women's involvement in conservative religious groups to "false consciousness of the internalization of patriarchal norms through socialization,"[59] scholars should analyze "the conceptions of self, moral agency, and politics, that undergird the practices of this nonliberal movement, in order to come to an understanding of the historical projects that animate it."[60] A recent edited volume on gender in Japan, too, outlines a similar approach in its introduction:

[58] For more on the invocation of ancient norms and practices—mainly taboos around menstrual pollution—to exclude women from the priesthood, see chapter 4.

[59] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.

[60] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 5.

> Rather than just dismiss women's support for conventional roles as "false consciousness" or an "internalized reckoning of their relative bargaining power" that they themselves are unaware of […], we examine specific aspects of women's lives and detail a number of surprising ways that women exercise "agency" and "voice," contributing to their well-being.[61]

If we want to take female priests at their word, how should we think about their refusal to use the term "discrimination" to describe their experiences?

Many of my interviewees identified some aspect of the shrine world that marginalized them—whether they framed it as a temporal slip or a focus on men. However, there are two possible reasons why my interviewees were not comfortable labeling this marginalization as "discrimination." Perhaps female priests do not think of "times when they had problems because they were women" as discrimination. Equally possibly, they are uncomfortable labeling them as discrimination to me, a scholar who they frequently identified as being from a more "gender equal" country. This trend may be because of the association between the words "gender discrimination" and left-wing, progressive movements[62]—which Jinja Honchō explicitly opposes, as we have seen in chapter 2. It may also be an unwillingness to name particular wrongdoers, due to the tight-knit nature of the shrine world (discussed in chapter 5). Whatever the reason, it is obvious that "gender discrimination" (and its related concept, "gender equality") do not necessarily have much currency among female priests. What concepts do?

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[61] Steel, "Introduction," 2.

[62] It is worth noting a similar linguistic dodge in the Basic Plan for a Gender-Equal Society (Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai kihon hō), which uses the unfamiliar expression "*danjo kyōdō sankaku*" in order to avoid the more common "*danjo byōdō*" (equality). See Ayako Kano, "Backlash, Fight Back, and Back-Pedaling: Response to State Feminism in Contemporary Japan," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 8, no. 1 (2011), 43-45; Tomomi Yamaguchi, "The Mainstreaming of Feminism and the Politics of Backlash in Twenty-First-Century Japan," in *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 68-71.

What Only Women Can Do

When female priests define their value to the priesthood, they tend to do so not within the rhetoric of gender equality but instead with the terms "*josei shika dekinai*" (女性しかできない only women can do [something]) or "*josei nara de wa*" (女性ならでは if you are a woman [you can do something]). Kotani, for example, says,

> [H]ere, we're famous for our *kami* for prayers for safe birth (安産祈願の神様 *anzan kigan no kamisama*), so the people who come [to the shrine] are mostly young mothers. [...] So that especially is easier to do as a female head priest, as a female priest, right? And since [I] have given birth and raised children, I can give advice as a mother, right? [...] Men are comparatively mechanical (機械的 *kikaiteki*). But female priests, I think everyone is inherently (そもそも *somo somo*) like this, but they see things from the mother's, the mother's perspective, and they can say things like, "Oh, how cute! How many months?" and "Is [the baby] around half a year old?" [...] Yeah, so, that kind of thing, that's one of the things female priests are good at. If men ask that kind of thing with too much interest, it feels weird, right?

Okada, when asked, "Will the increase of female priests change Shinto?" responded,

> Men, comparatively, they just do their work and then immediately go home—they don't talk to people or things like that, but if you're a woman, then you definitely…because you're soft, you can tell people, "Oh, Shinto is like this." Especially since women are people who understand the feelings of mothers who give birth to and raise children, well, um, in terms of letting people know more about Shinto, as [the number of] female priests increases, Shinto will feel more familiar, and I think that will be a plus, right?

These trends remain true across all my interviews, regardless of age, marital status, or experience birthing or raising children. In response to the question, "Are there things male priests are better at than female priests?" the two points that were raised in almost every instance were physical labor (力仕事 *chikara shigoto*) and the ease with which men can perform *gaisai* (外祭 "outside festivals")—a category of rituals, such as ground purification ceremonies (地鎮祭 *jichinsai*),

performed outside of shrine grounds—without questioning or harassment from parishioners.[63] In response to the question "Are there things female priests are better at than male priests?" however, a cluster of attributes emerged: women are better at dealing with people, but especially children and the elderly; are better at rituals that involve children and mothers, especially the first visit to the shrine (お宮参り *omiyamari*), prayers for safe birth (安産祈願 *anzan kigan*), and *shichi-go-san* (七五三);[64] are better at being soft and kind; are more detail-oriented and better at seeing the small picture (in opposition to men, who see the big picture); are better at understanding "mother's emotions" or seeing things from "a mother's perspective" (母の目線 *haha no mesen* or 母の立場 *haha no tachiba*); and are better at cleaning, cooking, and other housework. Older interviewees would frequently reference the concept of "good wife, wise mother."[65] Interestingly, even women who insisted that the work of male and female priests was "exactly the same" or "should be the same" would then go on to discuss what female priests could contribute to Shinto from their unique vantage point.

One may be inclined to believe that this line of thought is limited to the older generation and will die out as new blood enters the priesthood. When I presented my research at Shūkyō to Shakai Gakkai (宗教と社会学会 The Japanese Association of the Study of Religion and Society), a professor from Kōgakkan University was so adamant that this thought process was

[63] See chapter 5 for further discussion of *gaisai* and the physical elements of shrine work.

[64] A coming-of-age festival for children age three, boys age five, and girls age seven.

[65] Interestingly, some of my younger interviewees did not recognize the term when I asked about it, which suggests that the term may be falling out of favor.

limited to the older generation that he invited me to visit the university and interview his students. However, when interviewed, his students enthusiastically endorsed the notion that female priests are softer and better at interacting with people than male priests and talked about the desirability of differentiated vestments and ritual technique for women. Interviewees in their teens and twenties are less likely to define motherhood as an essential quality of female priests, but still showcase women's softness and interpersonal skills.

Of course, not every interviewee enthusiastically endorsed this type of strategic gender essentialism. For example, Tsuda said,

> I have the feeling that we don't need the feeling like "because we're women…" No matter what, we're going to be seen that way, but I think it would be better if the feeling like "because we're men" [and] "because we're women" disappeared at some point.

Several of my interviewees expressed resistance specifically to the term "female priests" (女子神職 *joshi shinshoku*). "No one says 'male priests' (男子神職 *danshi shinshoku*),'"[66] Iida told me emphatically, "so why are we crying 'female,' 'female' all the time?" Other interviewees expressed resistance to the existence of Female Priests' Associations (女子神職会), for similar reasons. Another woman, upon reading a paper I had presented at Nanzan University on gender essentialism,[67] voiced her objections to the essentialist line of thinking I had discussed in the paper, saying that it was bad and should die out. However, even among my interviewees who expressed resistance to language and organizations that separated them from male priests, the majority agreed that men and women were different and should be differentiated. The question

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[66] The only place I have consistently seen or heard this term used is in ritual manuals; see chapter 4.

[67] Dana Mirsalis, "'Joshi shinshoku wa hontō ni futsū no josei to shite ikirareru no ka'—jendaa, kankeisei to joshi shinshoku," presentation, Nanzan University, 2018.

was often whether this differentiation should be "natural" or should be reinforced by organizational measures.[68]

Why is this type of strategic gender essentialism so common? One reason could be that, given the emphasis on "gender differentiation" within the shrine world as a whole, female priests feel the need to justify the value of their own existence using the same terms. For example, in a roundtable published in a special issue on female priests in *Reiten* in 1981, Nakajima Tatsuno, a priest from Shiga Prefecture, said,

> After all, serving [as a priest] while leveraging one's womanliness (女らしさ *onna-rashisa*), as a woman, without forgetting that "-liness" (らしさ *rashisa*). If you don't study that, it's bad, isn't it? So I think we should study how to leverage that and perform a type of service (奉仕 *hōshi*) that only women can perform, that makes [parishioners] think, "Oh, I'm glad it was a female priest."[69]

In the same roundtable, Suzuka Chiyono, a scholar and female priest, explained that parishioners are able to engage with female priests more familiarly than their male colleagues, who are often approached by parishioners "with a feeling like, '*Sensei*!'" She continued,

> Also, the people who come for individual prayers (御祈祷 *gokitō*)[70] are not just men. I think women's worries are also deep and complex. So, in the end, I think that right now in shrines both male and female priests are necessary.[71]

This idea of the complementarity of male and female priests frequently emerges in outward-facing coverage of female priests,[72] as well as in interviews. While male priests may be

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[68] For a case study of imposed attempts at gender differentiation through vestments and ritual technique, see chapter 4.

[69] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" *Reiten* 18 (1981), 36.

[70] See chapter 5 for a discussion of this term.

[71] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 21.

[72] See, for example, Kawamura Kazuyo, *Hikari ni mukatte: 3・11 de kanjita Shintō no kokoro* (Tokyo:

"mechanical" or "good at seeing the big picture" or "aloof," female priests can offer a complementary skillset that can open Shinto up to more people and make it "feel more familiar."

Generally speaking, female priests couch their participation in the priesthood in the language of strategic gender essentialism—"if it is a woman" (*josei nara de wa*) and "only women can do" (*josei shika dekinai*). They highlight the importance of women's "special capabilities," and argue that women are essentially different than men but not necessarily inferior. They take Jinja Honchō's rhetoric—that women and men are essentially different and that women therefore cannot serve male roles without modification—and turn it into a positive argument for inclusion. After all, if men and women are essentially different, shrines need both men and women serving if they want to serve all parishioners, as only women will be able to understand the worries and perspectives of other women.

Gender Essentialism as Strategy

Strategic gender essentialism is not limited to female Shinto priests. In her interviews with female Buddhist priests, Monika Schrimpf found that

> [m]any of the women I talked to defined the role of an ordained woman, in a wide sense, as social support. […] Often, they explained this social commitment by referring to perceived gender-specific differences in abilities or behavioral patterns

in particular women's empathy and openness, which make them easier to talk to than men.[73]

One of Schrimpf's interviewees argued, for example, "that women are destined to act in a

Shōbunsha, 2012), 161-180.

[73] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 199.

motherly way because of the potential motherhood implied by their gender."[74] Her interviewees also argued for the support that they can provide as women for women:

> [m]arried women especially tended to point out the value of their experiences as mothers and wives in propagating Buddhism among women, thus claiming that married ordained women can serve particular functions because of their secular gender roles.[75]

Schrimpf found that their conceptions of gender

> presume different social responsibilities and different behavioral patterns for men and women respectively. Women are depicted as more socially competent and anchored in people's everyday lives than men. Reference to such gender-specific characterizations, combined with the affirmative attitude towards women's roles as mothers and wives, maintain the rather conservative image of "strong, directive men" and "caring, accepting women." Yet this image is re-evaluated: because of the characteristics assigned to their gender, women can fulfill social functions that men cannot—or at least not as well as women. Women can therefore be clerics 'in a wider sense' than ordained men. Accentuating the social functions of clerics simultaneously elevates the position of ordained women, and the inferiority assigned to them in discriminatory practices is patently reversed.[76]

We can see some of these strategies leveraged in the cases Niwa discusses, as her interviewees sought out activities female priests might be uniquely qualified to run, such as yoga and baby massages.[77] We have seen many of the same strategies employed by female Shinto priests—the invocation of women's familial roles, the assumed inherent difference of men and women, the social importance of reaching female parishioners.

Jessica Starling has found similar patterns among *bōmori*; as one of her interviewees put it, "First of all, it is much easier to talk to a woman than a man, and that is important to our parishioners. You know, the home (*katei*) is important. Men move about (*ugoku*), but women

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[74] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 200.

[75] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 201.

[76] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 207.

[77] Niwa Nobuko, "*Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku: Nichiren-shū josei sōryō no jirei kara* (Tokyo: Kōyō Shobō, 2019), 98-101.

are important at home."[78] She also found that many temple residents had the opinion that "laypeople find it easier to talk to a woman than to a man, and are much more likely to open up to a *bōmori* or even a female *jūshoku* [priest] than to a male priest."[79] Just as Suzuka intimated that female Shinto priests may be easier to approach than male priests (and may be approached with less deference), Starling was told that

> parishioners are less likely to open up their hearts when they are served by the *jūshoku*, whom they presume has somewhere important to be and will not be able to spend all day with them. The *bōmori*, in contrast, is not burdened with the aura of being 'important' (*erai*) and thus is more likely to be confided in.[80]

We can see echoes of the same discourses female priests utilize—women's lack of authority may be an asset, in that they are easier to approach and thus can make the clergy feel more familiar and immediate.

The ideology of gender complementarity has also been well-documented in conservative religious traditions outside of East Asia. Saba Mahmood has argued that women entering previously male-defined spheres may use idioms "grounded in discourses that have historically secured their subordination to male authority."[81] Omar Kasmani found women-fakirs establish their authority "not in a language of masculinization, but in that of different, multiple, or other femininities," depending "on the gendered idea that women were better listeners and more caring in their roles as guides and intercessors."[82] Kalbian has discussed how in contemporary Catholic

[78] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 39.

[79] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 47.

[80] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 124.

[81] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 6.

[82] Omar Kasmani, "Fakir Her-Stories: Women's Spiritual Careers and the Limits of the Masculine in Pakistan," TRAFO—Blog for Transregional Research (blog), May 26, 2016, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/4243, 3.

discourse, gender complementarity is "egalitarian trend (men and women are equal in their dignity) and a subordinating one (men and women each have distinct roles)."[83] Davidman, too, has noted that ways that Orthodox Jewish communities invoke gender complementarity as "equity, the idea of separate but equal roles."[84]

Nor is strategic gender essentialism limited to women navigating religious communities. Previous scholarship of gender in Japan has documented the ways that women leverage their identities in order to secure their places within their workplaces and communities. In her study of gendered labor in major Japanese firms, Nemoto found "strong gender stereotypes among Japanese workers, both male and female," and that "[j]udging and sorting women based on gender essentialism (as emotional, irrational, and unprofessional), the ideology of separate spheres (that a woman's place is in the home), and gender hierarchy (that women should be men's assistants) is pervasive in Japanese firms."[85] Similarly, in her study of a small confectionary company, Kondo discusses the way that (part-time) female workers asserted their identities as housewives and mothers in order to avoid the grueling schedule and frequent overtime of the (male) full-time artisans, and gained status on the shop floor by acting as surrogate mothers to the (male) artisans, drawing on women's association with emotional work and care-giving. However, as Kondo indicates, when

> women strongly assert their gendered identities on the shop floor, they constitute themselves and are constituted in ways that simultaneously reinforce their marginality as

[83] Aline H. Kalbian, *Sexing the Church: Gender, Power, and Ethics in Contemporary Catholicism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 5.

[84] Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 199.

[85] Kumiko Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 222.

> workers and paradoxically make them critically important creators of a certain work atmosphere.[86]

She argues:

> A woman at any given moment may feel most comfortable, most accepted, and most integrated into the workplace as she enacts certain familiar, culturally appropriate meanings of gender. At the same time, she at some level surely knows that she is thereby ensuring her exclusion. […] [I]t is precisely by enacting their conventional gendered identities that women also refuse to accept their structural marginality and make themselves central figures at the workplace.[87]

We can see female priests adopting a similar strategy—they argue for their necessity in the workplace even as they reinforce their marginality by accepting the premise that they are not (nor should they be) the equals of their male colleagues.

Outside of the workplace, too, women have leveraged their familial roles to lobby for rights,[88] negotiate policy changes, or get involved in their local communities.[89] As housewives took charge of household management in the postwar period, they also entered into social activism—in consumer advocacy groups, antinuclear and environmental movements, Parent-Teacher Associations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and more. Women activists in the postwar period have frequently framed their activism in terms of their status as mothers or potential mothers;[90] Borovoy reports complaints that "women's movements, such as the

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[86] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 293.

[87] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 299.

[88] Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife*, 7.

[89] See, for example, Linda Hasunuma, "The Politics of Care and Community," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 103-120; Susan Pavloska, "Tokyo's First Female Governor Breaks the Steel Ceiling," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 153-165.

[90] Catherine Lewis, "Women in the Consumer Movement," in *Proceedings of the Tokyo Symposium on Women*, ed. Merry I. White and Barbara Molony (Tokyo: International Group for the Study of Women, 1978), 80-87; Robin M. LeBlanc, *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Hasunuma, "The Politics of Care and Community," 103-120; Aya Hirata Kimura, *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima* (Durham: Duke

antinuclear movement, rely so heavily on participants' identity as mothers that they exclude those who do not have children."[91] Feminist movements, too, have drawn heavily on maternal themes.[92] As Borovoy argues, "Although Japanese women face extreme hardship in making a living and supporting a family outside of a marriage, as long as they remain in the context of a family, they operate from a position of strength."[93] They tend not to want to "do the kinds of jobs men do," and tend to identify the type of valuable work they can do as being closely identified with their roles as mothers and wives (especially their skills as household managers, caregivers, and educators).[94]

This strategic gender essentialism is also common among conservative Japanese women activists. Osawa found that "[c]onservative women tend to define women as a gendered being and thus emphasize their being as mothers (and potential mothers), and many of them claimed that mothers had a responsibility for the well-being of the next generation."[95] For example, Onoda Machie, the second president of Nippon Kaigi's Women's Association, argued that

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University Press, 2016).

[91] Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife*, 144.

[92] See, for example, Hillary Maxson, "From 'Motherhood in the Interest of the State' to Motherhood in the Interest of Mothers: Rethinking the First Mothers' Congress," in *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 34-49; Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream from the Shadows: The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3-31; Ueno Chizuko, *Onna to iu kairaku* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1986), 123-125; Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003), 150-151.

[93] Amy Borovoy, "Not 'A Doll's House': Public Uses of Domesticity in Japan," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement* 20/21 (2001), 113.

[94] Borovoy, "Not 'A Doll's House,'" 104-105.

[95] Kimiko Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out: Conservative Women Defending Convention," in *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*, ed. Gill Steel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 130.

> Women have mysterious power to conceive and raise children and the magical power to encourage children and men. Using this magical power at home and in the community and establishing a good family will lead to the establishment of [a better] nation-state.[96]

This stance is in-line with those adopted by conservative women involved in political activism, especially those aligned with the Women's Association of Nippon Kaigi, who mounted a number of campaigns in the late 1990s and 2000s against laws (such as the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society) and amendments (such as the amendment of Article 750 of the Civil Code, which would allow for married couples to have separate family names) that seemed to be forwarding gender equality or a "gender-free" society.[97] As Osawa explains,

> Conservatives argued that the state's gender equality ideal is in fact the radical feminist idea of a gender-free society that allegedly seeks to eradicate all the differences between men and women, including segregated gender roles.[98]

Female priests invoke these ideas in their self-definition.

We can see that it is not uncommon for women to use strategic gender essentialism to affirm their own social value without challenging the logic of a system that marginalizes them. When female priests argue for their value by leaning into their "innate" mothering instincts, their empathy, and their attention to detail, they are using proven strategies that have worked elsewhere.

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[96] Quoted in Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out," 130.

[97] Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out," 124-125. See chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of Jinja Honchō's reaction to these policies.

[98] Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out," 125.

Can Female Priests Live as "Normal Women"?

Having discussed how female priests' value is tied to their ability to embody normative womanhood (and normative motherhood), we now return to the question with which I started this chapter: Can female priests live as "normal women"?

Kotani does not think that being a priest has prevented her from living life "as a normal woman"—she pointed out that she's a member of the local Lions Club and goes out drinking and singing karaoke with the other members "normally." She adds, however, that "getting married and having children" is "more important than being a priest or any other work you could do." She argues that the best course of action for women, regardless of whether they are priests or not, is to devote themselves to raising their children while they are very young, and only think about doing other work once their children are old enough to not need full-time care. During her interview, in fact, she urged me to have children—"after all," she told me, "you also were born as a woman." Her opinions parallel those of the conservative activists Osawa profiles, who "believe in the importance of women playing feminine roles at home as wives and mothers," yet "as long as they fulfill these duties as women, they can spend their spare time in various activities, including political activism."[99] Kotani, of course, has lived this ideal. As the wife and mother of a priest, she has felt no friction between her (gendered) position within her family, her womanhood, and her work as a priest.

On the other hand, when asked whether priests could live as normal women, Kobayashi responded:

> Hmm, something that's hard for me to do… Um, I was talking about remarrying, right? Marrying a different person. But since there's the shrine, I can't go outside [the family].

[99] Osawa, "The 'Silent Majority' Speaks Out," 128.

> My parents objected, [saying,] "You can't throw aside the [Kobayashi] name," so I wasn't able to get married. […] I thought, "It can't be helped," but I didn't speak to my parents for about a year and a half. (laughs) Well, now I've forgotten about it since I don't think it can be helped, but no matter what I do I can't go outside, right?

When Kobayashi refers to "outside," she is referencing both the shrine and the family—they are one and the same in her mind. Kobayashi sees herself as constrained by both her gender and her family of origin. Regardless of her gender, she would be expected to become a priest, although the issue of remarriage would be easier for her if she were a man, as she wouldn't have to fight against the expectation of taking her spouse's name. Her parents will not approve any marriage that would require her to change her family name—instead she needs to find a man who is willing to marry into the family and take her name.

Okada strongly believes that female priests cannot live as normal women. She identified the difficulty of experiencing the "life events" that happen "naturally" for other women, such as marriage and childbearing. She explained:

> A normal life (普通の人生 *futsū no jinsei*), it's hard, right? A normal life is probably getting married normally, having children, raising children—that's an ordinary life (一般的な人生 *ippan na jinsei*). Yeah. It's really hard, because inevitably you sacrifice the household. So, like, if your child has a fever and you're told to go pick them up, if you have people standing right in front of you for an individual prayer, you have to do that instead, right? Because the ritual (神事 *shinji*) comes first. […] So, um, well, the cooperation of your family is essential. Or maybe I should say the understanding of your family?

Okada, like Kotani, sees the potential conflict between women's duties as wives and mothers and their duties as priests, but unlike Kotani, who resolves this conflict by recommending that women prioritize childrearing over all else, Okada puts the ritual first. Unlike Kotani and Kobayashi who grew up in shrine families and thus have always had their personal and professional lives (or, perhaps more accurately, their familial and priestly lives) integrated,

Okada's profession has caused substantial friction with her family. Unlike Kotani and Kobayashi, whose families have supported (or, in Kobayashi's case, mandated) their entrance into the priesthood, Okada has trouble imagining a scenario in which her duties as a woman, especially her duties to her family, would not conflict with her duties as a priest, so she emphasizes the importance of the cooperation and understanding of a female priest's family.

The three answers above illustrate the range of answers interviewees offered—some were adamant that female priests could live as normal women, others were equally adamant that they could not, and some did not seem to have thought about the question before. However, the "normal woman" that emerged throughout interviews was inevitably more or less the same. The "normal woman" gets married and then births and raises children. Interviewees frequently talk about ways in which they and their peers have or have not managed to live as "normal women": being a priest made one a worse mother because she had less time for her children and another a better mother because serving in a shrine taught her the importance of raising children right. The "normal woman" is defined both by the "normal" life events she has experienced and her ability to move through "normal" society unrestricted by anything but her femininity. Notably, women who were either from "ordinary" families or who chafed against the expectations placed upon them by their shrine lineage also tended to place "normal" women within nuclear families rather than *ie*. The majority of my interviewees—although not all—also specifically defined the "normal woman" in terms of her dress ("stylish" [お洒落 *oshare*] and often involving short skirts or pants and glittery clothing or jewelry), her makeup (heavier or brighter than many interviewees thought was appropriate for priests), and her behavior (going jogging in hot pants, going out drinking with friends, buying discounted items at the supermarket, etc.). A few (usually older) women insisted that they felt no pressure to dress or act differently; these women

invariably asserted that female priests can live “as normal women”—as evidenced by their own lives.

It is also worth noting here the distinct challenges faced by my interviewees who were not born into shrine families. Women, like Hori, who first encountered “shrine world” gender norms as adults often noted the differences between “normal” women and the women they were expected to be within the shrine world. While they had been raised in one form of femininity, they found themselves stepping into a world that followed similar patterns but with enough differences that they could not navigate gender norms unconsciously. The “rules” of femininity shifted without them noticing, and now they were scrambling to catch up. Hori told me a story about being pulled aside by a *senpai* at a training course, who threatened to send her home (thereby failing her) if she wore “inappropriate” make-up again. Hori was bewildered (“It was just normal make-up,” she explained) but agreed to wash her face. Okada told me a similar story of being turned away when she tried to submit paperwork at the prefectural Jinjachō office. Her infraction: wearing a white blouse with a ruffled front instead of a plain, white button-down. For these women, being socialized into new forms of femininity was often a stressful, humiliating, and anxiety-provoking process, as they were penalized for breaking gendered rules they had never learned. Shrine world femininity will never be “normal” to them in the way that it is for many of my interviewees born into shrine families.

I experienced this pressure to conform to unfamiliar gender norms while conducting fieldwork, especially in Aichi Prefecture, where many of my interviewees were introduced to me as “our Dana-chan” (うちのデイナちゃん *uchi no Deina-chan*), a cutesy, feminine, familiar way to signal my inclusion in the shrine staff. In addition to my status as a pseudo-insider in

shrine communities, my age (I have been in contact with these communities since I was twenty) and our presumed "shared womanhood" meant that my interlocutors (almost all of whom were older and more experienced than me) frequently treated me as a mentee rather than a researcher. As a member of the shrine staff and a member of the community, it was important for me to behave in appropriate ways, so I was mentored in the same ways as the younger (female) priests and newly recruited *miko*. We were coached on the correct ways to carry trays of tea and snacks, greet the parishioners, and hand items to visitors, but we were also gently guided into proper expressions of femininity. My interlocutors were quick to comment and intervene when they thought I was behaving in un-womanly ways, such as: not wearing dresses and skirts, having a "deep" voice in English, not wearing make-up, not making an effort to be "cute," standing with my feet too far apart, wearing colors that were "too dark" or "severe" rather than pastels, not being deferential enough to male parishioners, and more. In a particularly striking example, only minutes after meeting a female priest for an interview, she scolded me for walking. My steps, she said, were too big; women should walk with small steps. She then demonstrated the correct way to walk and waited for me to imitate her before we could head inside the shrine for our interview.

On other occasions, I was used to shame other women—look at this foreigner, they would say, who is a more polite/quiet/respectful/feminine woman than you! In interviews, too, I was treated to gossip about which women in the area were not performing their gender properly. For example, one woman told me that there had been a woman from Kyoto sitting at the front of a lecture she attended recently, drinking tea with one hand while facing straight ahead, not even ducking her head to drink. "We've entered an age where women drink tea one-handed!" she cried, scandalized. "Women should be more concerned about their manners." It was impossible

to escape from gender while moving through shrine communities, and the standards for "proper" performance of femininity were exceedingly narrow.

My inclusion with the community has also meant that I am expected to follow the "normal" life trajectory. Just as Goldstein-Gidoni's interviewees discussed "the strength of the 'natural order of things' (*atarimae*-ness)" that governed their passage through each life stage,[100] my interlocutors have an imagined trajectory that women will "naturally" follow (unless it is interrupted or derailed in some way). Women will graduate from either college or a junior college,[101] work a few years, get married, quit work (whether temporarily or permanently), and have children. Many of my interviewees have not followed this trajectory in actuality—one of the priests at my main field site jokes that only one member of the staff is a "normal person" who has experienced every expected life event. However, the ideal remains strong. My marital status, for example, has been a point of constant concern, especially as I approached my thirtieth birthday. "Do you have a boyfriend yet?" is often one of the first questions I am asked when I return to my main field site; upon hearing that I still did not have a boyfriend after my twenty-sixth birthday,[102] the head priest tapped her wrist and told me, "*Soro soro da ne* (そろそろだね it's time)." Some well-meaning interlocutors have attempted to set me up with eligible young

[100] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 58.

[101] For more on the gender-differentiation of educational tracks in contemporary Japan, see Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 60.
Among my interviewees, only about half of them have a bachelor's degree from a four-year university; the rest are either junior college, high school, or vocational school graduates.

[102] Women over the age of twenty-five in Japan are sometimes referred to with the derogatory slang "Christmas cake" (クリスマスケーキ *kurisumasu keeki*). The phrase refers to the fact that a woman over the age of twenty-five is like a Christmas cake after the 25th of December: undesirable. While demographic shifts—especially the increasing age of first marriage—have begun to retire this phrase from the mainstream lexicon, I have still had it leveraged at me while conducting fieldwork. On one occasion, an interviewee patted my arm and told me that she wasn't worried about me being Christmas cake—she'd start worrying once I passed thirty instead.

men during my visits, while others have worried (increasingly loudly) if perhaps my graduate school education is scaring off potential husbands.

Nor is the pressure to conform solely coming from women who have had "normal" life trajectories. One of the most vocal advocates for my marriage is in her forties and unmarried. Her insistence on the importance of women becoming wives and mothers causes her immense emotional turmoil and anxiety, as she nears the end of her biological clock with no marriage prospects in sight. The narrowness and rigidity of gender norms can inflict as much pressure and pain on established members of the shrine community as they do on ethnographers.

Can female priests live as "normal women"? As unsatisfying as it may be to my original interlocutor, the answer is that it depends on the person and their circumstances. Much more important, I argue, is *why it matters* whether female priests can live as "normal women." As we have seen in this chapter, female priests tie their own self-value to gender norms—their essential difference from men, their ability to innately understand mothers and see things from their perspective, and their ease when dealing with children and the elderly, among other gender essentialist qualities. The "normal woman" is thus directly related to female priests' self-declared value *as* priests—and their distance from or proximity to "normal womanhood" directly affects their own self-evaluation. In fact, interviewees who express concern that being priests barred them from "normal womanhood" also tend to be less self-confident in their own abilities as priests and their own value to their shrines. "Normal womanhood" becomes a measuring stick by which women can explain how and where their lives have been constrained by the priesthood such that they have been forced to deviate from the very norm that gives their existence within the priesthood value.

This measuring stick is one used by Japanese women more generally, not merely those in the shrine world. In her ethnography of Japanese housewives in Osaka, Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni argues,

> Japanese feminists have long realized that when looking at the lives of women in postwar Japan we cannot be free from the concept of '*shufu*' (housewife). In postwar Japan this concept has become a yardstick against which women tend to measure themselves, as much as a model by which society tends to evaluate them.[103]

Her interlocutors had clear ideas of what constituted a "good" housewife. One of her more conservative interviewees expressed a preference "not to associate with 'those housewives who like going for lunch with friends or to fitness clubs for their own hobbies.'"[104] Others argued that "[a] proper housewife should be wholly immersed in housekeeping and child rearing and should definitely forsake any attempt to cultivate her appearance or feminine beauty,"[105] although some espoused new models of housewives that allowed them to both cultivate their appearances and serve as wives and mothers.[106] Nemoto's unmarried interviewees, too, "thought of marriage and children as a source of valuable bonds. Lacking these bonds made them feel inadequate."[107]

The perceived conflict between women's duties in the home and masculinized workplaces that demand long hours and overwork plagues women who work in Japanese companies as much as female priests.[108] Nemoto notes that workers who are mothers "can be

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[103] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, xvii.

[104] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 124.

[105] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 123.

[106] Goldstein-Gidoni, *Housewives of Japan*, 147-186.

[107] Nemoto, "Postponed Marriage," 234.

[108] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 163-164.

seen as the opposite of the ideal worker. A woman who wishes to combine the caretaker role with her role as a worker may face a 'motherhood penalty,' or negative stereotyping for being less than competent and not suitably committed to paid work."[109] The small number of women managers who are incorporated in Japanese firms are forced to prioritize their jobs over their personal and family lives—often remaining childless and single. Nemoto discusses the "remasculinization of management," under which

> women are often the targets of suspicion and questions when they enter into a man's world; the culture of long working hours only intensifies such suspicion and continues to serve as a physical and mental test for those women who consider challenging the boundary between the sexes that exists in the Japanese workplace.[110]

While this suspicion may open them up to questioning and harassment (similar to that experienced by the female priests discussed in chapter 5), it can also lead to inner turmoil, as women must choose between a trajectory as managers or a "normal" family life.[111]

These social pressures to perform femininity "correctly" are also common among Buddhist clergy. The *bōmori* Jessica Starling interviewed also reported feeling that they were constantly being monitored by their parishioners.[112] The ordained women Schrimpf interviewed cited their shared experiences with other wives and mothers as well as their "looking and living like an ordinary woman" (i.e. with an unshaved head) as contributing to their qualifications.[113] Niwa Nobuko's study of female Nichiren Buddhist priests focuses on the contradictions and

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[109] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 175-176.

[110] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 182.

[111] Glenda S. Roberts, "Leaning *Out* for the Long Span: What Holds Women Back from Promotion in Japan?" *Japan Forum* 32, no. 4 (2020), 555-576.

[112] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 38. See also, Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 120-121.
For more on monitoring by parishioners in the shrine world, see chapter 5.

[113] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 201-202.

tensions her interviewees felt between "womanliness" and "priestliness"—especially with regards to the decision to shave their heads (and sacrifice their "womanliness") or keep their hair (and potentially sacrifice their legitimacy as priests).[114] Mark Rowe, too, has highlighted the pressure female priests' may experience to shave their heads and pitch their voices downward during sutra recitation.[115] These pressures are not solely generated by "society" or male priests, but also enthusiastically reinforced by female priests.[116] Among the Gakkai women Levi McLaughlin studies, who he identifies as "domestic religious professionals," tensions emerge "as Gakkai women maintain their homes as family spaces and public arenas for Gakkai activities. They are pulled into time-consuming commitments to Soka Gakkai campaigns, Komeito electioneering, and other responsibilities that conflict with domestic obligations."[117]

We might note some resonances and divergences between the experiences of female priests and the above examples. First, the collapse of the family with the shrine (for priests who are connected to the shrine lineage) can create different types of tensions for female priests than corporate employees, as they may be required to hew more closely to a normative life course in order to be "good" workers in the shrine world (see chapter 2). Second, the lack of a distinct way that a priest "should" look means that gender policing manifests in different ways—rather than fixating on shaved heads, female priests focus on manners, body movements, and clothing (discussed in greater depth in chapter 4). Third, the tensions between home religious duties and

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[114] Niwa, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku*.

[115] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 94-97.

[116] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 94.

[117] Levi McLaughlin, *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 140.

domestic duties that we see in other Japanese religious certainly appear in Shinto, as does female priests' perpetuation and endorsement of societal pressures to perform womanhood "properly."

Conclusion

Female priests define their identities as priests in terms of their familial relations and couch their participation in the priesthood in the language of strategic gender essentialism. The pressures that shape their entrance to and experience within the priesthood are not only determined by their familial position but also whether they are expected to be an assistant to or replacement of male labor. Rather than challenging Jinja Honchō's rhetoric—that women and men are essentially different and that women therefore cannot serve male roles without modification—they argue that while women are essentially different than men, they are not necessarily inferior. After all, if men and women are essentially different, shrines need female priests to offer their "special characteristics" to complement those of male priests. However, this gender essentialism also creates intense pressure to conform to the model of what a woman should "naturally" be and to follow the trajectory that a woman should "naturally" live. This "natural" trajectory, however, is often unfamiliar to priests who grew up outside of the shrine world, as the temporal lag that so many of my interviewees identified as characterizing Jinja Honchō affects their gender norms as well, leading priests from "ordinary" families to be forced to learn a new type of femininity in adulthood.

Scholars of gender, like my colleagues at the X-Gender Research Group, may be inclined to dismiss female priests as outliers, not representative of the experiences of women in Japan. However, this stance is unproductive and absolutist. Female Shinto priests live within Japanese society, so the gender norms they experience are, by definition, societal norms, even if inflected

with the flavor particular to the shrine world. In fact, their imbrication within Japanese gender norms is precisely what creates the dissonance some of them experience in trying to reconcile their roles as priests and women or in navigating the familiar-yet-subtly-different gender norms within the shrine world.

If we want to listen in good faith, especially to marginalized actors within conservative religious traditions, we need to place them within their social context and pay attention not only to the ways they overtly resist the institutions that marginalize them but also to their imperfect modes of survival. Marginalized people create space for themselves within institutions that are hostile to their existence, but through methods that validate or reinscribe the logic of their marginalization. There is no moral victory to be found within survival—there's only human experience in all its messy, complicated, dissonant diversity, and the opportunity to empathize without valorizing. We turn to these messy, complicated experiences in the final two chapters.

Chapter 4
Gendering the Priestly Body

The first day that I participated in the ritual technique classes for the one-month training course (discussed in greater depth later in this chapter), two of the other students invited me to join them for lunch. On the stairs to the cafeteria, one of them pointed at the hair tie on the end of my braid. “It’s white!” she exclaimed. When I expressed confusion, she explained, “I didn’t know that was allowed.” While I had known that there were rules governing the hairstyles and hair colors of students in the training courses (see Figure 4.1), I had forgotten that non-black hair ties were also prohibited. Fortunately, I was able to change my hair tie before our next class meeting, but this encounter was a reminder not only of how strict the rules around bodily comportment for priests (and priests-in-training) were, but also how closely my fellow students were monitoring each other.

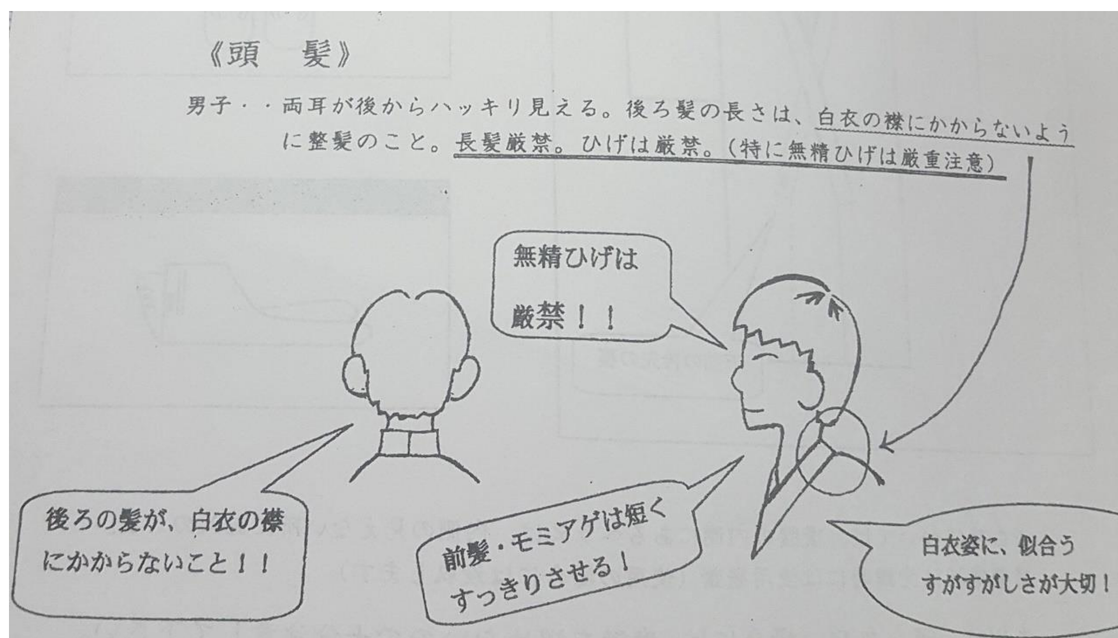

Figure 4.1 An image from a handout sent to students enrolled in a one-month training course at the training center in Ise, illustrating the appropriate hairstyles for men. The text explains that both ears should be visible and that the hair in the back should not be long enough to touch the collar. Facial hair is also prohibited. The next page of the handout explains that women with long hair should tie it back with a black hair tie and that dyed and permed hair is prohibited.[1]

[1] Jingū Dōjō, “Jukōsei kokoroe” (2016), 1. Thanks to a priest in Nagoya who lent me her copy of the handout.

This chapter considers the body as both a site of friction and a lens through which to view larger issues surrounding the gendering of the Shinto priesthood. As we have seen in chapter 2 and 3, the shrine world subscribes to a biologically essentialist understanding of gender, in which men and women are physically and psychologically different. Given Jinja Honchō's insistence on "gender differentiation" (see chapter 2), it is no surprise that they have gender-differentiated regulations for priests. This chapter examines three case studies in the gendering of priests' bodies: menstrual pollution, ritual technique, and vestments. Jinja Honchō has separate gendered regulations for the latter two but has avoided weighing in on the former due to the theological problems posed by clarifying menstrual pollution. However, as we already know from chapter 3, female priests do not unquestioningly adopt Jinja Honchō's rhetoric. Female priests do not actively resist Jinja Honchō so much as they reinterpret, adapt, or ignore regulations, taking advantage of the liminal, ambiguous space that female priests inhabit within the institutional structure to forward their own understandings of what female priests should do and be.

A Brief Introduction to Menstrual Pollution

Menstruation is often the most obvious bodily difference between male and female priests,[2] but before we consider menstrual pollution in the shrine world, we must understand the larger context of menstrual pollution. As Bernard Faure notes, we can find textual sources beginning in the medieval period that note the impurity (穢れ *kegare*) caused by menstrual blood, as well as practices wherein women were expected to go into confinement and/or abstain

[2] As a reminder to the reader, not all women menstruate and not all people who menstruate are women. While the latter tends to be ignored in the shrine world due to biological essentialism (see below), the former, as we shall see, is important to female priests.

from visiting shrines during their periods or after childbirth.[3] Most infamously, the Blood Bowl Sutra, an apocryphal sutra most likely penned in China in the twelfth century, claimed that unless women copied the sutra they would be condemned to a special hell in the afterlife as retribution for the pollution they caused with their menstrual blood.[4] Faure notes, however, that ritual sometimes offered remediation, as in the case of the *miko* of Tsushima, who, if they had to perform a ritual while menstruating, "merely recited a particular *norito* in order to 'correct the defilement' (*kegare-naoshi*)."[5]

Menstrual pollution was one reason for *nyonin kekkai* (女人結界) or *nyonin kinsei* (女人禁制), terms that convey "a variety of gender-based proscriptions, including barring women's entry from certain sites (e.g., shrines, temples, festival floats) or from certain occupations (e.g., sumo wrestling, sake brewing, kiln firing, sushi chef)."[6] Although women were barred from many sacred sites on mountains,[7] these territorial proscriptions were dissolved in 1872.[8] However, women are still excluded from some sacred sites,[9] as well as from entering (or even

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[3] Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 66-73.

[4] Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 73-78; Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 307-308.

[5] Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 71.

[6] Lindsey E. DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," in *Sacred Heritage in Japan*, ed. Mark Teeuwen and Aike P. Rots (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2020), 67.

[7] See DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 65-86; Heather Blair, *Real and Imagined: The Peak of Gold in Heian Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 48-56; Lindsey E. DeWitt, "Island of Many Names, Island of No Name: Taboo and the Mysteries of Okinoshima," in *The Sea and the Sacred in Japan: Aspects of Maritime Religion*, ed. Fabio Rambelli (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 39-50.

[8] DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 67.

[9] See DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 65-86; Mark Patrick McGuire, "Shugendo Everywhere," *Tricycle*, March 7, 2022, https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/shugendo/;

touching) sumo wrestling rings.[10] In fact, the *kami*'s intolerance for women was cited by two separate chairmen of the Sumo Association as the reason for sumo's exclusion of women. They argued that "professional sumo upholds a tradition of women not entering the ring based on *kami* rituals and we want to preserve that tradition," and that only men could enter the professional sumo ring because "sumo's roots lay in rituals dedicated to the gods (*shinji*)" and "the professional sumo ring constitutes a sacred battleground (*shinseina tatakai no ba*)."[11]

However, as Lindsey DeWitt argues, although much of what we understand about women's exclusion is "based on a small body of premodern texts," we know "very little about the broader context of these sources, […] such as for whom they were written, who was aware of them, or how they reflected practices on the ground." As she notes, "Material evidence (e.g., stone pillars, steles, halls) related to *nyonin kekkai*/*nyonin kinsei* at Mt. Ōmine," one of her sites of fieldwork and one of the sites that still enforces women's exclusion, "traces back only as far as the eighteenth century."[12] Similarly, the exclusion zone for women on Mt. Ōmine was reduced in 1970 for economic reasons, but the residents of the area insisted that they were maintaining a 1,300-year tradition.[13] A similar perspective can be seen at Munakata Shrine on Okinoshima, where shrine authorities prohibit women from landing on the island. One popular perspective claims that "women's bodily impurities would defile the island, anger its female

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Kobayashi Naoko, "Sacred Mountains and Women in Japan: Fighting a Romanticized Image of Female Ascetic Practitioners," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 103-122. See chapter 5 for a longer discussion of how this ongoing exclusion impacts female Shinto priests.

[10] See Lindsey E. DeWitt, "Japan's Sacred Sumo and the Exclusion of Women: The Olympic Male Sumo Wrestler (Part 1)," *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021), 1-24.

[11] DeWitt, "Japan's Sacred Sumo and the Exclusion of Women," 5-6.

[12] DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 68.

[13] Linsey E. DeWitt, "Envisioning and Observing Women's Exclusion from Sacred Mountains in Japan," *Journal of Asian Humanities at Kyushu University* 1 (2016), 22-23.

deity, and provoke calamities."[14] However, as DeWitt notes, no premodern sources mention women's exclusion from the island; "[a]vailable sources, drawn mostly from oral accounts, suggest that the ban crystallized in the modern period and has more to do with the professions of fishermen and military matters than anything else."[15]

DeWitt convincingly argues that the predominant contemporary framing of women's exclusion parrots the model put forth by Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), a famous nativist folklorist who attempted to excavate an ancient and unchanging Japanese "ethos" and "tradition" that was being threatened by Japan's modernization.[16] Yanagita argued that differences between men and women were "natural and universal" and that "a fundamental gender divide dictates which realms men and women can inhabit." DeWitt concludes, "Palpable traces of Yanagita's essential (and essentializing) views of gender and space continue to circulate, especially at conservative religious establishments."[17] As a result, "Popular as well as scholarly discourse on female taboos routinely presents the phenomenon as an ancient and unchanged fact of Japan's religious landscape or so-called traditional culture, with increasing emphasis on the latter."[18]

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[14] DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 62.
As DeWitt notes, "Lore concerning jealous and angry female deities can also be heard at other sacred sites in Japan that did or do prohibit women, including Mt. Ōmine." DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 62. We can see similar rhetorical moves in discussions of sumo, where women appear only as "female deities positioned above the ring (typically a nondescript goddess known primarily through her defining attribute of jealousy toward women)." DeWitt, "Japan's Sacred Sumo and the Exclusion of Women," 18. Some of my interviewees cited similar beliefs impeding their ability to perform certain rituals, most notably the ground purification ceremony (地鎮祭 *jichinsai*), discussed in chapter 5.

[15] DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 62.

[16] For an introduction to Yanagita, see Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 66-97.

[17] DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 75.

[18] DeWitt, "Japan's Sacred Sumo and the Exclusion of Women," 5. See also DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 77-79; DeWitt, "Envisioning and Observing Women's Exclusion from Sacred Mountains in Japan," 20-21.

To sum up, while menstrual taboos did exist in premodern Japan, contemporary discourse tends to assume that ideas about menstrual pollution were universal, unchanging, and part of a unique Japanese "tradition" that must be respected and preserved. DeWitt reminds us to pay attention to the context surrounding women's exclusion, as it 1. "divulge[s] the work involved in creating and maintaining sacred spaces and their boundaries," 2. "reveals geographically and culturally contingent agents and arguments" as "[w]omen's exclusion is not a monolithic entity" and "takes on different guises depending on location and situation," 3. and "draws attention to the complex social, political, and economic entanglements that concerned parties such as religious institutions, local residents, patrons, critics, scholars, and others must negotiate."[19] We will see all three of these principles within our discussion of gendered ritual practices below, as well as when we consider the experiences of female priests within shrines in chapter 5.

Jinja Honchō's Silence on Menstrual Pollution

One might imagine that menstrual pollution would be an ideal excuse for Jinja Honchō to circumscribe the roles of female priests. After all, menstrual pollution was one of the reasons why Miyamoto Shigetane's proposal to allow female priests in the 1930s was shot down (see introduction). *Naishōten* (see introduction) are also required to avoid certain ritual activities while menstruating.[20]

Indeed, readers may remember from chapter 2 that menstrual pollution was one of the three major issues (along with the conflict between "the social advancement of women" and "the

[19] DeWitt, "Envisioning and Observing Women's Exclusion from Sacred Mountains in Japan," 27.

[20] See Kobayashi Akie, "Miyamoto Shigetane no 'fujin shinshoku nin'yō ron' ni kan suru shōkō," *Meiji Seitoku Kinen Gakkai Kiyō* 46, 262; "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" *Reiten* 18 (1981), 11.

family system" and the conflict between labor law and "the spiritual nature of ministry and service") that the Basic Shrine Problems Research Group flagged as contributing to the "female priest problem." Let us look again at what their report had to say on the topic of menstrual pollution:

> As female priests have come to be entrusted with the same official duties as men (男子 *danshi*), points to remember when serving (奉仕上の留意点 *hōshi jō no ryūiten*) based on physiological characteristics have been indicated. In traditional folk customs, [menstruation] was designated a tabooed condition, but there was also the Meiji declaration to abolish childbirth pollution (産穢 *san'e*), [so] those standards have become ambiguous. In actuality, it must be noted firstly that the decision as to whether [female priests] are permitted to serve was made at the point when Jinja Honchō allowed female priests.[21]

The report lays out the issue here: while "traditionally" menstrual pollution was supposed to keep women off shrine grounds while they were menstruating, the Meiji government abolished those taboos, neatly presenting the Meiji period as a historical rupture in an otherwise unbroken tradition. Jinja Honchō has not made a clear statement in either direction—either that the Meiji government was wrong and menstrual pollution *is* an issue *or* that the Meiji government was right and priests *do not* have to worry about menstrual pollution. The report closes by noting that the ambiguity of these standards does *not* mean that they are attempting to relitigate whether women should be allowed into the priesthood.

There has been no movement on clarifying menstrual pollution since the Basic Shrine Problems Research Group's report came out in 1998. One might ask how menstrual pollution can continue to be unclear. One place to look is the rules for purification (斎戒 *saikai*) published in 1948, where there is the vague prescription not to come into contact with "filth" (汚穢 *owai*)

[21] "Jinja kihon mondai kenkyūkai hōkokusho," Gekkan *Wakaki* 585 (1998), 8.

or "uncleanliness" (不浄 *fujō*), with no enumeration of what might fall into these categories.[22] The same injunction appeared in ritual manuals in the 1970s,[23] and continues to be used in the newest edition ritual manuals.[24] If menstrual pollution falls into these categories, female priests presumably must change their behavior while menstruating, in the same way that they should avoid serving at the shrine when they come into contact with death pollution.[25]

We can see this confusion manifesting at the 28th Jinja Honchō Shinto Education Research Conference (神社本庁神道教学研究大会 Jinja Honchō Shintō Kyōgaku Taikai) on the topic of the successor problem. As female priests are related to the successor problem (see chapter 1), the topic of female priests naturally came up multiple times during the discussion period following the presentations. While participants noted that ritual technique for female priests (discussed below) might pose a theological issue,[26] much more of the conversation focused on menstrual pollution. Let us look at a sampling of the comments on menstrual pollution.

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[22] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1956), 179.

[23] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, sixth edition (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1977), 3.

[24] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Heisei nijūninen kaiteiban Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 2012), 4.

[25] Death pollution seemed to be much more consistently avoided by my interviewees—even in cases where it served as a logistical inconvenience. Kotani, for example, whose story is detailed in chapter 3, noted that her husband passed away in October, which meant that she stayed home from the shrine until November, having to return (and step into his old position) right at the peak of *shichi-go-san* season. It was also common for K Shrine to receive phone calls from participants in ceremonies (especially weddings) if there had been a death in the family, as the affected person wanted to know whether they were safe to come onto the shrine grounds.

It is possible that some of my interviewees did not believe in death pollution and circumvented the mourning and seclusion period, but they never announced it to me in the way that they did with menstrual pollution. One reason for this may be the much clearer guidelines for death pollution, which lay out different restrictions on their participation in shrine activities depending on the mourner's distance from the deceased.

[26] "Zentai tōgi," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 193.

First, Sonoda[27] noted the need to clarify issues around menstrual pollution.[28] He commented, though, that when it came to the exclusion of women from certain festivals:

> If you think about it from the perspective of Shinto, that's an overreaction, it's strange, isn't it? Of course, given the so-called pollution of blood (血の穢れ *chi no kegare*), it's reasonable that it becomes taboo, but making [women] avoid festival floats (山車 *dashi*) because they are women is, from the perspective of Shinto theology, unbelievable. Rather, I think that [women], as the wives of the *kami*, are the closest existence to the *kami*.[29]

Sonoda's statement delineates "women" and "women who are menstruating"—it is absurd to restrict women as a group, but reasonable to restrict women who are menstruating due to the taboos against blood. He closes by reaffirming the spiritual power of women, based on the arguments forwarded by Yanagita Kunio regarding women's closeness to the *kami*.[30]

On the other hand, Hattori, a participant from Shimane, argued that before solving the "female priest problem," the shrine world first had to solve theological and historical problems concerning women. He declared that it used to be that, as part of their schooling, children were taught that women should not go to the shrine while menstruating and would be given a permitted absence (公認欠席 *kōnin kesseki*), but recently because of problems around gender discrimination (男女差別 *danjo sabetsu*) and "gender-free" (ジェンダーフリー *jendaa furii*),[31]

[27] Participants in the discussion were identified only by family name, making it very easy to guess the identities of the presenters (whose full names are listed in the notes on their presentations), and somewhat trickier to identify those who did not present. In the following discussion, I identify the presenters by full name and the non-presenters by only their family name.

[28] "Zentai tōgi," 193.

[29] "Zentai tōgi," 194.

[30] See DeWitt, "World Cultural Heritage and Women's Exclusion from Sacred Sites in Japan," 75.

[31] For more on Jinja Honchō's attitude toward "gender-free" and "gender equality," see chapter 2.

people are no longer allowed to say that, and consequently visitors to the shrine have no restraint and do not tell anyone when they are menstruating.[32] His implication was that female priests should not be allowed at all.

Sakamoto Koremaru responded by pointing out that the Basic Shrine Problems Research Group had attempted to resolve this issue by speaking to a number of people involved in Jinja Honchō's administration as well as the head priests from some major shrines, but they were not able to reach a resolution.[33] While he agreed that there needed to be further consideration of the issue, he also noted that the Meiji government eliminated *nyonin kekkai*, so Jinja Honchō needed to keep that in mind as part of the historical reconsideration.[34] Yasuda Mitsutoshi chimed in, noting that if women were banned from being priests due to menstrual pollution, shrine lineages would be destroyed.[35]

Motegi Sadasumi, a professor of ritual technique at Kokugakuin University, added:

> Since both men and women have been serving the *kami* since time immemorial, there has been this intrinsic problem. Also, I think that since the time when Jinja Honchō allowed female priests in the postwar, that one [question, i.e. whether female priests should be allowed to serve] has been cleared. Other than that, there is the issue of taboos (忌み *imi*), but there is a fundamental principle that both men and women cannot serve [in ceremonies] if they have come into contact with taboos. If you are injured and there is blood flow, both men and women cannot serve. So, I think that deciding to restrain oneself during menstruation is common sense.[36]

[32] "Zentai tōgi," 199.

[33] "Zentai tōgi," 200.

[34] "Zentai tōgi," 203.

[35] "Zentai tōgi," 204.

[36] "Zentai tōgi," 205.

He said that this had already become "common knowledge" (共通認識 *kyōtsū ninshiki*) for the shrine world.[37]

Izawa Masahiro similarly indicated that, as the report says, the decision about whether to have female priests serve has already been made and is not up for debate. "However," he continued,

> the issue of the sanctity (慎み *tsutsumi*) of an individual person performing a ceremony (奉仕者 *hōshisha*) has been made the problem of the person concerned; the issue of the sanctity of serving has been cleared systematically.[38]

He, like Sonoda, differentiated debating whether women should serve (an issue that had been systematically cleared) and whether women who are menstruating should serve. He expressed his frustration at the lack of knowledge of the report's contents and the attempt to relitigate matters Jinja Honchō had already decided.[39]

Later in the discussion, Sakamoto, too, complained that it was obvious that the shrine world has an issue with information dissemination as the report on female priests had been sent out more than ten years previously but most of the participants were not familiar with its contents.[40] He said:

> Today, if we think about what [problems] persist theologically, women becoming priests aren't especially the issue. It is important, rather, to ask, when men or women become priests, what they should do as a priest, what they have to do, what their roles [should be].[41]

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[37] "Zentai tōgi," 205.

[38] "Zentai tōgi," 207.

[39] "Zentai tōgi," 207-208.

[40] "Zentai tōgi," 218-219.

[41] "Zentai tōgi," 219.

He noted that his mother would abstain from participating in major ceremonies when menstruating.[42]

Ultimately, nothing was resolved during the discussion. The only recommendation offered was to study how the *saishu* (祭主 a female ritualist at the Ise Shrines) and *naishōten* deal with menstruation, as they are established female ritualists.[43]

Let us consider some of the themes that come out of this discussion. First, there is a divide between priests (like Hattori) who believe that menstrual pollution should preclude women's participation in the priesthood and those (like almost all the others) who decouple women's participation in the priesthood (which they, like the Basic Shrine Problems Research Group's report, note has been decided and is not open to relitigation) from the issue of menstrual pollution and how to deal with it. The second group resists using menstrual pollution to ban women from the priesthood because, as Yasuda so pragmatically puts it, it is impossible to do so without shrines going unstaffed. None of the participants outright deny the existence of menstrual pollution—in fact, all of them affirm that it exists and should be dealt with in some manner. Many of them also note that women have the "common sense" to deal with menstrual pollution by acting with restraint or avoiding certain activities, although no one seems to have hard and fast rules for how, exactly, that should be accomplished. We might note the lack of women's voices in the above discussion—perhaps the lack of specifics was due to the participants' lack of familiarity with methods for dealing with menstrual pollution (or even menstruation itself).

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[42] "Zentai tōgi," 219.

[43] "Zentai tōgi," 206.

It is worth noting that the ambiguity around menstrual pollution may be productive for Jinja Honchō. If they affirm that menstrual pollution exists, female priests' existence becomes a theological issue. Either they must ban female priests (thereby destabilizing the already fragile workforce) or they must explain how female priests can circumvent menstrual pollution, which, given the level of specificity in ritual technique manuals (see below), will require thinking in-depth about bodily processes that the (all-male) administrators may not be prepared to confront. On the other hand, if they uphold the Meiji government's judgment and deny that menstrual pollution is an issue, much of their gender ideology comes into question. If female priests are not inherently polluting, why are they not employed at the same rates as male priests? Why are they expected to show restraint and "leverage their special characteristics" (see chapter 2)? Why are they expected to accept their inherent inferiority to men? By staying silent, Jinja Honchō maintains the best of both worlds—the specter of menstrual pollution to keep female priests in line without the theological implications fully barring them from serving.

Female Priests on Menstrual Pollution

Of course, as we have already seen, female priests do not merely accept Jinja Honchō's judgement without modification or interpretation. Or, in this case, they cannot simply exist within the grey area Jinja Honchō has created. Whether menstrual pollution exists is not merely a theoretical question for female priests, but rather an essential quandary that determines how female priests should be performing rituals within their own shrines.

One anonymous commenter at the roundtable following the Yamagata prefecture successor survey captured the anxiety and pressure that many female priests feel entering shrines:

> My father never said as much with his mouth, but what I felt [he thought] when I entered the shrine as a priest was "a woman is no good," but also "[she's] not the same as a man," "[she] won't be accepted by the elderly," and "a young person is no good." There were various reasons for this, but because I was a girl (女の子 *onna no ko*) at that time, I remember that first I stopped in front of the first shrine gate (鳥居 *torii*) and purified myself and, feeling like I had shed and thrown away my shell (殻 *kara*), I entered the shrine. I felt so incredibly tense entering a sacred (神聖 *shinsei*) place as a woman. So I think that feeling may exist even now.[44]

This sentiment was shared among my interviewees—even if they had not had anyone directly express concerns about menstrual pollution to them, they were aware that the people around them may have been thinking about it. As a result, some (although not all) of them took measures to purify themselves and negate any pollution they might be bringing onto the shrine grounds.

One of the few written sources where female priests speak frankly about menstrual pollution is a special issue in *Reiten*, the periodical of the Reiten Kenkyūkai (礼典研究会 Ritual Research Group), on female priests, published in 1981. For the issue, they organized a roundtable composed of nine female priests, Ono Kazuteru (introduced below), three male head priests of shrines in the Tokyo area, and Suzuka Chiyono, a lecturer at Kokugakuin University.

Near the beginning of the discussion, Suzuka Chiyono notes,

> Perhaps we could call it the consciousness of the Japanese (日本人の意識 *Nihonjin no ishiki*), but there is an extremely long tradition that is gravely kept of, we could say it's

[44] Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho* (2009), 44.

discrimination against women (女性蔑視 *josei besshi*) or a consciousness of women as polluted (女性は穢れたものだという意識 *josei wa kegareta mono da to iu ishiki*), and I am extremely interested in how current female priests are resolving that or what kind of attitude they should take toward that, so I'd like to ask about that.[45]

She notes that women have tended to be understood as polluted due to "blood pollution" (血の穢れ *chi no kegare*) from menstruation and childbirth, but in the postwar period, when Jinja Honchō allowed women into the priesthood, they tried to make those things not polluting. However, because those things had roots (as being polluting) in Japanese consciousness for a long time, "even if Jinja Honchō suddenly tried to say 'these aren't polluting,' I don't think it could be that easily resolved."[46] We see here that Suzuka is positioning menstrual pollution as being deeply rooted, traditional, and an inherent part of the Japanese consciousness.[47] Interestingly, she claims Jinja Honchō has rejected menstrual pollution—perhaps she is reading their lack of statement as an upholding of the Meiji decision.

Different female priests participating in the roundtable had different methods of dealing with menstrual pollution. For example, Okabe Tsuruko, a head priest from Tokyo, said that she completely (全面的に *zenmenteki ni*) rejects Jinja Honchō's opinion on menstrual pollution, and believes that both menstruation and childbirth are polluting. She explained that when she was younger and still menstruating—she used the term 穢れた (*kegareta* polluted), but glossed to

[45] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 3.

[46] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 3.

[47] Other women at the roundtable made similar remarks. For example, another woman claimed that menstrual pollution was "the spiritual basis of the Japanese people" (日本民族の精神的は基軸となる *Nihon minzoku no seishinteki wa kijiku to naru*). "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 8.

read *yogoreta* (dirty)—she wasn't sure whether it was okay for her to go into the *honden* (本殿 the main shrine building) or not, but she made sure to *harae* (祓 purify, but often specifically referring to purification rites) herself before she began work.[48] She said that due to generational change, there's now a tendency to not talk about menstruation as polluting, but completing *harae* while menstruating is a small thing that's nevertheless important when serving in the shrine.[49] She noted that if she was menstruating during major festivals, she would not enter the *kessaijō* (潔斎場 the area where offerings are prepared). If she had to work in the *heiden* (幣殿 the offering hall), she would use separate mats (敷物 *shikimono*) and wear a white robe tied with three red strings.[50] While menstruating she would put a (presumably small) mirror, salt, and *sakaki* (榊 a tree that is frequently utilized in shrine rituals; see chapter 5) leaves into a bag, bind it with hemp fiber (麻 *asa*), and then put it in her breast pocket.[51]

Other priests similarly created rituals to purify or negate the menstrual pollution.[52] Ishitsuka Keiko served as a *gonnegi* alongside her parents, husband, and younger brother in Tokyo, but she noted that since the family had so many *kenmusha* (see chapter 1) that had different ceremonies they must perform at the same time, she had to serve at the shrine even

[48] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 3-4.

[49] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 4.

[50] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 5.

[51] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 14.

[52] Kobayashi reports female Shugendō practitioners utilizing similar methods to ward off menstrual pollution; see Kobayashi, "Sacred Mountains and Women in Japan," 111-112.

while menstruating. She did feel that menstruation was polluting, so she purified herself with salt before performing ceremonies.[53] Nakajima Tatsuno, a *negi* in Shiga prefecture, said that she refrained from serving entirely while menstruating, and got other priests at the shrine to substitute for her. However, if there was an occasion when she absolutely had to serve, she would put *sakaki* or salt into a bag and carry that in her breast pocket to ward off the menstrual pollution.[54] She noted that she also knew people who carried in matches in their breast pocket (invoking the purification of fire), but that most people would carry salt, if they absolutely had to perform a ceremony while menstruating.[55] Yoshida Michiko, a head priest from Saitama, similarly said that she would abstain from performing ceremonies (奉仕 *hōshi*) or going in front of the *kami* (神前に出る *shinzen ni deru*) while menstruating, but if she absolutely had to perform a ceremony, she would make herself a "warding off uncleanliness" amulet (不浄よけのお守り *fujō yoke no omamori*).[56]

However, not all the participants perceived menstruation as polluting; often, they were more concerned with the mundane logistics of menstruation. Shimura said, "I understand it intellectually, but intuitively (感覚的に *kankakuteki ni*) I never think 'oh, this thing [menstruation] is dirty.'"[57] She said she'd take time off if she had cramps, but in her generation,

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[53] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 6.

[54] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 6-7.

[55] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 7.

[56] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 7.

[57] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 9.

there wasn't really a sense among men or women that menstruation was dirty. She did note the physical difficulties of serving in the shrine while menstruating, especially if one's cramps were bad enough to be debilitating.[58] Ono Kazuteru tried to make a joke about Jinja Honchō selling tampons, but Suzuka shot him down, noting that it was an actual problem female priests faced. Especially at festivals, priests must be able to endure working long hours (see chapter 5), which had been made slightly easier by more absorbent menstrual products.[59] Shimura added that during big festivals (大祭 *taisai*), she tried not to drink water. Due to the demands on her time, she couldn't go to the bathroom at all, even if she was on her period. She had had blood drip on her split-toed socks (足袋 *tabi*) while she was on her period, so she started always bringing an extra pair with her.[60]

Some priests entirely rejected the idea of menstruation being polluting. Motoyama Shiratori, a head priest from Kanagawa, said that since she was a head priest, she had to do everything herself.[61] She added, "I think that it's only after Buddhism and Confucianism came to Japan that these problems about women's (婦人 *fujin*) pollution started coming up. For that reason, I think I should take pride in being a female priest."[62] She named various famous women in Japanese myth and history, from Amaterasu to Yamatohime-no-mikoto to Empress Jingū to

[58] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 9.

[59] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 10.

[60] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 10.

[61] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 7-8.

[62] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 8.

Miyazu-hime, to prove that women were actively forwarding the Japanese nation since time immemorial.[63] She explained:

> In my case, the issue of pollution has not posed any obstacles at all to my work. I currently commute [to the shrine], but I do purification (潔斎 *kessai*) the same as always. Because there's no medical problem [with menstruation]. Also, at that time [of the month], I do the prayers in the morning, and pray, "Because I'm currently in this condition (事情 *jijō*), please take special care of me, please let me make no mistakes," and then I do my normal work.[64]

She admitted that she didn't know what she would do if there was more than one priest at her shrine, but she pointed out that among the Okinawan priestesses (司祭 *shisai*), menstruation is seen as something that makes the *kami* happy.[65] Suzuka too pointed out that in the *Kojiki* menstruation is not taboo, but rather a time when the person menstruating is closer to the *kami*.[66]

Several participants noted the "normalcy" of menstruation. For example, Okabe said, ""If you don't [menstruate], you are not a normal (正常 *seijō*) woman."[67] She reinforced the importance of menstruation in women's "normal" lives, and said that therefore she treated menstruation much more seriously than Jinja Honchō.[68] She noted that "because menstruation (月のもの *tsuki no mono*) is a gift from the *kami*, I feel gratitude and try to serve in such a way

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[63] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 8.

[64] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 8.

[65] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 8.

[66] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 9.

[67] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 4.

[68] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 5.

that [other people] won't know [that I'm menstruating]."[69] Takazawa Shin'ichirō, the president of Reiten Kenkyūkai and then-head priest of Meiji Shrine, also noted that menstruation "isn't an illness, [it's a] barometer for health. If there wasn't [menstruation], there wouldn't be any descendants, right?"[70]

Despite its normalcy, however, the perceptions of those around them (rather than the personal convictions of the priests themselves) often held sway. Both Okabe and Suzuka noted that men are often much more concerned about what female priests do during "that time of the month" than female priests themselves are, and warned female priests that they had the eyes of their parishioners on them.[71] Okabe noted that she first became a priest in 1946, so people would remark on a woman (女 *onna*) coming to perform ground purification ceremonies (地鎮祭 *jichinsai*, discussed further in chapter 5). She said,

> Although the law said that there was something called gender equality (男女同権 *danjo dōken*), the eyes of Meiji people were sparkling, so even if I thought in my heart that [menstrual pollution] caused no obstruction (障害 *shōgai*), the eyes that were watching me were those eyes.[72]

Regardless of the beliefs of the priests themselves, they sometimes performed rites to ward off or cancel menstrual pollution for the benefit of their parishioners' peace of mind.

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[69] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 5.

[70] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 5.

[71] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 5-6. See chapters 3 and 5 for more about the importance of the parishioners' gaze.

[72] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 10-11.
Careful readers may note that this statement seems to directly contradict statements Okabe made earlier about menstrual pollution—she seems to vacillate on the severity of the issue posed by menstrual pollution over the course of the roundtable, often mirroring the remarks made by the other women.

Sometimes the priests were surprised by the desires of their parishioners, however. Karamatsu Aiko, who served as a *negi* under her husband in Tokyo, spoke about how she had felt incredible resistance at first to serving. While she eventually began to take *omiyamairi* (お宮参り a ritual performed on the baby's first visit to the shrine, one month after they are born), she avoided going up into the *honden*. When she became pregnant, she intended to stop serving entirely, but she found that the people who came to the shrine for *omiyamairi* asked for her specifically, and even welcomed a pregnant priest performing the ritual for them.[73] A number of participants noted that they felt there was a generational shift, as the perception of menstruation and childbirth as being polluting was decreasing,[74] although some hastened to add that precisely because of that shifting perception, it was up to female priests to not be lazy and continue to diligently navigate their own menstrual pollution as well as teach others the long history of menstrual pollution.[75]

However, many of the participants noted a lack of centralized knowledge about menstrual pollution. Two women who were not born into shrine families said that they did not come into contact with the idea of menstruation being polluting until they began priest training.[76] Shimura noted that although her mother was also a priest, she'd never spoken to her once about "women's pollution." She had only done so recently, when she discovered that her mother drank salt water

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[73] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 6.

[74] Male commentators have made similar statements. See, for example, Yamagata-ken Jinjachō Kyōka Iinkai, *Yamagata-ken Jinjachō kōkeisha mondai jittai chōsa hōkokusho*, 45; Suzuki Hidetoshi, "Goshukuji ni kaete," in *Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai setsuritsu nijū shūnen kinenshi Kokoroba*, ed. Zenkoku Joshi Shinshoku Kyōgikai (Bun'eisha: 2008), 2.

[75] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 12-15.

[76] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 7, 9.

on days she had to serve while menstruating. Her mother hadn't been given any guidance in her training course, so she'd learned the technique from her mother (Shimura's grandmother).[77] Shimura concluded that it would have been nice if they had learned how to deal with menstrual pollution in college classes or during the training courses.[78]

Forty years later, my interviewees similarly do not have a single unified strategy for dealing with menstruation. One of the most vivid illustrations of the diverse approaches female priests take to dealing with menstruation comes from my main field site (discussed further in chapter 5). While I was working in the shrine office one day, the third priest (who often took charge of my education in proper shrine etiquette) asked me if my period was coming soon. When I said it was coming up in the next few weeks, she said that I should let her know when I started menstruating as she would make me a little paper packet of salt that I could carry in my sleeve. The salt, she explained, cancelled out the effects of menstruation. Upon hearing our conversation, the head priest became visibly flustered and asked if she had been regularly doing this. The third priest confirmed that, yes, she carried salt on her whenever she was menstruating. "You can't do that!" the head priest exclaimed. "If you're menstruating, you shouldn't go into the *honden*!" The third priest then pointed out that if she took menstrual leave or even just avoided doing ritual work while menstruating, the shrine would be understaffed, increasing the workload on the other priests. She also pointed out that the head priest had become a priest when she was post-menopausal, so she'd never need to worry about menstrual pollution, to which the head priest replied, "Exactly!" Meanwhile, the second priest announced that she didn't do anything for her period as menstrual pollution was not real, much to the consternation

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[77] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 10.

[78] "Zadankai 'Joshi shinshoku no jikaku,'" 15.

of the two other priests. As it turned out, all three of them had been sure that the other two were on the same page—so sure that they had never bothered to check in with each other.

However, even after the head priest's clear statement of her preference, the rest of the staff continue to work while menstruating. During a summer festival, I very publicly got my period while working as a *miko*—I was so busy I failed to notice that I had bled through all my clothing. Once I changed, the third priest poured some salt into a piece of paper, folded and taped it into a sachet, and instructed me to put it in my sleeve before sending me out again. After all, restricting me to the shrine office would mean that the festival would be understaffed.

Many of the themes that came up in the *Reiten* roundtable were reiterated in my interviews. Female priests were deeply worried about menstrual pollution, knew that their parishioners would worry, or did not worry at all. They utilized a variety of methods for managing menstrual pollution—avoiding certain types of rituals or certain locations on the shrine grounds, taking menstrual leave, performing special purification rites, or nothing at all. The methods they used were transmitted informally—by mothers, sisters, mentors, and peers, not Jinja Honchō administrators or training course instructors. They saw menstrual taboos as a deeply rooted part of Japanese culture, stretching back to time immemorial, but more importantly, something they had to navigate in their day-to-day interactions with parishioners (see chapter 5). Most notably, all the female priests I spoke to were careful to differentiate between female priests who menstruated and those who did not—usually because they were post-menopausal, but sometimes due to illness or other factors. While Hattori might have argued for the disqualification of all women from the priesthood based on their menstrual capabilities, my interviewees spoke with much greater nuance and granularity. Some older women, in fact,

suggested that perhaps it would be best if women only became priests if they were post-menopausal, which would neatly sidestep the issue of menstrual pollution altogether.

A Brief History of Gendered Ritual Technique

Given Jinja Honchō's unwillingness to take a stance regarding menstrual pollution, they have turned to more roundabout means to create gendered regulations. The remainder of this chapter will discuss two of them: ritual technique and vestments.

I use the term "ritual technique" to refer to the movements prescribed by Jinja Honchō regulations to perform ceremonies. This term is referred to colloquially in Japanese most commonly as "*saishiki sahō*" (祭式作法 ritual technique) or "*sahō*" (作法 technique) although many book titles write out it in full as "*jinja saishiki gyōji sahō*" (神社祭式行事作法 shrine ritual ceremony technique). Ceremonies and rituals are referred to by a variety of different terms including *saishiki* (祭式), *saishi* (祭祀), *gyōji* (行事), *shinji* (神事) and *matsuri* (祭り). For simplicity's sake, I translate all these terms as "ceremonies" or "rituals" here.

Although the types of ceremonies to be performed by shrine priests was set by the Home Ministry in 1875, ritual technique was not standardized until 1907.[79] Ritual technique was next

[79] For more on the Meiji-era creation of ritual technique, see Numabe Harutomo and Motegi Sadasumi, ed., *Shintō saishi no dentō to saishiki* (Tokyo: Ebisukōshō Shuppan, 2018), 64; Ono Kazuteru, "Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō (Meiji yonjūnen) seitei no ichi kōsatsu: norito sōjō o chūshin to shite," *Reiten* 19 (1982), 1-41; Sakamoto Koremaru, "'Meiji jidai no jinja ・ saishi seido ni tsuite: toku ni Meiji shoki no kokkateki saishi o chūshin ni," *Reiten* 28 (1994), 21-43; Takeuchi Masayuki, "Jingū no shinpai sahō," *Reiten* 40 (2016), 96-118; Takahara Mitsuhiro, "Meijiki Jinja saishiki sho no shōkai," *Reiten* 36 (2012), 50-69; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, revised edition (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 2011), 42-43.

revised in 1942,[80] and Jinja Honchō revised the 1942 guidelines in May 1948.[81] These guidelines included the ritual technique that the first generations of female priests learned.

The 1948 guidelines do not have separate ritual technique for male and female priests. The earliest mention of ritual technique specific to female priests I have found is a 1957 edition of Jinja Honchō's ritual manual. The section begins with a short note that these suggestions for female priests have not yet become regulations. Many fewer techniques are outlined than either the 1968 submission to *Reiten* or the 1971 revisions (discussed below)—they principally concern women keeping their legs closed when standing or sitting (but no injunctions concerning their stance while in motion, a preoccupation of the 1971 reforms).[82] Ono Kazuteru claimed to have begun thinking about creating technique for female priests in 1966,[83] so it is safe to say that by the 1960s, there was a sense—at least among some instructors—that female priests should be performing ritual technique in different ways than their male colleagues, even if there were no official injunctions to do so.

In July 1967, the Jinja Honchō Lecturers' Research Group (神社本庁講師研究会 Jinja Honchō Kōshi Kenkyūkai) met to identify the issues with three separate sets of regulations

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[80] For more on the 1942 revisions, see Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shintō saishi no dentō to saishiki*, 74; Ono Kazunobu, "Shōwa jūnananen kaisei 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni kan suru ichi kōsatsu: tamagushi hōten kara hairei e," *Reiten* 24 (1990), 71-117; Takeuchi Masayuki, "Jingiin kaisei jinja saishiki gyōji sahō ni kan suru ichi kōsatsu," *Reiten* 38 (2014), 69-90; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 42-50.

[81] Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shintō saishi no dentō to saishiki*, 76-77. See also Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 50-53.

[82] Jinja Honchō, *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō tsuketari kankei kitei oyobi kaisetsu* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1957), 107-110.

Almost the exact same section—minus the note about it not being regulated—appears in Jinja Honchō Chōsabu, *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō gichū* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1964), 43-45.

[83] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite: Ono Kazuteru-sensei kōan no joshi shinshoku no sahō oyobi saishi fukusō o chūshin ni* (Tokyo: Ono Kazuteru-sensei no koki o iwau kai, 1999), 9.

regarding ritual,[84] the second of which was the need to revise ritual technique.[85] The group was composed of four Jinja Honchō Lecturers—Kanemitsu Sōji, Iida Hozuma, Hase Haruo, and Takasawa Shin'ichirō—plus Ono Kazuteru, who was an assistant professor teaching ritual technique at Kokugakuin University.[86] Ono was the most junior and least entrenched member of the committee.[87]

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[84] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1971), 215-216.

[85] The first item under consideration was the rules around ceremonies (祭式規定 *saishiki kitei*) and the third was the annotations for ceremonies (儀註 *gichū*). With regards to the former, the issues that wound up being discussed were specifically around the classification and naming of certain festivals, most notably the renaming of the Spring Festival (春祭 *haru matsuri*) and Autumn Festival (秋祭 *aki matsuri*) to the Kinensai (祈年祭) and Niinamesai (新嘗祭), changes which had been made in 1948 to strip imperial connections out of Shinto. This change appears to be the most significant (as well as the most overtly political). See for example the remarks in Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 386-387, 391; Ono Sokyō, "Saishi kankei kitei no kaisei," *Jinja Shinpō*, February 1, 1971.

[86] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 216.

[87] Kanemitsu was a ritual instructor who was active both pre- and postwar. See *Sengo Shintōkai no gunzō: Jinja shinpō sōkan nanajūshūnen kinen shuppan* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 2016), 396-397. He also wrote extensively about ritual technique—in addition to his numerous prewar publications (Kanemitsu Sōji, ed., *Jinja saishiki fukusei chōdo kyōju yōkō* (Nisshindō Shoten Shuppanbu, 1936); Kanemitsu Sōji, ed., *Saishiki kyōhon* (Meiji Shoin, 1944); Kanemitsu Sōji, *Shinsen saishiki taisei* (Meibunsha, 1942)), his "*saishiki kōgi*" (祭式抗議 ritual technique lecture) and "*shinsen kentetsu*" (神饌献撤 presentation and taking down of offerings) series of articles can be found in the first 15 or so volumes of *Reiten* (the periodical of the Reiten Kenkyūkai).

Motoori Yayoi replaced Kanemitsu in later meetings, perhaps due to Kanemitsu's ill health and then eventual death in 1970. See *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 316. For more information on Motoori, see *Sengo Shintōkai no gunzō*, 226. In addition to his work on ritual technique, Motoori co-edited several works on *norito*. See Mikanagi Kiyotake, Motoori Yayoi, and Okada Yoneo, *Gendai shosai norito reibunshū* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1976); Mikanagi Kiyotake, Motoori Yayoi, and Okada Yoneo, *Shinsaku shosaishiki norito senshū* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1969).

In the pre-war period, Iida worked for the Shrine Bureau in the Home Ministry. In the postwar period, Iida worked at Kokugakuin as a lecturer, as well as serving as a priest at Meiji Shrine, Ōharano Shrine, and Atsuta Shrine. For a short biography, see "Honnendo no kōsekisha hyōshō," *Jinja Shinpō*, February 8, 1971; *Sengo Shintōkai no gunzō*, 102-103.

Hase Haruo was a ritual instructor who was active in both the pre- and postwar periods; see *Sengo Shintōkai no gunzō: Jinja shinpō sōkan nanajūshūnen kinen shuppan*, 309. His ritual technique textbook is still used at both Kokugakuin and Kōgakkan Universities (see below).

Takasawa served as head priest of Meiji Shrine, was a professor at Kokugakuin University, and served in a number of administrative positions at Jinja Honchō. See *Sengo Shintōkai no gunzō*, 142-143.

Ono was the only member who was not also a member of the Jinja Honchō committee to revise ritual notations (神社本庁神社祭式同行事作法儀註調査委員会 Jinja Honchō Jinja Saishiki Dō Gyōji Gichū Chōsa Iinkai). See Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 210-211.

Kanemitsu, Iida, and Hase were listed as instructors for the first set of training courses held in summer 1948 to introduce the revised ritual technique—the fourth instructor was Ono Teruo, the father of Ono Kazuteru. Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi*, 181.

Iida and Kanemitsu were also involved in the committee that created the 1942 revisions. Takeuchi, "Jingiin

In May 1968, the Reiten Kenkyūkai hosted a debate as part of its annual conference. All members were welcome to submit questions about ritual, which were then discussed by a panel of directors,[88] and a report on the debate is included in *Reiten*, Reiten Kenkyūkai's periodical. The final question listed in the report on the debate is from "a number of female members from Tokyo," who submitted a proposal for revised women's technique, ritual implements, and vestments. The text of their proposal is not included—only a list of bullet points—so it is difficult to determine how fleshed out their proposal might have been. A proposal for female priests' ritual technique (probably written by Ono Kazuteru)[89] is included in response. The introduction to the proposal notes that although there has been a lack of research into female priests' ritual technique, female priests have learned through experience that there are many points of the existing technique that are awkward and difficult. In particular, the petitioners note the difficulties posed by *uchiki hakama*, the women's vestments at the time (see below), which made it difficult to move backward or execute 180-degree turns.[90] Three of the participants in the debate were also members of the Jinja Honchō Lecturers group—Kanemitsu Sōji (the then-president of Reiten Kenkyūkai), Takasawa Shin'ichirō (the vice-president), and Ono Kazuteru (the moderator of the debate)[91]—and many of the suggestions were integrated into the revised ritual technique. The proposal includes recommendations both for the revision of the regulations

kaisei jinja saishiki gyōji sahō ni kan suru ichi kōsatsu," 69.

[88] Ono Kazuteru and Numabe Harutomo, "Kyōdō tōgi: 'Saishiki gyōji sahō o megutte' hōkoku," *Reiten* 15 (1969), 11.

[89] Ono Kazuteru claimed in 1999 that the proposal included was his personal plan (私案 *shian*). See *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 26.

[90] Ono and Numabe, "Kyōdō tōgi," 29.

[91] Ono and Numabe, "Kyōdō tōgi," 11.

and "instructional methods" (指導法 *shidōhō*),[92] suggesting that the proposal may have been a codification of existing practices already being utilized in classrooms. Ono Kazuteru's 1999 reflections on the revisions (see below) certainly suggest that he used his classroom as a trial space for female technique, although he does not specify when this took place.[93]

The next meeting of the Jinja Honchō Lecturers was August of 1968, when, for the first time, the agenda included ritual technique for women.[94] Whether this decision was sparked by the petition in May or occurred independently is unclear. Notes from later meetings demonstrate that members of the committee researched the use of a folding fan for female priests[95] and met with a *shōten* emeritus from the Imperial Household Agency, who came to instruct them while they were researching technique and clothing for female priests.[96] On July 1, 1971, Jinja Honchō finally released a revised set of rules for ritual technique,[97] which included the first formalized separate ritual technique for female priests.

Revision of the ritual technique occurred as part of a larger movement in Jinja Honchō to correct what they saw as the problematic new practices of the postwar period.[98] As the argument went, Shinto had been warped by the Allied Occupation, especially by the Shinto Directive (神

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[92] Ono and Numabe, "Kyōdō tōgi," 29-33.

[93] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 11-12.

[94] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 285.

[95] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 337.

[96] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 349; *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 10-11.

[97] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1976), 96-136.

[98] Many of the elements that were targeted in the revisions were instituted in 1948. See Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō jūnenshi*, 175-177.

道指令 *Shintō shirei*) of 1945, so now that the war had been over for more than twenty years, it was time to return Shinto (and the spirit of the Japanese people) to its original shape.[99] Previous scholarship has amply covered the larger political changes Jinja Honchō began pushing for during this period[100]—revisions to the education system (which they believed had lost the "Japanese spirit" (日本精神 *Nihon seishin*) in the postwar period), reinstitution of National Foundation Day, increasing reverence and respect for the imperial family, changes to the political status of Yasukuni Shrine, and expansion of Shinto Seiji Renmei (神道政治連盟 Shinto Politics Alliance, a coalition of Shinto politicians), citing the Tsu Ground Purification Case and Yasukuni as cases for its importance.[101]

However, Jinja Honchō also saw the need for internal revisions,[102] especially within the context of the twentieth anniversary of the end of the war, the hundredth anniversary of the Meiji Restoration, and Jinja Honchō's 25th anniversary.[103] Coverage in *Jinja Shinpō* of the revisions presents them as fixing the distortions created by the Shinto Directive, even if not solely

[99] See, for a small selection of examples: Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 84-114; Kubota Osamu, "'Shinto shirei' chōkoku no katsuryoku: Kobayashi Kenzō shi cho 'Kyōiku ryoku to shite no kokugaku," *Jinja Shinpō*, January 18, 1971; "Ronsetsu: Honchō nijūgoshūnen kinenbi ni," *Jinja Shinpō*, February 1, 1971.

[100] See, for example, Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 455-473.

[101] See, for a selection of examples, "Shōwa yonjūrokunen teirei hyōgiinkai giji gaiyō," *Gekkan Wakaki* 259 (1971); Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 147-148, 187-188, 263-265. *Jinja Shinpō* front pages from the period reflect the same trends.

[102] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 96-114, 156-157. A selection of the revisions instituted can be seen at Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 202-213, 213-215, 301-303.

[103] See, for example, Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō nijūgonenshi*, 258-260; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 83; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 140.
The reversion of Okinawa was also sometimes invoked as proof of large-scale change; see "Ronsetsu: Sōkan nijūgonen o mukaete," *Jinja Shinpō*, July 5, 1971.

returning to prewar forms.[104] Reflecting on the period in an interview in 1999, Ono Kazuteru tells much the same story—Shinto's essence had become warped by the Occupation, so Jinja Honchō began the revision process in order to restore Shinto to its prewar shape.[105] In 1976, Ono Michio, the then-head of Jinja Honchō's Survey Department, described the revisions as a "decisive action" (断行 *dankō*) against the Occupation system.[106] We can see from the rhetoric surrounding the revisions that they were positioned as a restoration of past forms, proof that the future ushered in by Jinja Honchō's 25th anniversary would undo the trauma and distortion of the Occupation and restore Shinto to its former (state-supported) glory.

Within the coverage of the revisions, however, female priests' ritual technique was relatively unimportant and received little attention. In a *Jinja Shinpō* article discussing the recently completed final draft of the revisions, for example, the only mention of female priests' technique comes at the very end of the second to last paragraph: "Additionally, there were some revisions to female priests' technique."[107] Coverage of the revisions since 1971 has similarly spent little page space on female technique, with usually only a brief mention that ritual technique for female priests was also created as part of the revisions.[108] While the revision of ritual technique was seen as an important step in fixing the "distortions" in postwar Shinto, the

[104] "Shinnendo yosan seiritsu: saishi kankei roku kitei no kaisei mo," *Jinja Shinpō*, June 7, 1971; "Honchō hei no igi de shitsugi: Saijō zai demo saishiki kaisei shinsa tokubetsu i," *Jinja Shinpō*, June 7, 1971.

[105] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 3-7.

[106] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 148.

[107] "Kaisei saishūan no tōshin: saishiki kankei kitei kaisei iinkai," *Jinja Shinpō*, April 26, 1971. For another similar example, see "Honchō hei no igi de shitsugi: Saijō zai demo saishiki kaisei shinsa tokubetsu i."

[108] See, for example, Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shintō saishi no dentō to saishiki*, 79; Hase Haruo, *Genkō jinja saishi seido gojūnenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1995), 52; Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 54, 56; Hase Haruo, *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kyōhon* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 1992), 56.

creation of gendered technique was a byproduct (and, as we shall see, a personal goal of Ono's) rather than an institutional goal. Perhaps this lack of interest in female ritual technique can be blamed on the uncomfortable place it occupies within Jinja Honchō's vision—while the revisions might have been positioned as a return to an unsullied past, female priests stuck out as a glaring disjunct from the pre-war glory days.

What Is "Feminine" About Female Priests' Ritual Technique?

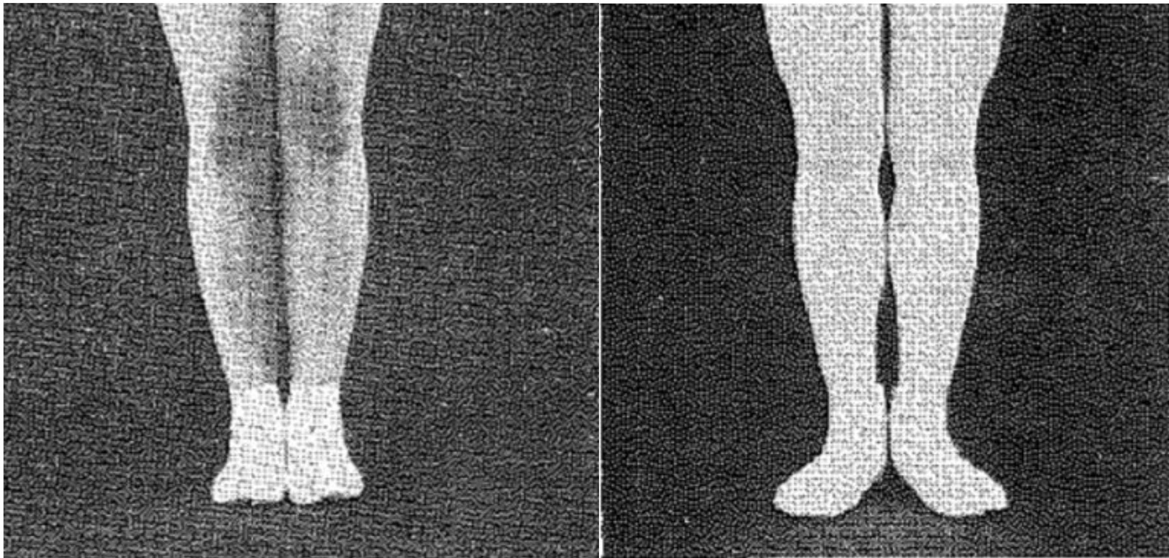

Figure 4.2 Female (left) and male (right) technique for standing, from Saishiki taisei.[109]

The 1971 modifications made two major modifications to "standard" male technique for female priests.[110] First, female priests are expected to use a folding fan (扇 *ōgi*) rather than the *shaku* (笏), the flat wooden ritual baton carried by male priests.[111] Second, women open their

[109] Ono Kazuteru, *Saishiki taisei: danjo shinshoku sahō hen*, ed. Takasawa Shin'ichiro (Yokohama: Wakōsha, 1972), 21.

[110] A list of all specifically female ritual technique can be found in Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 3-6.

[111] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 117, 119, 120, 122, 127, 128-129, 132. See also Jinja Honchō,

legs less frequently and (when they must open their legs) at smaller angles. Functionally, this requires that women press their legs together (rather than opening them, as men do) while sitting[112] and standing (see Figure 4.2).[113] As a general rule, female technique requires more movements than male technique. Kneeling turns require that women rotate on the balls of their feet with their legs pressed together, rather than opening their legs, while standing turns require an extra step, so that women need not open their legs at a ninety-degree angle (see Figure 4.3).[114]

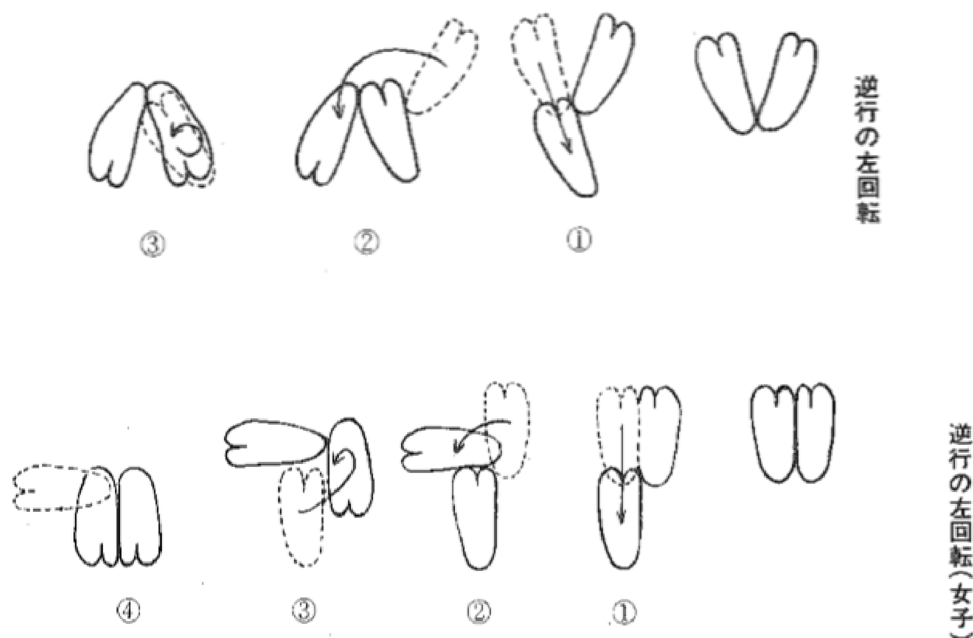

Figure 4.3 Male (top) and female (bottom) technique for executing a 180-degree left-hand turn. Note the extra step for female technique.[115]

ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 55.

[112] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 121, 123.

[113] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 121.

[114] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 125-126.

[115] Numabe Harutomo, *Shintō saishiki no kiso sahō* (Tokyo: Misogi bunkakai, 1971), 48-49.

Within the 1971 revisions, ritual technique is presented as gender-neutral and gender is only specified when a female variation is appended. Not all movements have female variations, so (unmarked) male technique only becomes recognizably male through context. An especially interesting case is the section on fan technique (扇法 *ōgi hō*), which is not gendered until the final line: "Addition: In the case of females carrying the fan, the technique follows the male [technique]."[116] This addition marks the foregoing section as male technique, although nothing within the text suggests that it is gendered. Similarly, female technique is always preceded by the phrase "in the case of [being] female" (女子の場合にありては *joshi no baai ni arite wa*),[117] in Jinja Honchō's 1971 announcement of the revisions, or "[female case]" (女子の場合 *joshi no baai*), in the *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, an explanatory text on ritual technique that was released after the revisions.[118]

The phrase "*danshi*" (男子 male) is only used when specifying that female priests, other than the small change they have enumerated, should "follow the male case" (男子の場合に準ず *danshi no baai ni junzu*).[119] For example, this phrase is used when specifying that female priests,

[116] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 131. The section on fan technique in the revised *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu* is split into "male" and "female" sections (Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 201-203)—the female section says only "follow the fan technique for priests" (神職の扇法に準ずる *shinshoku no ogi hō ni junzuru*). See Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 203. Interestingly, *Saishiki taisei* takes the opposite tack—fan technique is understood to be female technique, with male variations specifically marked. See Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 45-56.

[117] See, for example, Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 117, 119, 120. A similar pattern appears in Numabe Harutomo, *Shintō saishiki no kiso sahō*.

[118] See, for example, Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 55.

[119] See, for example, Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 117, 119, 120.

other than using a fan rather than a *shaku*, should follow the male technique when reading *norito*.[120] The *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, for the most part, refers solely to male technique (by consistently referring to using a *shaku* during ritual),[121] with only occasional insertions of female technique.[122]

We have already seen how Jinja Honchō treats female priests as temporary labor to offset a deficit in the male labor force, never to be the equals of male priests (see chapter 2), but these themes are further reinforced by their positioning within ritual technique. The 1971 revisions are centered on male technique, and leave it as the unmarked standard from which female technique deviates. Femininity is performed through keeping the legs closed, leading to more and smaller steps, as well as different ritual implements.

Ono Kazuteru on the Revisions

What was the thought process behind these revisions? While the notes published in Jinja Honchō's histories are sparse, one of the main architects of the revisions, Ono Kazuteru, spent the next thirty years explaining his thought process. Ono Kazuteru was the son of Ono Teruo, another ritual technique instructor, and the father of Ono Kazunobu,[123] who currently works at Kokugakuin University as a ritual and vestments instructor. He received both his undergraduate

[120] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō sanjūnenshi*, 119.

[121] See, for example, the use of 懐笏 and 把笏 in Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 83.

[122] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu*, 55, 60-61, 89-91, 107, 144. This remains true in more recent versions of the text as well; see Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kaisetsu* (Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha, 2010).

[123] When I briefly met Ono Kazunobu in March 2018, he expressed excitement at my studying female priests, as he was anxious to raise awareness of his father's role in the creation of female technique.

and graduate degrees from Kokugakuin University, and taught ritual technique at Kokugakuin University, Jinja Honchō, and Kanagawa Prefecture's Jinjachō.[124] He was a disciple of Kanemitsu Sōji,[125] who was involved in both the 1942 and 1971 revisions and wrote extensively about ritual technique. The following section principally pulls from Ono's explanatory notes for *Saishiki taisei*, an illustrated guide to the revised technique published in 1972 by the Reiten Kenkyūkai,[126] and an interview with him about the 1971 revisions that was conducted and published in 1999 to celebrate his retirement.[127]

According to Ono, Jinja Honchō did not request that he create female technique. Rather,

> I was teaching younger priests (神職の子弟 *shinshoku no shitei*) about technique (作法 *sahō*) at Kokugakuin University, and also was educating many girls (女子 *joshi*) in the [one-month] priest training courses, but I always felt terribly resistant to making the girls do the boys' technique. [I] say that rituals (礼 *rei*) express the most appropriate words and behavior for people's hearts, so I want boys to behave in masculine ways and girls to move in feminine ones.[128]

In his 1972 notes, he additionally mentions teaching many female students as well as debates with female members of the Reiten Kenkyūkai (likely in reference to the 1968 proposal, discussed above) as contributing to his feeling that female priests should have their own ritual technique.[129] In both his 1972 and 1999 comments, he cites the fact that female priests are no longer the "unimportant assistants to male priests" that they were in the postwar period, but rather have "magnificently shouldered [their role as] one wing of the Shinto world," and

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[124] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 25-28.

[125] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 24.

[126] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*.

[127] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*.

[128] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 9-10.

[129] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, unpaginated introduction.

therefore it is only natural (当然 *tōzen*) that they should have their own technique.[130] Ono's declaration is somewhat surprising, as in 1971 only 3.7% of the priesthood was female—not the proportion one would expect from his comments.

Ono explained that his creation of female technique was guided by three points:

> First, from a physical perspective, I wanted female technique to be elegant. Next, from a sensory perspective, [I] avoided movements that, although they are natural for men, would cause women to feel bashful. Finally, from the perspective of clothing, I included a gentleness [of movements] that would be appropriate for the *uchiki hakama*, which were women's vestments at the time, and fan. [I] kept the above three points in mind, and while basing it off the ancient "women's rites," [I] tried to create a unique technique appropriate for female priests.[131]

Ono laid out these three points in *Saishiki taisei*,[132] and they continue to be used in *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*,[133] a text intended to instruct teachers of ritual technique. The issue of vestments will be addressed in the next section of this chapter, but from the first two points we can see that Ono believed in both the physical difference of women (stressing the need for elegant movement) but also the social difference (movements that would cause women to be embarrassed).

Ono saw the gendered differentiation of male and female technique as an extension of the patterns within ancient rites.[134] He explained that in ancient times men and women had their

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[130] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 2. He uses very similar language, including the wing metaphor, in *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 8-9.

[131] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 11.

[132] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 2-3.

[133] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 41.

[134] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 10. He never specifies which ancient rites he is referring to, however.

own ritual techniques, which were based on the principles of yin and yang.[135] For this reason, Ono preferred that women use the fan over the *shaku* as "in ancient times, it was decided that women carried the fan; there is no example of [women] carrying the *shaku*."[136] For this reason, he, as has already been discussed, consulted with female ritualists attached to the imperial household, who he thought could offer an example and model for female priests.[137] Here we can see Ono appealing to the idea of female priests' ritual technique as a return to earlier form, the same as the rest of the revisions.

However, Ono explained, it would be logistically difficult if men's and women's technique were completely different, since rituals are generally performed with several priests, with a male priest in the leading role. Therefore, it was important that female priests' movements align with male priests'.[138] In particular, he notes the addition of fan movements for female priests in the revised technique. When bowing while holding a *shaku*, one must raise the *shaku* slightly before executing the bow (see Figure 4.4). A similar technique for fan did not exist—one would simply bow without moving the fan's position at all. However, as Ono notes, this would mean that male priests would have to execute an extra step in comparison to female priests when they bowed.[139] Ono justifies this deviation from tradition by explaining that it would be good to think of female priests' ritual technique as

[135] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 2.

[136] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 32.

[137] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 10-11.

[138] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 3.

[139] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 201. For further discussion, see Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 179-180, 187.

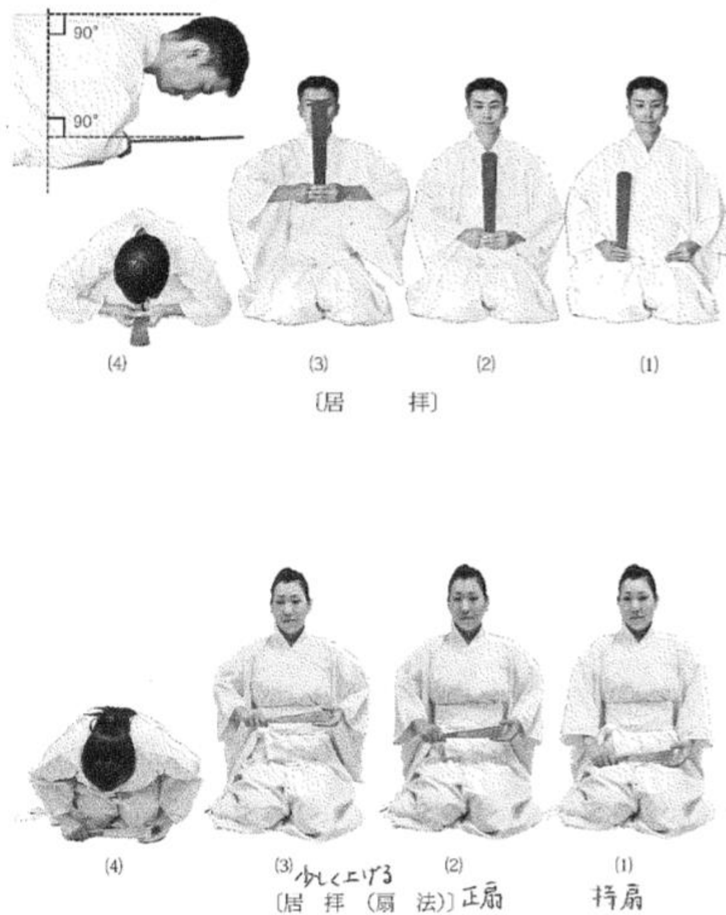

Figure 4.4 Male vs. female bow from Aichi Prefecture's ritual technique manual. The third movement was added to the female technique in order to align it with male technique.[140]

> unique etiquette (礼法 *reihō*) for female priests. The court nobles have technique appropriate for the nobility, warriors have technique as warriors, each of them has [appropriate technique] made for them, so the etiquette most appropriate to priests performing festivals is the shrine ritual technique (神社祭式行事作法 *jinja saishiki gyōji sahō*).[141]

Ono's dilemma is one that plagues female priests' place in the priesthood—they must be differentiated from male priests for the sake of gender segregation but differentiating them too

[140] Aichi-ken Jinjachō Saishi Iinkai, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhen (sahō hen)* (Nagoya: Aichi-ken Jinjachō, 2014), 45, 48. Marginalia on the second image is courtesy of the priest who was kind enough to lend me her copy to scan.

[141] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 180.

much will cause logistical issues in a mixed-gender workplace. Even if Ono claimed to be returning to earlier forms by consulting the "ancient rites," the primacy of existing ritual technique (now coded male) held sway.

In fact, Ono frequently describes female priests' ritual technique as "unique" (独自 *dokuji* or 独特 *dokutoku*),[142] and says that he intended it to "leverage female's special characteristics" (女子の特徴を生かし *joshi no tokuchō o ikashi*; see chapters 2 and 3 for further discussion of this phrase).[143] Interestingly, in his explanations within *Saishiki taisei*, Ono often refers to the ways men are expected to stand or sit as "natural" (自然 *shizen*) but does not do the same for women.[144] For example, compare "For males, standing with both heels pressed together and the toes [of each foot] slightly open is a natural posture"[145] with "For females, stand with the toes not open, the insides of both feet pressed together lightly, and the right and left feet aligned."[146] Here we return to the idea that while gender may be inherent, that does not mean that all women will naturally perform gender "well." Ono's ritual technique coaxes women into expressing their femininity properly in the ritual space, even if it does not feel "natural" to them.

Ono's female ritual technique was centered on two ideas. First, women are essentially different than men and therefore should move in different ways than their male colleagues.

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[142] See, for example, Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 3, 179, 187.

[143] *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 13.

[144] For additional examples, see Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 17, 25.

[145] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 20.

[146] Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 21.

These ways of moving may not be natural, but they are elegant, based on ancient forms, and will not cause women embarrassment. Second, despite their essential difference, women cannot move in such different ways as to become logistically inconvenient. Male priests are, naturally, the focus of ceremonies, so while female priests may have their own unique technique, it must always exist in relation to male technique. The result is a simultaneous insistence on female priests' uniqueness even while presenting their technique as a deviation from the male norm. Even as the revisions to ritual regulations are presented as a return to past forms, female priests' ritual technique is a mishmash of ritual technique used by past and present female shrine ritualists, logistical considerations forced by existing ritual technique (now an exclusively male domain), and Ono's own opinions about what femininity is and how it should be expressed.

Female Priests' Vestments

On June 26, 1946, Jinja Honchō established the regulations concerning vestments (祭祀服制 *saishi fukusei*), with a split between male and female dress.[147] The first vestments for female priests were the *uchiki hakama*, based on those of the *naishōten*.[148] As can be seen in Figure 4.5, they featured upper robes with a long, flowing train; no headgear; and crimson *hakama*. In 1950, Jinja Honchō revised the regulations to standardize *hakama* colors regardless of gender,[149] introduce a hat for women (the 額当 *nukaate*), and allow female priests to wear

[147] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja Honchō gonenshi* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 1951), 39.

[148] Abe Megumi, "Joshi shinshoku no saishi fukusō o meguru kisoteki kenkyū," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo kiyō* 24 (2019), 36-43; Abe Megumi, "Joshi shinshoku no tokisage to kanmurimono (saishi ・nukaate) ni tsuite," *Shintō bunka* 27 (2015), 85.

[149] Previously, female priests had worn crimson *hakama* while men wore purple (with or without a crest) or light

suikan (水干), a different upper body garment that more closely resembled men's, during certain ceremonies.[150]

Figure 4.5 An illustration of a female priest wearing uchiki hakama.[151]

However, as we have already seen, the difficulty of moving in the current vestments was one of the major issues cited by the female priests associated with Reiten Kenkyūkai, and the constraints imposed by women's vestments was one of the three points guiding Ono's creation of female ritual technique.[152] Ono began actively petitioning to change the vestments for women around the same time that he began work on revised ritual technique for women, and he

blue-green, depending on their rank. See chapter 1 for a discussion of different ranks.

[150] Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no tokisage to kanmurimono (saishi ・nukaate) ni tsuite," 86-89; Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no saishi fukusō o meguru kisoteki kenkyū," 43-46. For more on the *nukaate* specifically, see Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no saishi fukusō o meguru kisoteki kenkyū," 90-94.

[151] Yatsuka Kiyotsura, *Shōzoku to emon* (Tokyo: Jinja Honchō, 2014), 74.

[152] In fact, in his 1999 interview, he mentions putting on women's *hakama* in order to test the movements

Figure 4.6 Female vestments after the 1987 revisions. Note the shorter upper garment and the addition of the crown.[153]

published his personal plan for female priests' vestments multiple times.[154] In 1986 and 1987, Jinja Honchō assembled a committee to study female priests' vestments, which determined three

himself. *Shōwa yonjūrokunen kaisei no 'Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō' ni tsuite*, 12.

[153] Yatsuka, *Shōzoku to emon*, 81.

[154] Ono Kazuteru, "Joshi shinshoku no fukusō shian," *Shintō Shūkyō* 63 (1971), 48-52; Ono, *Saishiki taisei*, 394-403. For a comparison of Ono's personal plan and the regulations that were passed, see Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no saishi fukusō o meguru kisoteki kenkyū," 55.

priorities for women's vestments: that they be appropriate for performing ceremonies, that they have the dignity and grace of female priests, and that they both be traditional and bring male and female vestments into accord with each other. Revised regulations for vestments were passed by Jinja Honchō in July 1987 (see Figure 4.6).[155]

These revisions fundamentally changed the ways that female priests dressed. Although they were still based upon the vestments traditionally worn by female ritualists such as the *naishōten* and the *uneme*,[156] they sought to both "harmonize" male and female vestments and create vestments that were easier for women to move in. First, they sought to establish a one-to-one correspondence between male and female clothes by introducing headgear for women that directly paralleled men's.[157] This included the addition of the *saishi* (釵子), a crown intended to be worn when men would wear the *eboshi* (烏帽子), a formal court hat. Second, and more importantly to many of my interviewees, they changed the robes and *hakama* that female priests were expected to wear. Prior to the 1987 revisions, female priests wore an upper garment called an *uchiki* (袿) with a long, flowing train. Unfortunately, the train hampered female priests' ability to execute turns or to back up,[158] both of which are movements required in most if not all ceremonies. Many of my interviewees who have had experience wearing the older form of female vestments complained that they would frequently step on or trip over their own clothing.

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[155] For an overview of the revisions, see Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no saishi fukusō o meguru kisoteki kenkyū," 47-55.

[156] See Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no saishi fukusō o meguru kisoteki kenkyū," 94-103.

[157] Abe, "Joshi shinshoku no tokisage to kanmurimono (saishi ・nukaate) ni tsuite," 89-90.

[158] See Ono and Numabe, "Kyōdō tōgi," 29.

Currently, female priests' vestments are immediately visually distinguishable from male priests' vestments. The shape of the garments are different, the headgear is different (more noticeably so when wearing the *saishi*), and the color scheme of female vestments tends to be much more varied and brighter than their male counterparts.[159] Again, we see the uneasy coexistence of past and present forms of dress employed by female shrine ritualists, logistical considerations due to the existing male vestments, and (again) Ono's sense of how female priests' should express their femininity visually.

Gendered Vestments and Ritual in the Classroom

Priests' first encounter with vestments and ritual technique is often the classroom. As discussed in chapter 1, priests go through either a four-year, one-year, or one-month program, which includes classes on ritual technique and vestments. At the lowest level of certification (直階 *chokkai*), students are expected to learn all the basic movements and segments of a ceremony in less than a week's worth of classes. Ritual technique classes in four-year or one-year programs are physically demanding but become even more so within the one-month course, when students will have six or more hours (from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with short breaks) of ritual technique training in a single day.

[159] See, for example, images from Kokugakuin's Coming of Age Day ceremony: Kokugakuin Daigaku Wakagi mutsumi (Wakagi mutsumi), Twitter post, January 7, 2019, https://twitter.com/wakagimutsumi/status/1082470039524061185.

One reason why female vestments tend to have more variation in color is because the colors are much less proscribed than male vestments. Yatsuka, *Shōzoku to emon*, 6-11.

Ritual technique classes tended to leave very strong impressions on my interviewees, especially those who gained certification through a one-month program.[160] Many of my interviewees found the amount of time they were required to sit in *seiza* (正座 a formal kneeling posture) difficult and painful. Other interviewees compared the experience of the regimented one-month course to joining the military. Students coming in with little to no experience within shrines struggled with the vocabulary. One of my interviewees, who did not grow up in a shrine family but decided to take certification to support her husband, described being confused for the first few days of the course, as the instructor kept shouting, "*Shōyū*!" (小揖 a 30-degree bow) at them. She thought he was shouting, "*Shōyu* (醤油 soy sauce)," and couldn't understand how she was supposed to react. Many of my interviewees—especially those who had gone through one-month courses—reported distress or anxiety from ritual training classes. Multiple interviewees described uncontrollably crying, either during or after the course, from the sheer stress. Another interviewee said that her anxiety had been so high for the entirety of the training course that she had a perpetual stomachache. The day after the course ended, she went to the doctor to make sure that she hadn't developed stomach cancer.

The training courses also habituate priests-to-be into bodily norms in the shrine world. The most striking (and upsetting) example is that a professor at Kokugakuin University told me that there had been a transgender man enrolled in the undergraduate program some years before. The university had told him that he could be certified as a priest, but he would be required to

[160] About two-thirds of my interviewees completed a one-month course.

wear female vestments and use female technique. He eventually decided to drop out of the program rather than be perpetually misgendered.

Even for cisgender students, however, the rules around bodily comportment are quite strict. In addition to the rules about hair that opened this chapter, students are not allowed to have manicures, piercings, rings, misanga bracelets (a good luck charm made from knotted thread), or other types of accessories and jewelry. While Kokugakuin did not seem to have a dress code for commuting to class (we all changed into *hakama* before class started), Kōgakkan required their students to commute to class in black suits with white collared shirts. The handout for the Ise training center specifies that students should

> Always [wear] clean, high-quality, clothes that express propriety (礼節 *reisetsu*). Fashionable, extravagant (華美 *kabi*) clothing is strictly prohibited.
> Men: shirt with a collar
> Women: blouse with a collar
> For both men and women, jeans, t-shirts, trainers, shorts, sleeveless [shirts], etc. are strictly prohibited. Sandals, slippers, etc. are strictly prohibited.[161]

We can see how this list matches many of the modes of dress that my interviewees identified as things "normal women" could wear that they could not as priests (see chapter 3)—they must eschew many of the normative markers of femininity (accessories, fashion, shorts) in order to perform priestliness correctly. We might also note the omission of any rules about make-up from this list; the lack of clear rules about make-up can cause, as we have already seen in chapter 3, friction among women who have different interpretations of how much make-up is appropriate for a priest to wear. As a result, we can see a specific type of priestly femininity being developed through these rules—one that is understated but elegant, plain but refined, but still open to some degree of interpretation.

[161] Jingū Dōjō, "Jukōsei kokoroe," 2.

I participated in all four days of the ritual technique classes for the one-month *gonseikai* (権正階 the second level of certification, see chapter 1) course at Kokugakuin University during February 2018, so I experienced some of these difficulties first-hand. We were often required to sit in *seiza* for extended periods of time (up to forty-five minutes); many of my classmates stumbled or fell when they tried to stand after sitting for too long, as their legs had fallen asleep or seized up. While I mostly managed to avoid *seiza*-related difficulties, I was unused to moving on my knees so much. My legs seized up partway through a kneeling turn during my first hour of class and I hit the floor, which did wonders for my acceptance by the other students but was embarrassing and painful. After the first day of classes I had bruises on both legs stretching from ankle to kneecap. The Kokugakuin course seemed to be less psychologically challenging than regional courses, which some of the other students commented on.[162] We had an unstructured lunch period, for example, while at the Aichi Prefecture training course everyone is given a boxed lunch that they must start and finish eating at the same time,[163] and we had a more relaxed dress code to and from the training center. However, even with these laxer guidelines, students were stressed and exhausted by the end of the course.

It is easy to see, given the intensity of their experience, why ritual technique classes leave such an impression on priests. For many students, it is the first time they are taught how priests move and the first time that they may be aware, for example, of their stride length or the depth of their bows. Ritual technique classes are often their first exposure to gendered technique, so in

[162] One student said that he decided to attend the one-month course at Kokugakuin University rather than Kōgakkan University, despite living much closer to Kōgakkan, because he had heard that the Kōgakkan course was much more intense.

[163] This feature of the training course is a source of consternation for many of my interviewees. One of the most common complaints is that the male students tended to eat faster than the female students, which meant that female students were frequently unable to finish their lunches in time.

order to understand how ritual technique is gendered, one must understand how gendered technique is taught in the classroom.

Surveying the ritual technique textbooks used by Kōgakkan University (Hase Haruo's *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kyōhon*),[164] Kokugakuin University (both the Hase volume and *Shin jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhon,* edited by Numabe Harutomo and Motegi Sadasumi),[165] and the Aichi Prefecture regional one-month training course (a manual compiled by a committee attached to the Aichi Prefecture Jinjachō),[166] the centering of male technique is obvious. Hase's book continues the tradition of leaving male technique unmarked, while female technique is preceded by "(in the case of females) (女子の場合 *joshi no baai*)."[167] The word "male" only appears to label foot-placement diagrams.[168] All photos feature male models, except when demonstrating a specifically female piece of technique. Numabe and Motegi's volume lists both regulations (規定 *kitei*) and technique (作法 *sahō*). In the regulations, female technique is marked off by prefacing it with "[female] (女子 *joshi*)."[169] However, female technique is sometimes omitted from the technique section,[170] sometimes prefaced with a bullet point

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[164] Hase, *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kyōhon*.

[165] Numabe Harutomo and Motegi Sadasumi, ed., *Shin jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhon* (Tokyo: Ebisukōshō Shuppan, 2011). Note that Hase was a professor at Kōgakkan while Numabe and Motegi work at Kokugakuin; interviewees frequently speak of ritual technique as either being "Kōgakkan-type" or "Kokugakuin-type," as there are several points on which they differ.

[166] Aichi-ken Jinjachō Saishi Iinkai, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhen (sahō hen)*. Aichi is "Kōgakkan-type."

[167] See, for example, Hase, *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kyōhon*, 129, 154 onward.

[168] See, for example, Hase, *Jinja saishiki dō gyōji sahō kyōhon*, 175, 184, 189.

[169] See, for example, Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shin jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhon*, 24, 27, 53.

[170] See, for example, Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shin jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhon*, 27.

followed by “Females, (女子は、*joshi wa*,),”[171] and sometimes divided into (marked) male and female sections.[172] In the section on basic technique, photographs of women only appear when discussing specifically female technique, while in the photographs of ritual procedure, one woman appears in the lowest ranking position. The Aichi Prefecture manual similar marks off female technique with “In the case of females (女子の場合は *joshi no baai wa*).”[173] Women mostly appear doing specifically female technique (with a few exceptions),[174] but many sections are illustrated by side-by-side photographs of male and female ritualists.[175]

The *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, an instructional text for teachers of ritual technique, similarly refers to male priests as the “main constituents (主体 *shutai*)” of rituals in which there are multiple priests, and explains that female priests’ technique has been aligned with male priests’ when possible for this reason.[176] Interestingly, this text directly addresses the issue of unmarked (male) technique and shared technique:

> However, not only the places marked as “female case” in the official regulations are female priests’ technique. The entirety of the ritual technique regulations has female priests’ ritual technique, so even when [the regulations] are shared with males, in small

[171] See, for example, Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shin jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhon*, 54.

[172] See, for example, Numabe and Motegi, ed., *Shin jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhon*, 62-63.

[173] See, for example, Aichi-ken Jinjachō Saishi Iinkai, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhen (sahō hen)*, 14, 19, 27.

[174] See, for example, Aichi-ken Jinjachō Saishi Iinkai, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhen (sahō hen)*, 54-55, 58-59.

[175] See, for example, Aichi-ken Jinjachō Saishi Iinkai, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō kyōhen (sahō hen)*, 14-15, 64-65.

[176] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 41.

> places, females have female movements, so [you] must remember that there are many places where not everything can be executed in the same way.[177]

This direction is in-line with Ono's understanding of female ritual technique—women are essentially (physically and socially) different than men, so even when regulations are the same, men and women will naturally move in different ways. What these ways might be are left to the reader's imagination (creating space for the instructor to bring their own ideas concerning proper femininity into the classroom).

However, although clear gendered guidelines for ritual technique have existed since 1971, not every female priest has had the opportunity to learn female ritual technique. For example, Yamashita (whose story is discussed in greater depth in chapter 3) took a one-month course at a regional Jinjachō training center during summer 1997. While she estimated that somewhere between ten and twenty people were taking the course, only three of them were women. The instructor asked them whether they wanted to learn the fan technique or the *shaku* technique. Yamashita and her female classmates did not want to be isolated from the rest of the class and worried that they would increase the load on the instructor if they requested separate instruction, so they chose to learn the *shaku* technique. As a result, Yamashita still uses a *shaku* and male technique and wears the male vestments while performing ceremonies. The only exception is the annual festival, where she feels pressured by the presence of priests from other local shrines (who come to assist) and a representative from Jinja Honchō to wear the female vestments, use a fan, and follow female technique. She said she struggles during the annual festival, as the vestments (especially the *saishi*) are unfamiliar, and she must fight her muscle memory to add extra steps to her turns.

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[177] Jinja Honchō, ed., *Jinja saishiki gyōji sahō shidō yōkō*, 41.

Even when students have the opportunity to learn female technique, male ritual technique and vestments continue to be treated as the standard. Hori, who graduated from Kōgakkan University in 2014, complained,

> Well, the tests were men's technique. [The teachers] couldn't make a female version, so [the female students] memorized it. The teachers were men, so they probably can't do [the female] ritual (祭典 *saiten*). The teachers were all men.

She further explained,

> In the end, the male technique wound up being standard (基本 *kihon*). […] In the end, the female students were a bonus (おまけ *omake*), so we keenly felt that the men were the focus. Because of that, I was made to think that it was a male society or something.

I heard similar stories from other students at Kōgakkan University, when I went to observe a day of their ritual technique and vestments course. One of them recounted how during her first year they had all been taught how to do *shaku* technique, so she had assumed that female priests also used the *shaku*. Then, in the fall semester of their second year, the teacher suddenly announced that the women in the class would be using fans, leaving her and her classmates confused. One of the ritual technique instructors, who was sitting in on the interview, said that they taught female students both types so that if they work at a shrine that requires them to use the *shaku*, they will be able to adapt. One of the students grumbled that male students have it easy, since they only have to learn *shaku*.

At both Kokugakuin University and Kōgakkan University, while both male and female students took the same class, the physical space was gender-segregated. The day I observed at Kōgakkan University, the students were split up into four groups based on where they would be doing their summer internship (実習 *jisshū*)—one group had all the women in the class (eleven of the forty-five students). When I took the training course at Kokugakuin, all the students lined

up by family name in columns facing the front of the room—the two columns on the farthest left were all women. Since there were many fewer women than men (seven vs. thirty-two on the first day of the course), the women's lines were much shorter.[178]

The Kokugakuin course, however, did not require that female students learn the male technique—the technique we learned was fully gender segregated.[179] In fact, the instructor had the men practice the women's technique along with the women a couple of times, but never had the women practice the men's technique.[180] When performing ceremonies rather than individual movements, we were broken into mixed-gender groups, although the women were usually at the back of the line,[181] serving the less highly ranked positions until they managed to work their way to the front in the rotation. For example, the class practiced the reading of liturgies (祝詞 *norito*) by the head priest and *kenpeishi* (献幣使 in this context, the representative presenting offerings from Jinja Honchō) in small groups twice. However, due to the size of the groups and the female students' position near the back of the lines, none of the women got to practice either role. At the end of our practice time, the instructor realized that no one had demonstrated the way female *kenpeishi* should receive the folded paper with the text of the *norito* from one of the other

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[178] By the last week of the course, seven men dropped out, bringing the total number of students to thirty-two.

[179] From interviews, it seems that many prefectural short-term training courses have also moved in the direction of enforcing gender segregation—many of my interviewees who received their certification recently never learned male technique.

[180] The instructor in question is interested in revising some of the men's technique—especially on the turns—to be more in line with the women's, as he thinks that the male technique looks bad.

[181] The positioning of women at the back of the line was not enforced explicitly by the instructor—rather, women tended to drift toward the back. At ceremonies at shrines, as well, female parishioners tend to take the lowest seats.

ritualists, since ritualists carrying fans have to interact with *norito* in different ways than those carrying *shaku*, and enlisted one of the female students to demonstrate.

Figure 4.7 Students at Kōgakkan University practice putting on female vestments.

At both Kokugakuin and Kōgakkan, male vestments tend to be prioritized in instruction. At Kokugakuin, everyone learned how to put on both the male and female vestments; however, the male vestments were prioritized, as they were taught on the third day of the four days of ritual technique. Female vestments were not taught until the fourth day (in the period directly before the exam), and the teacher said that if we did not have enough time, we would not go over female vestments at all. At Kōgakkan, male vestments were prioritized even more highly, as only the male vestments were covered during class. The instructor allowed male students to go home at the end of the class period, while the female students had to stay behind to learn the

female vestments after the class period had officially ended (see Figure 4.7). The DVD[182] and textbook[183] used at Kōgakkan also only cover the male vestments. (The textbook used by the Kokugakuin one-month course[184] covers both male and female vestments.)

Instruction on ritual technique and vestments seems to fall into two camps—either the male variation is taken as the standard or (more rarely) it is fully gender-segregated but male students are still given precedence. While female students may be expected to learn both male and female technique and vestments, the same is rarely true of male students. Female students are constantly reminded that male students (and male priests, by extension) take precedence, whether that manifests in how class time is spent or by their position at the end of the line when they practice rituals.

Female Ritual Technique and Vestments in Shrines

The gap between the ritual technique taught in training courses and that utilized within shrines can often be stark, even putting aside issues of gender.[185] For example, ritual technique is often divided into standing and kneeling technique—most ceremonies[186] are supposed to be

[182] *Emondō ・ shōzoku no chōsōhō*, DVD box set (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 2009). During my visit, we watched an excerpt from the third disc, "*Kariginu no tsukekata ・tatamikata*."

[183] Yasue Kazutaru, *Ikanhitoe ・ kariginu no tsukekata* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1998).

[184] Yatsuka Kiyotsura, *Shōzoku to emon*.

[185] One issue is that, at least at Kokugakuin University, the shrine being used as a reference point was Meiji Shrine. My interviewees from Kōgakkan University and regional centers have said that Kokugakuin's focus on Meiji Shrine is unusual, and that their courses were generally less focused on one shrine as an example.

[186] Purification rites (修祓 *shūbatsu*) are an obvious exception—these are mainly performed standing, according to the instructor of the Kokugakuin course, as they were originally performed outdoors (and kneeling on gravel is unpleasant).

performed with kneeling technique. When passing offering trays from ritualist to ritualist, for example, both ritualists are supposed to kneel, pass the tray, turn, and then stand and walk to the next ritualist before kneeling again. However, this ceremony is not performed the same way at all shrines. I have seen two common variations—the entire segment is performed standing (saving the knees of the ritualists) or the entire segment is performed by one priest, eliminating the need to kneel to pass the trays. One of the students at the Kokugakuin course complained that we were focusing on kneeling technique so much when, at her family shrine, they perform all ceremonies standing, out of deference to her grandfather's knees and because the floor of the shrine is made of concrete.

As might be expected from this gap between regulation and reality, female ritual technique and vestments are adopted unevenly in shrines. At my main field site (discussed in greater depth in chapter 5), all three priests are women. However, the head priest inherited her vestments from the previous head priest (a man) and only learned male technique, so she carries a *shaku* and wears male vestments. The second priest learned both female and male technique, but did not want to buy her own vestments, so she wears male vestments (borrowed from the head priest) but uses female technique. The third priest has only learned female technique and bought her own vestments, so she wears female vestments and uses female technique. Looking at this example, one can immediately identify two major issues obstructing female priests' adoption of ritual technique and vestments—economics and lack of training.

However, even women who were taught female ritual technique will sometimes opt to use male technique and vestments. Several of my interviewees use male technique because they were asked to by their head priest. The most common reason given is that having priests use different technique will make the rituals look sloppy—the most common complaint is that

“female” turns require an extra step, which means that even if female priests take less time between each step than their male colleagues, the rhythm of their turns will be fundamentally different. Other female priests opt for using male technique, vestments, or implements to reduce resistance to their presence or to increase their perceived legitimacy. Watanabe, a priest in her twenties, relayed that when she first became a priest, the other female priest at her shrine recommended that if she is asked to do a ceremony outside of the shrine grounds (such as a ground purification ceremony, discussed in greater depth in chapter 5), she either go with a male priest or do the ceremony in “male-style” (i.e. with a *shaku* rather than a fan), as, in her experience, being a young woman carrying a fan made people question whether she was a “real” priest or just a *miko*.

Interviewees expressed more resistance to current vestments than techniques, but older women were much more likely to complain about vestments in interviews than women in their twenties and thirties. For example, when I asked Kōgakkan students about female priests’ vestments, they said that they were “desirable” (あこがれ *akogare*). Another interviewee in her early twenties, when asked whether Jinja Honchō had different regulations for male and female priests, said that there were none other than vestments and ritual technique, but that she was glad that those gendered regulations existed. My younger interviewees often did not feel that male and female vestments could or should be standardized.

On the other hand, Saitō, a priest in her seventies, said that it would be best to unify male and female vestments. In particular, she complained that the current female vestments were “ugly” and “hard to move in.” These are common refrains in interviews. Female priests—especially older women who have experience wearing male vestments or priests who have

studied the history of female vestments (in graduate school, for example)—complain that the current vestments are hard to put on and wear, difficult to move in, or aesthetically not pleasing. They often blame the inconvenience of female vestments on their creation by men, who had a skewed image of what female priests should wear to express their femininity. A frequent target of their ire is the *saishi*, the crown for female priests, which many of my interviewees complained is difficult to balance on their heads and looks silly.

Another common group of complaints was that they don't look like legitimate priests' clothes—an interviewee in her forties reported that she wore male vestments, because men's are easier to wear, plus "it would be a problem if [parishioners had the impression that] a princess came" to perform a ritual. An interviewee in her eighties reported that while she wears female vestments when performing rituals at her own shrine, she wears male vestments when she is performing outside ceremonies. She also wears male vestments when she is going to assist at other shrines, in order to align her vestments with the other priests in attendance. Many of my interviewees reported wearing different vestments for different occasions—the most common split was only wearing female vestments for their annual festival, but it was also common for interviewees to report wearing male vestments when performing rituals outside the shrine or when performing rituals alongside male priests, in an attempt to not stand out. One interviewee in her fifties admitted that she loves the way female vestments look, but she thinks it would be better if they were standardized, since viewers assume that male and female priests wearing different vestments means that they perform different functions. Standardizing vestments and technique, she argued, might reduce confusion about and resistance to female priests.

Ritual technique generally receives a much more lukewarm and divided response. One group of female priests spoke negatively of ritual technique. Kotani (whose story is discussed in greater depth in chapter 3), a priest in her sixties, said,

> Special regulations [for female priests]? I don't think we need them. Mainly, we don't say "male priest," right? But there are only "female priests." I think that's strange. (laughs) I think that men and women are the same, so it would be fine if the regulations are all the same. You don't have to change anything.

A similar complaint came from Murakami, a priest in her sixties. If female priests executed three-step turns, she said, they "might look more masculine, but, um, I wonder…do the *kami* care about things like that?" She said that she thought that many of the specific, finicky rules for ritual technique were intended not for the *kami* but for the human beings watching. Similar complaints came from my interviewees with graduate education,[187] who remarked that female ritual technique was created recently (by men) and that its history is comparatively shallow. The overwhelming recommendation from female priests who dislike the current ritual technique is to standardize it across genders.

However, some female priests believe that female ritual technique should continue to exist. Saitō received her credentials in the late 1970s, but was only taught how to use a *shaku*. Although she has since learned fan technique, she says she prefers *shaku*. However, she believes that it is best not to unify ritual technique. She explained:

> After all, women are feminine, well, the way they place their feet and so on, right? I think that it's good to just have [differences] in how you place your feet. After all, as a woman, well, after all, men are men and women are women, and there's no reason for women to become men and no reason for men to become women, so I think it's better for [differences] to exist.

[187] All of my interviewees with graduate education are enrolled in or have received their degree from either Kōgakkan University or Kokugakuin University.

This sentiment was expressed by many of my other interviewees. One woman in her eighties expressed concern about the difficulty in synchronizing the movements of male and female priests, but that it was better to keep them separate. “As long as the rhythm matches, it’s fine,” she said. “Men don’t have women’s beauty; it’s wrong for women to have men’s strength (逞しさ *takumashisa*).” These sentiments were echoed by my younger interviewees as well. Interviewees in their teens through early thirties tended to speak of gendered ritual technique as either an extension of men and women’s natural difference or as a measure necessary to preserve women’s femininity (女性らしさ *josei-rashisa*). “It looks bad when women open their legs,” one priest in her thirties rationalized. Students also spoke of the ways that female technique felt “special” or “desirable.”

It is worth noting that resistance to gendered ritual technique does not correlate with resistance to gender essentialism. Regardless of their opinion on ritual technique, almost all female priests agree that male and female priests have differing capabilities and strengths, but that they are complementary, not inferior, to men. As is discussed further in chapter 3, they frequently cite their bodily difference from men in essentialized terms—their ability to give birth to children, for example, allows them to better connect to children and mothers than their male counterparts, or their weaker bodies mean that they are worse at manual labor. For them, the question is not whether men and women are different (physically, mentally, or spiritually), but how that difference should be expressed. Similar to the methods female priests use to bridge the absence of instruction from Jinja Honchō on menstrual pollution, female priests adapt the vision of femininity forwarded by Jinja Honchō to better suit their own shrine context and sense of how a female priest should move and dress.

Conclusion

Why has Jinja Honchō fixated on the body as the only arena for gendered regulations? One possibility is their focus on the inherent physiological difference of men and women (as we have seen in chapter 2)—if men and women are physiologically different, then of course they should move differently and look distinct. However, another possibility is simply the primacy of the body in Shinto regulations. From their first moments of training, priests-to-be are taught to be conscious of their dress, behavior, and movements. Priests carry this consciousness to their shrines, where they have the additional pressure of the eyes of their parishioners (and their fellow priests) dissuading them from dressing or behaving in potentially "unpriestly" ways. While a priest might not have to think about her relationship to "Good Wife, Wise Mother" every day, she does have to think about how her body is moving through ritual space, what vestments she is wearing, and whether her parishioners might be concerned that she is performing rituals while menstruating. In this way, Jinja Honchō plants their vision of a priestly femininity in shrines—a femininity that is visually and kinetically distinct from the normative masculine standard.

However, the gendering of the Shinto priesthood has never been a simple process of imposition by Jinja Honchō. It is, instead, an ongoing negotiation between many different actors—Jinja Honchō issuing regulations, instructors modifying their lessons, and priests navigating their local communities and work environments. In this chapter, we have seen examples of this process of negotiation through case studies of menstrual pollution, ritual technique, and vestments. Jinja Honchō refuses to clarify whether menstrual pollution exists and how female priests should deal with it, but female priests cannot exist comfortably within such an ambiguous space. Instead, they must develop their own theories of and methods for dealing with menstrual pollution, and then they transmit these theories through informal networks,

creating a theology of menstrual pollution over which Jinja Honchō has no oversight. Jinja Honchō instead chooses to address the reality of its mixed-gender priesthood by codifying unique female ritual technique and vestments, but it does so by marking female priests as a deviation from the (male) norm. While some instruction is now moving to a fully gender-segregated model, male ritual technique and vestments continue to be centered and prioritized. However, here too female priests do not accept Jinja Honchō's regulations without modification. Rather, they must balance official regulations, their own training, their workplace environment, and their own understandings of their identities as women and priests to determine the ways in which they serve as female priests. We turn to this topic in the final chapter.

Chapter 5
Gendered Labor in Shrines

One day after work during the summer of 2015, I took the subway with Okada to attend a special *gagaku* (雅楽 traditional court music, used in many ceremonies at shrines) practice session for priests, run by a mutual acquaintance. The session was being held at another shrine in the city, which was staffed by the Kaneda family, and the younger of the two Kaneda daughters (who was five months pregnant) met us at the station to drive us to the shrine. On the drive, Okada asked if Kaneda was having morning sickness, and Kaneda replied that it had been much worse earlier in her pregnancy. She said that it was particularly difficult to deal with when she had to go perform *gaisai* (外祭), a category of festivals performed outside of the shrine. Laughing, she told us that when she went to perform a ground purification ceremony (地鎮祭 *jichinsai*), she would pack a bucket in the back of her car, throw up before leaving in the house, get in the car and drive to the site, try to get through the ceremony as quickly as possible while also still observing social niceties, and then, smiling and waving, walk to her car where she would discreetly vomit in the bucket.

I open with this story because it highlights many of the themes that will run through this chapter. Female priests enter their shrines with the knowledge imparted from their training, but once they are onsite, the landscape they must navigate becomes far more complicated than anything they learned in class. A female priest must navigate not only the restrictions Jinja Honchō puts on her body (chapter 4), the gender norms espoused by Jinja Honchō (chapter 2), and her own internal sense of duty as a woman and a priest (chapter 3), but also the gender norms and particularities of her local community. Serving at a shrine is not just a matter of

doing the rituals and dispensing theological advice. As a priest moves through her day, she must navigate community politics, complicated interpersonal relationships, and even her own fallible human body. In many ways, a priest serving at a small shrine is working in customer service—dependent upon the community, trying to build or maintain fragile relationships, and open to much of the same abuse and discrimination as service workers. On the other hand, a priest is also a community leader, both a role model and a voice of authority—although that authority may be tempered, diminished, or shifted by her intersecting identities. Additionally, her often contingent and precarious position may leave the female priest vulnerable to harassment and abuse, without the protections that a corporate structure might provide.

In this chapter I demonstrate that the character of women's shrine labor is varied and often locally determined. I start by offering an overview of what work a priest is expected to do at a shrine and then zoom in on a wedding to unpack everything that goes into a forty-minute ceremony. I then turn to the different relationships my interviewees had with their parishioners and shrine representatives, and how this variation causes female priests to have individualized strategies for interfacing with their shrine communities. I then turn to the two most contentious types of work for female priests to perform: physical labor and *gaisai*. Finally, I consider harassment in the shrine world. Despite issues that many of my interviewees recognized as systemic (or at least shared by all female priests), female priests have not created collective means to address these shared challenges, instead relying on individualized, context-specific solutions.

Some Important Terminology

The shrine world, like many specialized industries, has its own language, so let us take a moment to go over some common terminology.

Many shrines have parishioners (氏子 *ujiko*) who live in a designated area around the shrine. Parishioners were systematized in 1871 under the universal shrine registration system—intended to replace the Edo-period Buddhist temple registration system—although it was quickly dropped as a census mechanism.[1] While the parishioner system lost legal validity in the postwar period, many shrines still consider all the people living within a certain designated area their parishioners and partner with neighborhood associations (町内会 *chōnaikai*) in that area to distribute news about upcoming festivals or ask for donations to the shrine.[2] However, shrines do not have a centralized database that lays out boundary lines for each shrine's parishioner area—when I consulted with the shrine staff to make a map of the parishioner area for K Shrine, for example, I discovered that it included not only parishioners from other shrines but at least three other (unaffiliated) shrines. Unlike the Buddhist *danka* system,[3] parishioners are not obligated to pay the shrine for religious ceremonies on a regular basis, so parishioners mainly

[1] See, for example, Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 375-376.

[2] The relationship between shrines and neighborhood associations is a fascinating topic that deserves a longer treatment elsewhere. The legality of collecting donations through the neighborhood associations is not clear to me, although several of my interviewees explicitly rejected the practice for perceived illegality while others insisted that it was fine. I know of multiple cases of *clearly* illegal behavior, however, where shrines skimmed a "parishioner fee" (氏子費 *ujiko hi*) off the top of the mandatory "neighborhood association fees" (町内会費 *chōnaikai hi*) without alerting the residents in the area. In these cases, the shrine staff insisted that their behavior was fine, although the chance of them admitting to committing a crime during a recorded interview is low.

[3] See Stephen G. Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 23-42. For a more recent discussion, see Paulina K. Kolata, "The Story Beyond UNESCO: Local Buddhist Temples and the Heritage of Survival in Regional Japan," in *Sacred Heritage in Japan*, ed. Mark Teeuwen and Aike P. Rots (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2020), 163.

contribute to the shrine's coffers via A. voluntary[4] donations, B. contracting the shrine for individual prayers (see below), C. purchasing goods at the shrine (amulets, tablets for the household altar, etc.), or D. dropping a few coins in the offering box when visiting the shrine.

In addition to parishioners, many shrines rely on worshipers (崇敬者 *sūkeisha*)—that is, people who support the shrine but do not live in the designated parishioner area. In some cases, worshipers may have once lived in the area and then moved, but this is not always the case. Some shrines do not claim parishioners at all and rely solely on worshipers. Usually, a statement to this effect does not mean that they have *no* local support so much as that the shrine does not rely *primarily* on support coming from a specific, geographically bounded area; rather, the shrine accepts all supporters (regardless of their location) as equals. This switch to a worshiper-only system may occur due to problems with parishioners, a lack of people living within the bounds of the parishioner area, or a rejection of the parishioner system, which may be perceived by the priests as a violation of the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. Two cases of shrines that switched to worshiper-only models are discussed below. Visitors to the shrine are generally referred to with the catch-all term "*sanpaisha*" (参拝者 literally "person who prays").

In addition to parishioners, most shrines have *ujiko sōdai* (氏子総代, often shortened to *sōdai*), a term I translate here as "shrine representatives."[5] Shrine representatives vary from shrine to shrine, but they are generally parishioners (or, at shrines with no parishioners, worshipers) who have either stepped up or been nominated to take a larger role in shrine

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[4] Except in cases of a "parishioner fee" leveraged through the neighborhood association; see footnote 2.

[5] A more literal translation would be "parishioner representatives"; I opt for "shrine representatives" to avoid confusion. For a discussion of how a similar system manifests in temple Buddhism, see Covell, *Japanese Temple Buddhism*, 33-34.

activities. They usually serve on a multi-year rotation and are expected to attend all shrine ceremonies and assist at larger festivals. Due to the time commitment required of shrine representatives—as festivals tend to be scheduled during the day on specific dates, regardless of the day of the week—their demographics tend to skew heavily toward retired men and their wives, with the occasional younger person who is self-employed (or otherwise has a more flexible schedule). In addition, for a shrine to be registered as a juridical person (宗教法人 *shūkyō hōjin*), it is required to have a board of six directors (責任役員 *sekinin yakuin*, often shortened to *yakuin*).[6] While the head priest[7] (and the *negi*, if there is one) may be on the board, the rest of the seats are often filled by shrine representatives.

Serving at a shrine in any capacity is referred to as "*hōshi*" (奉仕). In his work on prison chaplains, Adam Lyons translates "*hōshi*" as "public service,"[8] but the term has a subtly different meaning when talking about shrine work. Unlike the chaplains Lyons discusses, priests are paid for their labor—although the shrine representatives who offer their labor to the shrine are also performing "*hōshi*" without monetary compensation. In the case of priests, "*hōshi*" encompasses both serving the *kami* and ministering to the parishioners, so I translate it as service and/or ministry, depending on the context. However, it is important to remember that priests see their work as serving *both* the *kami* and the people—the most common definition I received from my

[6] For more on this system, see Hardacre, *Shinto*, 525-528.

[7] For an explanation of the different names for priests' roles, see chapter 3.

[8] See Adam Lyons, *Karma and Punishment: Prison Chaplaincy in Japan* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2021), 187-188.

interviewees when I asked them to describe what a priest is or does was that a priest was a "mediator" (中取り持ち *nakatorimochi*) between the *kami* and the visitors to the shrine.

An Introduction to K Shrine

K Shrine is a midsized shrine located in a suburban area of Nagoya. It is a five-minute walk from the nearest subway station, and directly on one of the municipal bus lines. K Shrine is referenced in the *Engishiki* (compiled in 905), and both the parishioners and the shrine staff are proud of its long history. In 1872, the shrine was classified as a village shrine (村社 *sonsha*),[9] and in 1937 it was upgraded to a prefectural shrine (縣社 *kensha*). The shrine has been burned down twice in recent memory—once during an Allied air raid of Nagoya in March 1945 and once in the 1990s in a fire that may have been an accident.[10]

The grounds are relatively large for an urban shrine at 10,152 square meters (just under 110,000 square feet). They include a pond, a small "forest" behind the *honden* (本殿 the main shrine building), a shrine office, a (currently unoccupied) shrine residence, and eleven subshrines (摂社 *sessha* and 末社 *massha*).[11] The shrine also owns a parking lot and an apartment building

[9] For more on the ranking of shrines in this period, see Hardacre, *Shinto*, 373-376.

[10] According to the shrine staff, the perpetrator is known by the police, but was underage, so the shrine staff do not know whether the fire was intentional. Over the course of my time at the shrine, I heard much conjecture about what happened to cause the fire—perhaps the most exciting (although implausible) story was that the youth in question was looking at a pornographic magazine while smoking a cigarette and got so wrapped up in it that he didn't realize the shrine was burning down.

[11] In theory, *sessha* are subshrines that enshrine *kami* that are associated with, related to, or otherwise linked to the *kami* enshrined in the main shrine, while *massha* is just the catch-all term for subshrines on the shrine grounds.

(roughly a five- to ten-minute drive from the shrine), which provide a small amount of additional income. The shrine has roughly 40 to 45 shrine representatives at any given time—usually 20-25% of them are female while the rest are male. Most of the shrine representatives are past retirement age, and many of the female shrine representatives are married to male shrine representatives. The gender dynamics of the shrine representatives are discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

The shrine employed three priests (all female) during my fieldwork.[12] Yamashita (the head priest) and Okada (the third priest) have had their stories detailed in chapter 3, but Ebara (the second priest) was hired out of one of the Shinto university programs. The shrine also employs two clerical/administrative workers part-time, as well as half a dozen *miko*, mostly high school and college students,[13] who come to the shrine to work weddings on the weekends. As one might guess from the large staff, the shrine is fairly lucrative[14]—which is unusual for shrines of its size (see chapter 1). Its current financial state can be traced back to the charisma and hard work of Yamashita—when she took over the shrine in the late 1990s, it was a *kenmusha* (see chapter 1) taken care of part-time by a head priest whose main shrine was elsewhere as well as a

In actuality, the shrine staff are not entirely sure why some of their subshrines are *sessha* while others are *massha*, although they do have fun theories about it.

[12] A fourth priest was hired in April 2021, so I have not been able to meet her, but the shrine will soon go back to only having three priests, as Yamashita is set to retire as head priest at the end of March 2022. See the conclusion.

[13] Both of the current clerical workers are former *miko*, who transitioned into working more in the office (although will still sometimes serve as *miko* when needed). A third woman continues to occasionally serve as a *miko* despite being in her late twenties—she is the daughter of the family that own the kimono store near the shrine. The kimono store and its relation to the shrine are discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

[14] While I do not have numbers for the total yearly income of the shrine, in 2015 its assets were worth a little over 1,000,000,000 yen (approximately $10,000,000 USD). I also offer the monetary details I have concerning the services it provides below, in the text and footnotes.

negi who was also frequently absent. Yamashita's rise to power is discussed in greater depth below.

What Do Priests Actually Do?

Let us begin by thinking about what type of work a priest does. At all shrines, priests perform shrine rituals—these are linked to the specific *kami* of the shrine and follow their own calendar. Often shrines will have one (or sometimes two) monthly festivals (月次祭 *tsukinamisai*), one or more yearly major festivals (大例祭 *taireisai* or 例祭 *reisai*), and other assorted ceremonies for the deities enshrined there. For example, at K Shrine they have a yearly festival for the three deities enshrined in the main shrine as well as one for each of the major subshrines (the Inari Shrine and the Tsushima Shrine), two monthly festivals for the main shrine (held on the 1st and the 15th of each month), and one monthly festival for the Inari Shrine (held on the 8th). All shrines generally have some type of programming for the New Year, and many perform two major purification rites on June 30 and December 31. Some may have festivals for other major calendrical holidays, such as Setsubun (February 3), Hina Matsuri (March 3), Tanabata (generally July 7 or August 7),[15] and *shichi-go-san* (generally November).[16] Some

[15] The exact dates on which Tanabata is celebrated depend on whether the shrine in question follows the Gregorian calendar (July 7), the Gregorian calendar with the one-month delay (月遅れ *tsukiokure*) to compensate for the difference between the lunar and solar calendars (August 7), or the lunar calendar (dates vary depending on the year).

[16] One interesting recent development, which is unfortunately far beyond the bounds of this dissertation, is the temporal expansion of *shichi-go-san* (七五三). The festival celebrates children age three, boys age five, and girls age seven (although, in my experience, many parents ignore the gendered aspect entirely), and is traditionally held on November 15. Since November 15 is not a national holiday, many shrines began celebrating it on the closest weekend—but in order to cater to larger numbers of parents, who might have busy schedules, it gradually came to encompass the entirety of November. In recent years, however, K Shrine has experienced an increase in people requesting *shichi-go-san* ceremonies performed outside of November—we had a caller who scheduled for May

shrines[17] also hold festivals that are linked with the imperial house or that follow the prewar ritual calendar, such as Kigensai (紀元祭 a festival for prayers for a good harvest, linked with National Foundation Day on February 11) or Niinamesai (新嘗祭 a ceremony of thanksgiving for the harvest, linked with a ritual performed by the emperor on November 23).

In addition, most shrines perform individual prayers (御祈祷 *gokitō*) for parishioners upon request. Some of these are performed at the shrine—for example, parishioners might ask for a purification for their car or bicycle, a purification on their "unlucky year" (厄年 *yakudoshi*), a ceremony for a baby's first visit to the shrine (お宮参り *omiyamairi* or 初参り *hatsumairi*), or weddings. These ceremonies are performed for a fee and often provide a sizable amount of the shrine's income—at K Shrine, for example, individual prayers cost 5,000 yen (about $50 USD).

Other ceremonies, *gaisai*, are performed outside of the shrine—priests might be asked to come to a construction site to perform a ground purification ceremony, for example, or they may come to a parishioner's home to perform a purification when they move in (入居祓 *nyūkyobarae*).[18] *Gaisai* tend to cost substantially more than individual prayers performed at the shrine—at K Shrine they are usually around 30,000 yen (about $300 USD).

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while I was working there in 2018. One of the priests hypothesized that parents were scheduling outside of November because it meant A. avoiding the crowds and B. avoiding the inflated prices on kimono and photographers. Other interviewees also noted (often with disapproval) that *shichi-go-san* was becoming unmoored from November.

[17] Interestingly, despite K Shrine having documented support from the imperial court since at least the 10th century, they do not currently celebrate any of the imperial holidays. None of the shrine staff are sure why.

[18] 祓 can be read as either "*harai*/*barai*" or "*harae*/*barae*." My interviewees in Nagoya tended to default to *harae*/*barae*, so I follow their lead here.

Many of my interviewees drew a line between priests who were "ritual only" (神事だけ *shinji dake*) and those who had to do more work. "Ritual only" priests were often (but not always) located at large shrines, where they had large staffs that could handle the non-ritual aspects of shrine management. At smaller shrines, "ritual only" priests tended to be part-time priests administering to a *kenmusha* (see chapter 1)—they generally only showed up for the ritual, while the parishioners handled everything else.

At shrines that don't have support staff or helpful parishioners, priests' duties expand dramatically. They may be responsible for maintaining the shrine grounds—including cleaning (both the shrine spaces and ritual implements), groundskeeping (trimming trees, feeding fish, pulling weeds, cleaning ponds, sweeping walkways, etc.), crafting or repairing ritual implements, sewing or mending vestments, doing laundry, and even unplugging the toilet. Priests may also be responsible for shrine administration, such as keeping track of finances,[19] organizing the parishioners, or organizing non-ritual aspects of the festivals (catering, for example, or contracting musicians). Priests may also run affinity groups at the shrine, such as the Children's Group (子供の会 Kodomo no Kai), the Youth Group (青年会 *seinenkai*), and the Wives' Group (敬神婦人会 *keishin fujinkai*, usually shortened to *fujinkai*). Priests may also be involved with community programming and outreach, such as hosting community organizations at the shrine space, welcoming local elementary schools for field trips, or organizing events with the local community. They may produce a newsletter for the shrine—which requires writing the articles,

[19] One of my interviewees was a licensed accountant before she became a priest, and she insisted on her son also being licensed as an accountant, because of how important it was to keep track of both the shrine's finances and the stream of money from the parking lot the shrine owned.

formatting, printing, and disseminating—or manage the shrine's website and social media. As we can already see, what qualifies as "priests' work" varies widely depending on the shrine.

As we might expect, money is often a motivating factor in expanding the roles a priest must shoulder. On one of my earliest days of fieldwork for this project in summer 2015, I arrived at the shrine to discover that the head priest was missing. As it turned out, she was in the residence on the shrine grounds (社守 *shamori*). The house's former occupants were a pair of elderly sisters who were parishioners; they had lived in the house in exchange for assistance at the shrine. However, one sister had passed away while the other had been hit by a car and had to move into an assisted living facility. In her absence, the house had fallen into disrepair, so the head priest was hoping to clean and renovate it. She could hire a contractor to come and do the renovation, but she wanted to save money by doing as much of it as she could with just the shrine staff. This was a recurring theme in my time at K Shrine—we could have paid someone else to do many of the tasks around the shrine, but, as much as possible, the head priest wanted to keep expenses low. As a result, we hoed out clogged gutters, maintained a small garden behind the shrine office, did basic plumbing repairs, washed and mended our own clothes, cut branches from the *sakaki* trees behind the shrine, did our own account books, and relied on one of the clerical workers (who worked part-time at a veterinary office) to take care of the turtles that lived in the pond.

Attentive readers may notice that the "strong points" of a female priest, as described by my interviewees in chapter 3, map very neatly onto this expanded set of responsibilities. Women's skill at cleaning, cooking, and other housework is an asset at a shrine where the priests are responsible for cleaning the shrine grounds and doing their own laundry. Their "detail-

oriented" nature and familiarity with balancing household budgets will surely be an asset if they are responsible for the shrine finances themselves, while their people skills will be invaluable in interfacing with the community. Female priests who underwent "bride training" (花嫁修業 *hanayome shūgyō*)—instruction in traditional arts such as tea ceremony, flower arranging, and calligraphy as well as homemaking skills such as cooking and mending—when they were younger often noted that they found ways to utilize those skills at the shrine, either by teaching classes in those areas or leveraging those skills in their shrine work. The two weaknesses of female priests that my interviewees raised—"physical labor" and "festivals performed outside the shrine grounds"—on the other hand, are, as we shall see, two of the points that cause the most friction in their lives.

Finally, let us say a quick word about the temporality of shrine work. Shrines are, ideally, supposed to be open every day. In actuality, they are often open less often than this, especially if they are *kenmusha*. However, at many shrines (especially at "main" shrines where there is a full-time priest), there is an expectation that there will be someone in the shrine every day. When Yamashita began working at K Shrine, for example, she was the only priest, so she worked at the shrine every single day. Even with three priests, each of them worked at least eight hours a day, six days a week, and they had to stagger their days off so that the shrine wouldn't be short-staffed. This grueling pace unfortunately does not seem particularly unusual—at one of the successor conferences, for example, Arai Kimiyoshi said that he usually had his shrine open about 300 days a year, with the remaining days spent working at his *kenmusha*.[20]

[20] "Zentai tōgi," *Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūkai Kiyō* 16 (2011), 184.

"A World That Ordinary People Don't See": Behind the Scenes of a Wedding

As one of my interviewees described the work she did at the shrine, she explained that all the organizational work she did behind the scenes was far harder than any of the ritual work she did. "It's a world that ordinary people don't see," she explained, which meant that it was only noticed by "ordinary people" when something went wrong. This description gelled with my experience at K Shrine, where we often spent most of the day doing "behind the scenes" work, with only brief interludes for (public) ritual work.

To offer a glimpse into the work—both seen by visitors to the shrine and unseen behind-the-scenes—that is carried out by the priests at the shrine, let us focus in on a single ceremony: a wedding. Weddings are a major source of income for K Shrine,[21] and part of the reason they can employ a full-time staff. During peak wedding season (May to early July), K Shrine staff perform three to seven weddings a weekend—most at the shrine but a few at hotels and other wedding venues nearby. The weddings at the shrine are scheduled in two-hour blocks.

Let us take the perspective of a guest at a ceremony being performed at 11 am. We arrive at the shrine sometime between 10 am and 11 am, and join the other guests in the reception hall. We sit around low tables, drink auspicious *konbucha* (昆布茶 a "tea" made from dried, ground seaweed mixed with hot water), nibble on snacks, and make small talk. A little before 11 am, we line up and process into the *honden*, wash our hands at a hand-washing station just inside the doors, and then take a seat (on either the bride or groom's side) at a table inside the *honden*. The

[21] Weddings at K Shrine are 60,000 yen (about $600 USD) for a ceremony with recorded music and no *miko* dance, 80,000 yen (about $800 USD) for recorded music with *miko* dance, and 120,000 yen (about $1,200 USD) for live music and *miko* dance. The use of two of the three rooms in the shrine office (the banquet room and two smaller rooms that can be used for changing) is included in the above fees, but the couple can pay an additional 4,000 yen (about $40 USD) to use the third room.

priest then performs a purification ceremony, followed by a reading of *norito* (祝詞 a liturgy). The bride and groom ritually exchange *sake* (三々九度 *sansankudo*), and then read a pledge to the *kami* together.[22] If the family has shelled out for an offering of dance by the *miko*, they perform here, accompanied either by live musicians or—the less expensive option—a CD. The bride and groom then offer a *tamagushi* (玉串 a branch of the *sakaki* tree; see below) to the *kami*, followed by a representative of each family offering a *tamagushi*. All the guests then drink a sip of *sake* and eat a mouthful of dried squid (鯣 *surume*) together, and the officiating priest offers a few words of congratulation to the couple and their families. The guests then process out of the *honden* to take photos and make their way to the reception venue. The whole ceremony has taken forty minutes total, during which the priest's only role was reading two liturgies written in impenetrable classical Japanese and speaking for a few minutes at the end of the ceremony.

But let us take a step behind the scenes, to see what work—ritual and otherwise—goes into putting on a wedding ceremony.

First, there is scheduling of the ceremony. Weddings are often scheduled a year or more in advance, especially if they are set to take place during wedding season. Keeping track of all the different weddings requires maintaining (and constantly updating) a calendar, as well as a file folder with briefs on each wedding party—the names of the bride and groom, their ages, the number of participants in each party, what add-ons they have purchased (musicians, *miko* dance,

[22] Unlike at many other shrines, the bride and groom read the pledge in unison. The standard format is for the bride to only read her own name and leave the rest of the recitation to the groom.

the use of the reception hall, the use of the other rooms at the shrine for changing), whether they will be getting dressed at the shrine (and whether they will have professionals to help with kimono, make-up, and photography), and more. These briefs might also include information about accessibility—whether any of the members of the party will be using a wheelchair, for example, necessitating a slightly modified procession route, which avoids the stairs in favor of the ramp into the *honden*. They must also keep track of payment—when it will be delivered, and from whom it will be received.

If the couple are paying for live musicians, the shrine staff must reach out to the *gagaku* musicians they regularly employ (for both weddings and other major festivals at the shrine) to coordinate. All the musicians K Shrine contracts work part-time,[23] so they must reach out to the leader, who contacts the individual members to check availability before returning in a few days with a list of the members who will be attending.

Many of the weddings at K Shrine are contracted through bridal companies, which often requires communicating both with corporate headquarters and with the specific consultants who will be dispatched to the shrine on the day of the ceremony. Of course, maintaining a good relationship with bridal companies is important, as they can direct clients toward shrines where they have favorable relationships with the staff. During the important "observation" (見学 *kengaku*) visits to the shrine—where prospective clients tour the shrine grounds, meet a priest, and ask any questions they might have about holding a ceremony there—the priest often serves in a customer service capacity, having to be personable without being pushy. Having good rapport with the representative from the wedding service agency can be an asset here, too, as

[23] The leader of the group works full-time as an English teacher, for example. Another member of the group is a full-time artist, part-time priest, and part-time *gagaku* musician.

they can talk up the shrine and exchange friendly banter with the priest, further cementing their affable image.

If the couple are not contracting a bridal company to arrange the details of their ceremony, the priest might suggest that they contract the services of businesses that are close to the shrine. For example, K Shrine has a good relationship with a local kimono store run by the Tomoda family—the matriarch of the family is a shrine representative, and their daughter has served as a *miko* at the shrine for many years, in addition to being a certified cosmetologist. If the couple mentions searching for a good kimono rental store, the priest can refer them to the Tomodas; their shop, after all, is located so conveniently, and the shrine staff can vouch for their services. The shrine has similar relationships with a local confectionary store, so if the couple are looking for snacks to serve their guests as they wait for the ceremony to start, the priests can quickly offer their contact information.

Once the date of the ceremony has been set, the couple must come to the shrine for a rehearsal. This rehearsal usually takes place in the week before the ceremony, and takes half an hour to an hour. A priest teaches the bride and groom the rituals they must perform for the ceremony—many people have never offered a *tamagushi* before, for example, and must be taught the correct hand motions. This is also an opportunity for the bride and groom to ask any questions of the priest, as well as for the priest to get to know the bride and groom (and either deepen an existing relationship or begin building a new one). The rehearsal is often also when the shrine receives the payment (in cash), which must be logged and safely stored in the shrine's safe until the bank representative's next visit.[24]

[24] Due to the large amounts of cash that are accepted for many private ceremonies at the shrine (the shrine does not accept credit cards or other electronic payment methods), the shrine staff do not feel safe carrying it to the bank

Figure 5.1 Offering trays. Left: rice, sake, salt, and water. Right: mushrooms, dried squid, and two types of seaweed.

On the day of the ceremony, the morning ceremonies must be performed to open the shrine—these ceremonies are performed every day, regardless of the other ceremonies scheduled. The morning ceremonies require the preparation of offerings—one tray with salt, water, rice, and sake; one with offerings from the mountains and the sea (Figure 5.1); and one with fresh produce, often purchased from the farmer's market that operates out of the shrine six times a month. While the first two trays are prepared every day (with the first tray made fresh every day and the second reused), the third is usually only prepared when there is a special ceremony (such as a wedding) on the schedule. The priest performing the morning ceremonies (or, occasionally, the ethnographer assisting the priest) places these offerings on the main altar after performing a purification rite, and then the priest reads the morning liturgies.[25]

Once the morning ceremonies are complete, the inside of the *honden* must be prepared for the ceremony. As illustrated in Figure 5.2, this requires setting out tables and folding canvas

to deposit themselves. Instead, a visit by the bank representative is scheduled once every few weeks. The bank representative will generally go over the account books with one of the priests, and then carry the cash in an armored box (usually attached to the back of a motorized scooter) to the bank for deposit.

[25] These include the *chōhai norito* (朝拜祝詞) and the *ōharae norito* (大祓祝詞).

Figure 5.2 The inside of the honden*, prepared for a wedding ceremony. The bride and groom are seated in the center, while guests are seated on either side, facing toward the center. Note the small wooden trays in front of each setting and the electric fan in the upper right. One of the priests (center) speaks to the musicians, who are in the process of setting up.*

Figure 5.3 Ritual implements for the wedding ceremony. From left to right: tamagushi, sake *vessels, and the set of plates for the* sansankudo *(三々九度 ritual exchange of* sake *between the bride and groom). The tray on the far right contains extra bags of shredded squid.*

chairs, as well as small trays with a *sake* plate and a small bag of shredded, dried squid for each guest. While the furniture is intentionally designed to be relatively light, set-up does require a certain amount of heavy lifting. If the weather is particularly hot or humid, the priests may also set up portable fans to help cool down the *honden*.

The ritual implements for the wedding also need to be prepared (see Figure 6.3). While the set of *sake* plates used for the *sansankudo* only need to be washed between uses, the decorations on top of the *sake* vessels need to be inspected after each use and occasionally replaced, if they have been damaged. The *tamagushi* are made from fresh *sakaki* branches and *shide* (紙垂), pieces of paper cut and folded to look like lightning. The *sakaki* branches are cut from trees on the shrine grounds. At least once a week, one of the priests heads into the (mosquito-infested) grove of trees behind the shrine with a pair of tree clippers to cut down suitable branches, and then takes them to the shrine office to cut them down to the correct size. The branches are then stored in buckets of water in the shrine office (see Figure 5.4) and reused until they wilt. The *shide* are also constructed at the shrine (Figure 5.5), using a series of cardboard forms (with slit marks to guide cuts), an awl, printer paper, and straw rope. They must be regularly replaced, as they are easy to tear or water-damage (especially when stored in buckets of water).

Figure 5.4 Tamagushi *stored in buckets of water in the shrine office. Note the artificial* tamagushi *in the left back corner, which is used when the existing fresh* tamagushi *are unusable and no one has had time to cut new* sakaki *branches, or on occasions when transporting fresh* sakaki *is inconvenient.*

Figure 5.5 Shide *are constructed at the shrine by* miko*, priests, or ethnographers trying to make themselves helpful.*

Back in the shrine office, preparations are in full swing. While the priest officiating is technically supposed to copy out a fresh *norito* for each ceremony she performs, in actuality she copies the relevant information for the bride and groom onto a sticky note which she can stick

inside her folded *norito* and refer to whenever she hits a section that requires personalization.[26] The brief must be checked again, and pieces of paper with the bride and groom's names must be printed so that they can be posted outside of the shrine office. If the bride and groom have paid for additional rooms to serve as changing and make-up rooms, the priests must prepare those rooms—moving the tables and chairs used for shrine representative meetings to the edge of the room, for example, and making sure that the full-length mirrors have been moved into the rooms.

Figure 5.6 The reception hall, ready for guests. Note the snack plates in the middle of each table, as well as the Minnie and (off-camera) Mickey Mouse dolls to designate the bride and groom's respective sides.

Meanwhile, the reception hall must be prepped for the guests (Figure 5.6). The low tables must be dragged into the correct configuration in the reception hall, and the brief must be

[26] These sorts of tricks were extremely common among my interviewees, who rarely had time to write a *norito* from scratch every time they wanted to perform a ceremony. Perhaps the most impressive feat was a woman who told me that she was too busy to write *norito*, so she simply held up a piece of blank paper and improvised. "They [the people receiving the ceremony] bow their heads, so no one notices it's blank," she explained. Her former career as a Japanese language (国語 *kokugo*) teacher may have contributed to her ability to improvise archaic language.

checked and rechecked to lay out the correct number of seating cushions for the guests. The priests spoon dried *konbucha* into teacups, and boil water for a hot water dispenser so that guests can serve themselves. If the couple have bought snacks for their guests, the priests tastefully arrange those on communal plates, which are placed on the tables for guests to enjoy.

The shrine staff must also interface with the representatives from the bridal company, as well as any additional staff at the wedding—the photographer, the employee(s) from the kimono store, or the make-up artist. If the couple has paid for live music, they must prepare a space for the musicians to change and wait. Usually, they leave a dispenser of tea (either hot or cold, depending on the season), and a few snacks (often donated by visitors; see below) for the musicians to enjoy.

As the guests filter into the shrine, it is time for the officiating priest (and sometimes the head priest, if she is not officiating) to network, greeting those with whom she is already acquainted and inquiring after their families. K Shrine is known as a wedding site, so many of the couples getting married there have no previous relationship with the shrine. However, through the positive memories associated with their wedding—and their positive interactions with the priests (especially the head priest)—they cultivate a years-long relationship with the shrine, often coming back to visit even if they move out of the area. While doing fieldwork at the shrine, especially during large events, such as New Year's and the summer festival, I was introduced to countless couples who had gotten married at the shrine, and then came back for *omiyamairi*, the summer festival, *shichi-go-san*, and other life events. If the priests make a positive impression on the guests, they might be cultivating the beginning of a relationship that could benefit the shrine both socially and economically.

When the priest performing the ceremony (plus two *miko*, serving as assistants, even if the couple has not paid for them to dance) leads the procession into the shrine, even more work needs to be done. Since weddings are scheduled in two-hour blocks, there are only twenty minutes between the end of the 11 am ceremony and the arrival of the 1 pm ceremony. Whoever isn't officiating the ceremony in the *honden* springs into action, cleaning up whatever detritus has been left in the reception hall. Since most guests dislike the taste of *konbucha* (but are too polite—or else don't have enough experience—to refuse to drink it outright), this clean-up often requires cleaning the congealed, sludgy remains from dozens of teacups, drying them, and then prepping *konbucha* for the next group. The banner for the next couple must be printed—although it cannot be replaced until the last group clears out.

Through this brief vignette, one can see that the work priests perform extends far beyond the bounds of the ritual itself and requires many different skill sets. Within the bounds of a single wedding ceremony, priests are sales representatives, event planners, crafters, accountants, and more. In addition, there are numerous "contact points" when a priest's gender may affect (whether positively or negatively) her interactions with clients, wedding guests, bridal company consultants, local confectionary shop employees, bank representatives, and more.

Snacks, Parishioners, and Community Connection

In the center of the shrine office at K Shrine, there is a low shelf with a counter on top. On top of the counter are the tea dispensers (hot in the winter and cold in the summer) and an ever-rotating collection of snacks. Sometimes the snacks are bought by the shrine staff—souvenirs of travel, for example, or homemade baked goods—but most of them are donated by

visitors to the shrine. During the summer gift-giving season, *ochūgen* (お中元), the connections between the shrine and the local community took physical form, in the shape of the pile of snacks that covered the entire counter. A shrine representative dropped off freshly made roll cakes, the Tomoda daughter brought flowering tea, the leader of the *gagaku* troupe dropped by to gift an entire box of jellies, a parishioner dropped off an assortment of rice crackers, and another local priest came by with popsicles for everyone. The tower of snacks became so large that we began having multiple "snack breaks" in our day and offering snacks along with the obligatory tea to visitors to the shrine—passing the rice crackers and cookies and small cakes that symbolized the shrine's connection to the community back to different members of that community.

Not all connections—or snacks—are positive, however. One day, Mizuguchi, a parishioner, came to the shrine to consult with the head priest and brought (quite expensive) fried chicken as a gift. As the head priest ushered her to a private room to talk, a small panic broke out among the remaining staff in the shrine office. All food gifted to the shrine must be offered to the *kami* before being consumed, but we could not offer the chicken—poultry[27] was not a permissible food offering. To make matters worse, Mizuguchi had apparently come to ask the head priest to curse her brother—despite the head priest having already explained to her that it was not within her power to curse someone, nor was it ethically right to do so. But we could not refuse to accept the chicken, nor could the head priest refuse to listen to Mizuguchi. One of the priests stowed the box in her bag once Mizuguchi wasn't looking—with apologies to the *kami*, she would consume the offending chicken at home—while the head priest took two hours out of

[27] Some shrines include birds among their offerings—K Shrine does not. The only meat that is ever offered at K Shrine is seafood (fish and squid, mostly). Additionally, cooked meat of any type is never a permissible offering.

an extremely busy day to try to talk Mizuguchi down (again) and convince her that cursing her brother would not improve her life.

Unlike larger shrines, which can depend on tourist revenues, small- and midsized shrines depend heavily on community support. The relationship between shrines and local communities is so complex that it cannot be covered in detail within the confines of this dissertation, so let us focus here on one aspect of it: the relationship between shrine staff and parishioners/shrine representatives. The importance of the priest-parishioner (or priest-shrine representative) relationship is a theme that came up over and over in my interviews. Part-time priests often relied heavily on shrine representatives for administrative support, but even at shrines where the parishioners do not have much legal or administrative control over the workings of the shrine, parishioner support can make or break a shrine community. The need to cultivate and maintain community support meant that priests often had to learn to manage opinionated parishioners, unpleasant parishioners, or parishioners who wanted to exchange fried chicken for a curse on their brother—without alienating them. As we shall see later in this chapter, this desire to avoid alienating parishioners also sometimes meant accepting harassment and abuse.

A variety of different factors can contribute to the varied relationships between the priest(s) and their parishioners. First, there is the obvious gendered aspect—shrine representatives tend to be male, and they may not take kindly to a female priest entering their space and taking an authoritative position. However, other factors we might consider include: how the shrine representatives imagine their authority vis a vis the priest, whether the shrine representatives imagine the property of the shrine as belonging to the priest or the members of the community, whether the priest is full-time or part-time, how long the shrine family (if there is one) has been serving at the shrine, under what circumstances the priest succeeded to their

position, whether the shrine representatives are chosen based on a long residence or history of commitment to the shrine, the age of the priest, and more. All these different factors can contribute to clashes in authority between the priest and shrine representatives. I offer some quick sketches of these relationships below to demonstrate both how varied these relationships are and how gender is often only one of the operant variables determining a priest's experience.

Let us start with K Shrine. Yamashita, whose story was recounted in chapter 3, became a priest because the person who was supposed to be in line to take over as head priest was deemed unfit by the shrine representatives, who went to the prefectural Jinjachō office to eject him. Although she entered the position with the full support of the shrine representatives, she quickly began butting heads with them—the shrine had previously been a *kenmusha*, and the shrine representatives oversaw the day-to-day workings of the shrine while the head priest only visited to perform rituals. Yamashita, on the other hand, was in residence at the shrine every day, and wanted to be involved in the decision-making process. This peeved some of the shrine representatives, and several of them went to Jinjachō to complain that their head priest was always at the shrine. Jinjachō laughed at them, and then immediately reported their insubordination to Yamashita. Yamashita explained that they had not been used to having to consult with the head priest before making decisions and thought that they were above her—which was not helped by her being the first female priest in the shrine's history. Although her relationship with the shrine representatives has improved since then, especially given that her constant presence in the shrine has contributed to its current economic prosperity, I still saw friction between some of the older (male) shrine representatives and the priests. Male shrine representatives sometimes complained about the shrine staff's attitudes—they were stubborn or lazy or sloppy or rude or not deferential enough. Two of the staff told me that there were issues

when they first started working there because they were “outsiders” who were born in the distant land of Gifu (the neighboring prefecture, about an hour away by train), so they were viewed with suspicion. In one case, the shrine representatives refused to learn a priest’s name for her first three years working there.

Other interviewees found that their gender was an asset in interfacing with their parishioners. Nikawa’s father had taken over as head priest from his uncle, and Nikawa decided to get certification to help her father. Her father had always had issues with his shrine representatives, in part because of the structure of the shrine representatives in the area. There were a group of nine shrines in the area, but the *kami* enshrined in Nikawa’s family shrine was the “parent” (祖神 *oyagami*) of the others. As a result, the shrine representatives for Nikawa’s family shrine were promoted from the pool of shrine representatives at other shrines, leading them to be slightly older on average and think very highly of themselves. As a result, the shrine representatives looked down on her father, and he was constantly getting into fights with them. When Nikawa became a priest, however, the shrine representatives thought she was “cute” and were much more supportive. She still butted heads with them occasionally, but she found that over time she convinced them to be more cooperative.

Some of my interviewees who married into shrine families found that their status as “outsiders” to the community impacted their relationship with their shrine representatives. When I was conducting early interviews for this project, I sat down with Kobayashi, a gregarious woman in her sixties. I had recently interviewed her daughter (see chapter 3), who had shared many stories of the hardships her mother had undergone when she had entered the priesthood, so I was excited to hear what she might be willing to share. While the younger Kobayashi was born

into a shrine family, her mother had married into a shrine family and only gained certification because her husband didn't have the time (or interest) to enter the priesthood. I asked how the parishioners had reacted when she started serving at the shrine. "For the first three years, they looked at me like I was *doko no uma no hone* (どこの馬の骨)," she explained. She must have seen the look of confusion on my face—"the bones of a horse from where" was not easy to parse—and she gestured to my electronic dictionary, which was sitting on the table between us, giving me permission to pause the interview to look up the phrase. As I discovered, "*doko no uma no hone*" is an evocative phrase referring to a person of suspicious or unknown origin. This phrase appeared again and again in my interviews, as female priests (especially those who had not been born into the shrine lineage in which they served) tried to describe the distrust, disdain, and suspicion they had to navigate upon their entrance to the priesthood.

Some of my interviewees butted heads with their shrine representatives over their salaries, because their shrine representatives had the impression that the priest was their employee. The elder Kobayashi, for example, reported that the shrine representatives on the board of directors told her point-blank that if they didn't like her, they would fire her. A few of them were upset that she was paid, since she was "volunteering" at the shrine—she then had to explain the difference between "*hōshi*" (奉仕) and "*borantia*" (ボランティア), the transliteration of the English "volunteer." She explained that she was doing "*hōshi*" not "*borantia*," so she should be paid. Itsuki, another part-time priest who took certification to take over the shrine from her ailing father-in-law, had similar issues at her shrine. When she started, one of her parishioners objected to her holding a second job, as they felt that she was greedy to want two salaries. She pointed out that her "salary" at the shrine was only in the range of a few

tens of thousands of yen (several hundred USD), but the parishioner pointed out that her husband worked full-time in a company, so she was really getting *three* salaries. Although many priests cannot support themselves and their families on the income from the shrine alone (see chapter 1), some parishioners still have a perception that gaining *any* income from the shrine is morally wrong. Clashing with the housewife imperative for married women (see chapter 3), female priests may be especially subject to scrutiny for taking a salary as a priest. It is worth noting, however, that none of my widowed interviewees reported questioning from their parishioners on this point—if they were the sole supporter of their children, perhaps it was more permissible for them to receive a salary.

Being the only woman in a room full of men was often a source of tension for my interviewees. Iida's grandfather had been the previous priest (her father had also been a priest but died very young), but he passed away just as she was finishing up her certification. Although her husband had married into the family (婿入り *mukoiri*), he worked full-time outside the shrine and refused to take certification. Her uncle was the head priest on paper, but he only appeared at the shrine for the biggest festival of the year (例祭 *reisai*) and left the rest of the shrine management to Iida. Iida experienced issues with both her board of directors and their wives—she was, after all, the sole woman in a normally homosocial space, which ruffled the feathers of the men and caused the women to treat her with suspicion. She, in her words, decided to become friends with the men, eventually winning over "even the most stubborn old man." She took a different tack with the women by starting a wives' group (婦人会 *fujinkai*) at the shrine, which allowed her to get to know the women in the neighborhood better and helped thaw some of the chilly atmosphere. Iida's story echoes points that many of my interviewees

raised—often most or all their shrine representatives were men, so they may have disliked the idea of female priests being their equals or even superiors. Even when the shrine representatives were not overtly sexist, the homosocial nature of much socialization in Japan meant that female priests felt that they were at a disadvantage when it came to networking with men—much in the same way that the female workers Nemoto studied were often at a disadvantage in companies with a masculine organizational culture.[28] Being the only woman in a room full of men often elicited suspicion that something untoward was occurring behind closed doors. As we shall see, the very dynamics that engender suspicion against female priests entering previously homosocial situations also leave them vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse.

A final group of interviewees never managed to find a workable equilibrium with their shrine representatives. I interviewed Fukano together with her friend Ninomiya. Ninomiya was a gregarious woman in her sixties, the fourth daughter of a shrine family who was left to inherit the shrine when all her older sisters fled. Fukano, on the other hand, was a much more reserved woman in her forties, who had taken over her husband's family shrine after his death. When I asked if they'd had any issues with their parishioners, both of them laughed. "This is for you," Ninomiya said, gesturing to Fukano to go first.

Fukano had originally wanted to take certification while her husband was still alive, but her husband objected, saying that priests were men. However, her husband passed away when her son was still in elementary school, leaving the shrine without a priest. Another head priest in the area took over her family shrine as a *kenmusha*, but he recommended that Fukano take certification herself. Fukano decided to follow his advice, but the shrine representatives opposed

[28] Kumiko Nemoto, "When Culture Resists Progress: Masculine Organizational Culture and Its Impacts on the Vertical Segregation of Women in Japanese Companies," *Work, Employment and Society* 27, no. 1 (2013), 157.

her. She persisted in gaining certification, but her relationship with the parishioners has remained strained to the present. She explained:

> **Fukano:** I came [to the shrine] as a bride; I wasn't an adoptive daughter (養子娘 *yōshi musume*). It's different if you're born and raised at a shrine, and you're introduced like, "This is my daughter." But it was like I was a stranger. I think it's different if you're a groom, if you're a man, but for me, they didn't know who I was and treated me with suspicion (どこの馬の骨かも分からん *doko no uma no hone ka mo wakaran*).[29] […][30] "Is it really okay for her to be doing the festivals? She's a woman, and she's polluted," [the parishioners worried]. My shrine's fall festival was [historically] a festival performed by men only. […] I was the first woman to enter the festival, probably. […] The times are changing, but when I started, they would say, "It would be okay if it's a man, but women are no good."
>
> **Ninomiya:** Old people say that, not young people. Elderly folks. Because they have an old-fashioned way of thinking, right?
>
> **F:** Yes.
>
> **N:** [Fukano]-san has a son, right? So she has to try her best until he succeeds (継ぐ *tsugu*).
>
> **F:** Yes, but if my child was a daughter, I probably wouldn't have been able [to become a priest].
>
> **N:** You wouldn't have succeeded [your husband].
>
> **F:** The people around me wouldn't have thought that [I could] succeed [in the interim for a daughter]. […] It really feels like it's gender discrimination (男女差別 *danjo sabetsu*). But the reality is that those elderly folks think, "It's better if it's a man." It doesn't matter if I'm good or bad at ritual technique, if I'm old or young, if I'm, if I'm—
>
> **N:** If you're fat or thin—
>
> **F:** [laughing] If I'm big or small—
>
> **N:** It's better if it's a man!

Fukano explained that now her shrine representatives had gotten better at hiding their distaste for her, but she was counting down the days until the current group rotated out. (They served on a

[29] Note again the use of the "horse bone" phrasing here.

[30] I have removed much of the crosstalk from this quotation for space and legibility reasons, as Ninomiya kept interjecting to emphasize or elucidate on particular points.

two-year rotation at her shrine.) Later in the conversation, Ninomiya noted that while she had no issue dealing with her shrine representatives, her son thought that having to listen to the shrine representatives was "tiresome." "It is tiresome," Fukano agreed. She felt the judging eyes of her parishioners everywhere she went—she explained that she had to always think about what she was wearing when she went out on walks, so she tried to only go out when no one was around. The judging eyes of the parishioners were a common theme across all my interviews—regardless of the priest's relationship to their parishioners, many of my interviewees modified their behavior to prevent questioning from parishioners (see chapter 3). They sometimes felt a lack of division between their public and private lives—being a priest meant that any and all of their behavior could be scrutinized, so they had no "off hours."

Fukano's parishioners rejected her because of her gender, even as they needed her until her son came of age. She blames her positionality on their rejection—if she were a shrine daughter it would be different, but as an "outsider" to the shrine world who married in, the parishioners had no affection for her. Her decision to become a priest against their wishes also certainly contributed to their animosity toward her. She was hyperaware of their judgment—in their gaze when she left the house, in the offhanded comments they made about her unsuitability as a priest—but she also could not escape it without turning her back on the shrine (and disrespecting her husband's family legacy).

Fukano's story highlights one of the major divisions within my interviewees: those born into shrine families and those who were not. Those who were born into shrine families often worried that those who were only entering the shrine in adulthood had not been socialized into Shinto in the same ways that they had, but often praised those from "ordinary" families (especially those who did not enter the shrine world through marriage) for having stronger

"passion" (熱心 *nesshin*), unlike those who had been forced into becoming a priest by the circumstances of their birth. Those born into ordinary families, on the other hand, sometimes resented those born into shrine families for the easy acceptance they experienced from their parishioners as well as what they perceived as the shrine-born priests' sense of superiority. In reality, female priests from all backgrounds reported experiencing resistance from and issues with their parishioners—the main difference was how that resistance took shape. Female priests (regardless of their background) experienced resistance for stepping into an authoritative role or were treated with suspicion for entering previously homosocial spaces, but female priests who were born into ordinary families were much more likely to report being treated as an outsider or an unknown quantity.

However, Fukano did not have the worst relationship with her parishioners among my interviewees. One woman[31] told me that her shrine had abolished having parishioners altogether, switching instead to entirely relying on worshipers. The shrine had been having issues with the surrounding community for years, as there was substantial friction over both the need to collect money to renovate the shrine (which some members of the local community thought was unnecessary) and the decision to move one of the *kenmusha* onto the main shrine's grounds to free up land to build a preschool (which would offer some much-needed additional income to the impoverished shrine). The breaking point, however, was when the shrine staff discovered that some of the shrine representatives had opened a secret bank account with the shrine's name on it. Since the male priests at the shrine worked full-time outside the shrine, while the female priest was busy raising small children, they had (as is common at many shrines with part-time priests)

[31] I am not sharing her pseudonym for this section, both at her request and because of the criminal nature of the allegations.

entrusted the finances to the shrine representatives. The shrine representatives, however, had extorted money from the local community, put it in the secret account, and then committed tax fraud (since religious corporations are taxed differently). The same perpetrators had also lied to members of the local community about the shrine staff, which had compounded the existing friction. Although the priests went around to their neighbors to try to correct their misconceptions, they ultimately decided that they didn't want to deal with parishioners anymore, and instead recruited people for the board of directors based on their commitment to the shrine (and their trustworthiness) rather than their physical proximity. The prefectural Jinjachō supported the transition, and they have not had major issues since then.

These issues with parishioner resistance are not unique to Shinto. The narratives of the female Buddhist priests Mark Rowe interviewed share many similarities with my interviewees. Ishida, for example, took over her husband's temple after his death, in circumstances very similar to Fukano's. Even though her parishioners wanted "people they knew as family to take over" until her son came of age,[32] she still experienced opposition from parishioners at first.[33] Jessica Starling, too, discusses the way that economic factors that require male Buddhist priests to work outside the home (see chapter 1) often leave their wives to serve as ritualists during the week. However, as she notes,

> [t]he fact that temple wives are the most logical or convenient choice to step in as priest during the week [...] does not mean that the transition from wife to priest is without its problems. While temple family women are seen as "good enough" to perform priestly duties in their husbands' absence, they are usually not parishioners' first choice.[34]

[32] Mark Rowe, "Charting Known Territory: Female Buddhist Priests," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 88-89.

[33] Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 87.

[34] Jessica Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home: Domestic Religion in the Contemporary Jōdo Shinshū* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 110.

When it comes to succession, as well, she notes that

> [t]he stakes of temple succession are actually broader than just a single-family line: the parishioners are also stakeholders, and their expectations often guide the succession process. Still, the stake felt most acutely by temple wives who guard the temple by becoming its *jūshoku* [priest in residence] is likely their obligation to care for and protect their own family members.[35]

We can see here the tensions already discussed in chapters 1-3 between wishing to maintain familial continuity and seeing female ritualists as inferior to male ones. Monika Schrimpf also reports a Buddhist female priest who was "skipped in a rotating system of succession to a leading position. The reason she was given was that there was no precedent for a female leader."[36] Without a need to use a female ritualist to maintain a lineage, it may be easier to just exclude or skip her. Parishioner support is necessary for Buddhist temples, the same as Shinto shrines, so parishioners may hold sway over succession—or, when they have no choice in who serves, may make their dissatisfaction clear to the clergy.

Finally, it is important to note that shrine communities do not begin and end with parishioners, and many of my interviewees made a special effort to expand their support base. Sanada is the oldest person I have interviewed for this project (she was eighty at the time of interview). She was born into a shrine family, but the shrine she served at had not historically belonged to her family. Her shrine was in an urban area, next to a highway that had been built in the postwar period, and therefore there were only five or six people still living within her parishioner area. It had been a *kenmusha* before she had received it from an overburdened priest, who wanted to cut down on the number of shrines he had to take care of. (The lack of income

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[35] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 127.

[36] Monika Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?: Self-Understandings of Ordained Buddhist Women in Contemporary Japan," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 4 (2015), 196.

from the shrine may have been a motivating factor as well, although she did not mention it.) The shrine was not exactly the quiet, secluded space that visitors might want, and the lack of people living in the vicinity meant that the shrine was dependent upon worshipers rather than parishioners for support. Although the shrine owned a parking lot that provided some income, Sanada admitted that she paid for most things at the shrine out of her own pocket. Still, over the course of the four hours we spoke, she told me story after story of the different innovations she had adopted to increase engagement with the shrine. She cooked full meals for the *naorai* (直会), the meal eaten after a ritual, both because it saved money and because the shrine's supporters appreciated her home-cooking. When the *honden* needed costly repairs to its roof, she couldn't find anyone willing to donate, but once she offered to put people's names on the roof tiles, with the tiles closest to the center of the shrine (正中 *seichū*) paying more, suddenly people were clamoring to support the shrine. She invited a tea ceremony instructor from the Urasenke school to do tea ceremony at the shrine in conjunction with one of the town's big festivals. She bought special *happi* (法被 a traditional straight-sleeved coat worn for festivals) for group leaders to wear during festivals, and she gave the other shrine representatives sashes in the colors of the five directions so that they would feel special. Each of her innovations was geared toward inviting more people into her community and making them feel appreciated, even if the shrine wasn't the type of secluded, picturesque spot that would lure in tourists.

Like *bōmori* who become community leaders[37] and female Buddhist priests who create programming aimed at mothers,[38] many of the female priests I interviewed thought deeply about how to draw their local communities closer to the shrine. Female priests cooked for their parishioners, made sure that they had special *happi* and sashes so they would stand out at festivals, held special classes and events at the shrine, and invited local community organizations to take advantage of the shrine's space to host their events. K Shrine, for example, regularly hosted one of the neighborhood associations (町内会 *chōnaikai*); a group of model train enthusiasts; a local assisted living facility for mentally ill and developmentally disabled people, who would come clean the shrine once a month; a farmer's market; and a charity bazaar in conjunction an NGO that focused on education in Bangladesh, in which Yamashita actively participated. Other shrines where I did fieldwork hosted pop-up cafés, mobile libraries, *gagaku* clubs, choruses, tea ceremony clubs, calligraphy classes, and more. Many priests spoke of the importance of these activities in bringing people closer to the shrine and the *kami* and making the shrine feel more familiar, which meant that participants would be more likely to be drawn into the shrine's ritual activities or contract the shrine for individual prayers in the future. In summer 2016, Pokémon GO was released, and many shrines were designated PokéStops (where players could pick up virtual items) or Gyms (where players could battle each other for territory). While some priests didn't want people coming to the shrine just to catch virtual monsters,[39] others

[37] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 47-48.

[38] Niwa Nobuko, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku: Nichiren-shū josei sōryō no jirei kara* (Tokyo: Kōyō Shobō, 2019), 98-101.

[39] In one of the most surreal conversations of my fieldwork, I had to explain to an older priest that Nintendo had not released literal wild animals onto her shrine grounds—Pokémon were fully virtually and did not occupy space in real life. This conversation occurred while the *miko* were stealthily trying to catch Pokémon on their smart phones behind her back.

brainstormed how they might be able to utilize this influx in foot traffic to bring people closer to the *kami*. One priest showed me a copy of a notice printed by another shrine that she had seen circulating on the internet, eager to hear whether I (as a "youth") thought that such an approach might be effective at her own shrine.

Parishioner support (and shrine representative support) was essential for my interviewees—it meant that they could hold major festivals, pay for the upkeep of their shrine, and have a stable (if sometimes meagre) salary. We can see a large variety of different relationships between priests and their shrine representatives (and parishioners) just in this small sampling of stories, although we might note that they are often shaped by similar social dynamics and concerns about authority. The solutions that priests used to better their relationships with (or at least endure) their surrounding communities, however, were highly individualized and addressed the localized issue rather than the systemic one—whether that was starting a *fujinkai* to win over suspicious wives, severing the shrine's relationship with problematic parishioners, increasing community programming, or simply gritting one's teeth and waiting for ornery shrine representatives to rotate out. There was no way to eject a problematic or abrasive person from the community—unless they were breaking the law and stealing money from the shrine. Someone committing the lesser sin of merely being unpleasant—or demanding a curse on their brother—simply needed to be endured.

Physical Demands of Shrine Work and Gendered Division of Labor

Working as a priest is physically demanding, especially at a small or midsized shrine where the priest is responsible for cleaning and upkeep. When I asked interviewees for their

strongest memories of working at their shrines, they often related memories of extreme physical suffering or pain. In addition to the physical hardships posed by priest training and ritual technique (chapter 4), the heavy clothes of priests and the lack of insulation from extreme heat and cold in most shrines mean that for many priests, just existing within the shrine was a physically demanding experience.

I decided to work New Year's at K Shrine in 2018, to better understand many of the stories my interviewees had been telling me. I knew that the shrine would be busy—the peak of the New Year's rush tends to last for the first three days of the New Year. The shrine was open nonstop from 9 am on December 31 to 9 pm on January 1 and then from 8 am to 9 pm on the subsequent two days. Even once they went back to normal operating hours, the shrine saw heightened activity (and often informally extended hours) well into mid-January, and most of the shrine staff could not take any time off for a week or more.

When I asked the shrine staff about it in advance, they said that it was one of the hardest times of year. "Oh, everyone gets *shimoyake* (霜焼け)," one of the *miko* mentioned to me casually—a statement that alarmed me, because *shimoyake* means "frostbite." (It also, I later discovered, means "chilblains," which is what she meant.) I got tips for staying warm from the shrine staff—thermal leggings underneath *hakama*, white three-quarters sleeve thermal shirt, five-toed socks under my *tabi*—but we could not cover our hands or heads, since we had to wear ritual vestments. We had an oil-burning stove in the back of the shrine office where we could warm our hands for brief stints, but all the windows had to be kept open to cater to the endless flow of people coming to request new amulets and fortunes for the new year. The weather was below freezing, and my hands swelled up in the cold—I had to take periodic breaks to hold my

hands over the stove until the swelling receded. I had chilblains by my second day of the New Year, and by the third day I had completely wrecked my body by spending so much time on my feet. However, the most memorable moment of New Year's 2018 occurred when I was helping one of the other staff members wheel the wheelbarrow full of coins that had been dropped in the offering bucket to the post office for deposit.[40] While she was filling out the paperwork, the skin of her hand cracked open and started spurting blood all over the paperwork and the counter. She looked at the blood spray, annoyed, and said, "Again?" before slapping a tissue over it and finishing the paperwork.

There was nothing abnormal about any of these experiences—I have heard dozens of similar stories from my interviewees. One of Ebara's strongest memories of starting work as a priest was rubbing her hands raw because she was unused to the bamboo handle of the broom used to sweep the pathways of the shrine. Both Kanda and Saito complained of the summer at their respective shrines, constantly being bitten by mosquitoes and having to pull grass in the sweltering heat. Tsuda explained that her least favorite part of being a priest was being physically exhausted in the fall—she worked full-time in addition to being a priest, and all her *kenmusha* had their major annual festival (例祭 *reisai*) in the fall, so she had to rush from place to place with no break until well after the New Year. Itsuki complained that sometimes she would sweat so much that she would wash all her make-up off. Physical labor came up again

[40] This was a common occurrence at the shrine—the post office had a coin counting machine, so we would collect the coins from the offering boxes every day (to prevent theft, a major issue at many small shrines) and once we had a large enough quantity, we would pick all the dead bugs, dirt, and rocks out of them before bagging them up and wheeling them to the post office for deposit. During the rest of the year, we would usually do this once every few weeks—one month of offerings was usually around 230,000 to 240,000 yen ($2,300 to $2,400 USD). Around major festivals and during the New Year, this needed to be done every day, due to the volume of offerings—K Shrine was often receiving a month-worth of offerings *per day* at the start of the New Year.

and again in my interviews, as priests explained the pain, exhaustion, sweat, and blood that often went into keeping their shrines running.

Physical labor was necessary for the physical upkeep of the shrine but also for the shrine priest's spiritual (and social) development. For example, Iida explained how she and her son performed the morning rituals at 6 am so that they could clean for three hours in the morning before the shrine "officially" opened at 9 am. She explained that the morning ritual operated on three levels. First, the shrine was literally cleaned. Second, in cleaning the shrine, she also cleaned her own heart (心 *kokoro*), which meant that she was better able to serve both the *kami* and her parishioners. Finally, anyone who passed by while they were cleaning saw how hard the priests were working. She noted that many people passed through the shrine in the morning on their way to work, so seeing the priests cleaning helped make them familiar and also made it easy for them to come chat with her. She explained that people feel better if they pray at a clean (清めた *kiyometa*) shrine. By making herself visible and familiar and keeping the shrine clean, Iida (who, we may remember, had experienced resistance from her parishioners when she started) both made herself accessible to anyone in the community who might want a spontaneous chat *and* "proved" that she was doing work at the shrine (and therefore deserved both a salary and respect). Similar themes came up in my other interviews—cleaning, especially, was highlighted by many of my interviewees as an arena where they put in a great deal of effort both to polish themselves spiritually and to prove their value to the shrine. When I went to visit shrines with other priests, they would often note how clean the shrine was (or be quietly judgmental when it wasn't up to their standards).

Despite the universal sense among my interviewees that men were better suited to the physical labor that the shrine required, there was equally a sense that they couldn't back down from the challenges of the work. In some cases, there simply was no one else to do the work—female priests at shrines with no male priests (or male parishioners they could call on) had no choice but to (literally) shoulder the physical burdens of shrine work. In other cases, female priests felt that they couldn't back down from the challenge or they would prove that they weren't suited to priest work. Many of my interviewees said that although they knew men were better at physical labor, they still endeavored to do the same work as the male priests. "It's hard to do physical labor," Hotta explained, "but you can't let men win." She joked that maybe they should get robots to do the physical labor around the shrine, eliminating the need for men. Iida, on the other hand, criticized young female priests who said that they couldn't do the same work as men. "If you want to be treated as equal (同等 *dōtō*), you can't say things like that," she said.

Figure 5.7 The male shrine representatives construct the chi no wa *(茅の輪), a hoop made of reeds that is circumambulated during the summer festival. Note the lantern display area on the left, also built by the male shrine representatives.*

However, it is worth noting here the gendered split within voluntary shrine labor performed by shrine representatives and parishioners. This split mirrors that described by other scholars working on Buddhist temple communities.[41] Let us again take K Shrine as a case study. During major festivals, the male shrine representatives performed the physically demanding activities—they built structures (Figure 5.7), climbed ladders to hang lanterns, cut reeds from the pond, and did security patrols. Female shrine representatives, on the other hand, were either in the kitchen (Figure 5.8) or doing public-facing work such as selling special offerings, answering questions about the festival, or directing people in their ritual circumambulation. The male and female shrine representatives also ate separately—during the five meals for the summer festival, for example, the female shrine representatives had a designated table in the corner of the banquet hall, and they ate after the male parishioners.

Figure 5.8 A subset of the female shrine representatives preparing lunch during the summer festival at K Shrine. While K Shrine does not have an "official" fujinkai*, the older women who take charge of the kitchen are affectionately referred to as the* fujinkai*.*

[41] Starling notes a similar division of labor in temples, where men operate in the "front" of the temple while women operate in the "back." Male clergy focus on the liturgical aspects of major ceremonies while female temple residents focus on hospitality and food preparation, and the voluntary labor of parishioners is similarly gendered. Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 50-58. Schrimpf similarly reports a female Buddhist priest who "had to clean up and work in the kitchen" while serving in a temple with male priests. Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 196.

The all-female staff of K Shrine thus occupied an uncomfortable, liminal space in this strict gendered division of labor. They were not welcome in the kitchen—they were too highly ranked (偉い *erai*) to be toiling over the stove with the other women. But neither were they welcome to help with the construction—even though several members of the staff were much stronger and more fit than the frail, elderly men who insisted on hanging the lanterns themselves. One of the clerical staff helped with the lantern hanging one year and was subjected to non-stop teasing (some of it good-natured, some of it not) for the remainder of the festival about her being a "man." Except for the head priest, all the shrine staff ate separately from the shrine representatives as well—the priests alone in the shrine office and the *miko* and clerical workers at their own special table in the banquet hall (again, after the men had eaten). The head priest ate with the male shrine representatives, in part because she had to give the "greeting from the head priest" (宮司挨拶 *gūji aisatsu*) to start off the meal. Several other interviewees noted how problematic and tense the greeting (and the assumption that they would eat with their male parishioners) became for them, as it often isolated them from other women in the community and opened them up to harassment (discussed in greater depth below).

Shrine work is necessarily both embodied and physical—shrines require upkeep and often that labor cannot (or, priests believe, should not) be outsourced to the parishioners. However, female priests must fight against the assumption that they cannot do the same physical labor as a man (rendering them a burden to the shrine) while also navigating the specific gendered divisions of labor in their shrine communities. As a result, female priests are sometimes caught in a liminal space—performing physical labor when no one else is around but

then having to retreat from "male" domains during large festivals, even as they cannot or should not take refuge in "female" spaces due to their position as a priest.

Gaisai

Across the board, my interviewees identified *gaisai*, festivals performed outside the shrine grounds, as the most difficult rituals for female priests to perform. They particularly identified ground purification ceremonies, rituals associated with the sea (such as purification of fishing boats), and rituals involving mountains (such as purification in advance of the building of a tunnel) as major issues.

My interviewees had a variety of explanations for why these ceremonies were an issue. They explained that the industries they were required to interface with tended to be male-dominated and men in those industries tended to be most opposed to female priests. They noted specific taboos around women and mountains, related to notions of exclusion areas for women and menstrual pollution (see chapter 4). They also identified older people (older men especially) as more likely to take issue with female priests coming to perform ceremonies for them.

Kotani explained that she had no issues as a female priest at her own shrine, since it is a shrine that is known for prayers for safe birth (安産祈願 *anzan kigan*), so she estimated that 80% of the visitors to the shrine were women. "On the other hand," she said,

> ground purification ceremonies are a man's world (男の世界 *otoko no sekai*). Your clients (相手 *aite*) are men, so they think it's better to have a man do it. It's less of an issue now because there are more female priests, but older people want old men to do it.

She said that she didn't send out younger women out to perform ground purification ceremonies, as it was liable to cause problems, both because of the perception that only men should be performing ground purification ceremonies and because of the potential for them to be mistaken for *miko*.

Several of my interviewees employed similar strategies of avoidance. Watanabe, a priest in her twenties who worked at her family shrine, reported that while she hadn't done a *gaisai* yet, her *senpai* (who was also a female priest) had had issues with them. When she arrived, the clients didn't recognize her as a female priest, and asked why the shrine had sent a *miko*. Her *senpai* had thus told Watanabe that if she had to do a *gaisai*, it would be better for her to either go with a male priest (who could vouch for her) or in male-style vestments with a *shaku* (see chapter 4). Tsuda and her sister, similarly, avoided doing ground purification ceremonies altogether (leaving them instead to their father and husbands), although they did do other types of *gaisai*. In both of these cases (as well as Iida's), their shrine staff were mixed-gender, so it was possible to send male priests in their stead.

Several of my interviewees reported being turned away for ground purification ceremonies. The priests at my main field site said that once someone had called at the shrine to request a ground purification ceremony and asked if they could send a male priest. The head priest informed him that they only had women at the shrine but referred him to other local shrines he could call. Others had much more negative or combative interactions. Murakami, for example, was scheduled to perform a set of purifications at a construction site—one before the house formerly occupying the spot was taken down (取り壊し *torikowashi*)[42] and a ground

[42] While there is a more formal name for this ceremony—*kaitaki yoharai* (解体清祓)—in practice all my interviewees referred to it as either "*torikowashi*" (demolition) or "*torikowashi no harae*" (取り壊しの祓

purification ceremony before construction on the new house began. She completed the first ceremony without incident, and it was approaching time for the ground purification ceremony to occur. She explained that the client called her and said,

> "I was told by a fortuneteller (占い *uranai*) that a male priest would be better." At that time, my husband was still working [full-time outside of the shrine], so I told my father-in-law what [the client] had said, and said, "It seems like I can't go." So my father-in-law went instead, and I assisted (幇助 *hōjo*). When I say "assisted," I mean I didn't wear vestments, I just lined up the offerings and did the preparations [i.e. helped set up the ritual space]. Anyway, even though they said that they had been told by a fortuneteller that a man would be better, I later heard that was really because the person from the construction company disliked women. So, I accompanied my father-in-law, not knowing anything, and [the construction company representative] saw me and made a *terrible* face. (laughs) [...][43] Even now there are businesses that are bothered by women. That really was a horrible memory.

We see here a theological explanation (the consultation of a fortuneteller) masking a much more mundane issue (the representative from the construction company disliking women). While Murakami had no issue with the fortuneteller advising her dismissal, she was upset to discover the truth.

However, rejection from clients was not the only issue female priests faced. Harakami, a head priest with an all-female staff at an urban shrine, obliquely complained that (male) priests in her area were sniping her ground purification ceremonies. She said that in rural areas, due to depopulation and the large area of parishioner areas, there is usually only one priest with jurisdiction over the area, but in cities, since the parishioner areas are much smaller (and, as explained above, often overlap), priests clamor to take ground purification ceremonies that they *know* are outside of their parishioner area rather than referring them to the correct shrine. The air

purification of demolition).

[43] Here she identified the person as being from a specific local construction company, details of which have been omitted to preserve privacy.

of authority around a male priest may have helped them lure away her parishioners, although Harakami placed the blame squarely at the feet of the male priests, who she felt were acting duplicitously due to their dislike of her (discussed in greater depth below). The fact that *gaisai* tend to be relatively lucrative ceremonies—at K Shrine, for example, they were six times the cost of an individual ceremony performed at the shrine—surely helped spur their decision.

Other issues posed by *gaisai* were more subtle. Fukano expressed similar concerns about *gaisai*, noting that she'd experienced problems when she'd gone to perform them, since "there's a line of thought that priest equals man." However, she also noted that one of the major issues with *gaisai* is that, since they are outside of the shrine grounds, priests are required to transport all the ritual implements for them, which requires a great deal of packing and carrying heavy objects. This sentiment was shared by several of my other interviewees as a reason why *gaisai* were particularly difficult for women. I participated in several *gaisai* in 2015 for precisely this reason—the other priests were worried about Yamashita (who was in her seventies, blind in one eye, and starting to have mobility issues) carrying all the ritual implements herself, so I was sent along as an assistant, since I had no issue hauling the heavy duffle bags full of collapsible altars, trays for offerings, and other ritual implements from the car to the site. For some priests, their concerns about physical labor revealing their unsuitability as priests were an additional layer to the social issues posed by *gaisai*.

However, not all female priests had entirely negative experiences with *gaisai*. The younger Kobayashi agreed that ground purification ceremonies were particularly difficult for female priests to perform because "[m]en probably want men to come." She continues taking ground purification ceremonies, however, as her shrine has no male priests, and the additional income is desirable. She explained that she simply politely explains to the client that she is a

woman so she will "do the ground purification ceremony in a woman's way." (Kobayashi, it is worth noting, only wears men's clothes, so she does not run into the *miko* misrecognition problem.) Ninomiya credited her lack of issues performing *gaisai* to her father making an effort to bring her to *gaisai* when she was little, so that by the time she started performing them herself, people were used to her. Despite her familiarity to her parishioners, she still made sure to ask them if it was okay for her to perform the *gaisai* when she first started serving as a priest. She said that going to *gaisai* "makes you aware that you're a woman," and that recently she has started trying to get her son to do *gaisai* instead. She said that it wasn't that she didn't want to go; it was just that she thought it would be better for a man to do it. Both Kobayashi and Ninomiya were born into shrine families (and Kobayashi was raised as a successor; see chapter 3), so their parishioners were more familiar with them. However, it should be noted that their strategies were similar—forefronting her gender and making sure that the client was fine with her performing the ceremony. While Ninomiya has passed *gaisai* onto her son, Kobayashi does not have the option to do so, and instead retreats to gendered ritual—she will not be performing the ceremony in the same way as a man (even if she wears male vestments).

While Buddhist ritualists do not have the equivalent of a ground purification ceremony, women's ritual work is still sometimes valued monetarily less than the same work performed by a male priest.[44] Starling explains, "[t]his preference for a male member of the family to perform the priestly duties is clearly not dictated by the individual's ordination credentials. Indeed, it seems to exceed what is externally attainable for those who were not born with the body of a (male) successor."[45] Starling notes the "less than enthusiastic reception" from parishioners when

[44] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 111; Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 196.

[45] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 112.

bōmori with living and available husbands and sons attempt to perform rituals themselves.[46] Monika Schrimpf also notes discriminatory practices in Buddhist institutions and among Buddhist believers that "(1) exclude women from ritual practice and leading positions, (2) degrade their ritual performances, and (3) assign them an inferior and servile position."[47] In particular, she discusses the degradation of women's performances of funerary rites; in

> a Nichiren Buddhist survey of ordained women of this Buddhist school, some women reported that they were not allowed to conduct funerary rites because the soul of a deceased was said to be unable to attain Buddhahood if the rites were performed by a woman. In addition, the quality of a religious rite was said to be reduced if it were to be conducted by a woman.[48]

We can see here a similar melding of social aversion to women's ritual performance with theological reasoning why women's rituals are less effective (or perhaps even harmful).

Interestingly, one of my older interviewees insisted that female priests no longer had issues with *gaisai*. Takashima was in her seventies when I interviewed her. She said that when she was younger, women were told that they couldn't do purification ceremonies for boats (船の祓 *fune no harai*). She also knew of several cases where the clients hired a second (male) priest to redo a ground purification ceremony after a female priest performed it, since they were concerned that the women hadn't done it right or that it needed to be redone because a (polluted) woman had performed the ceremony. However, she said, ground purification ceremonies had only been a true issue for women thirty years ago. When I mentioned my numerous interviewees who had continued to have problems at ground purification ceremonies, she was incredulous.

[46] Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 113.

[47] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 195.

[48] Schrimpf, "Children of Buddha, or Caretakers of Women?" 196.

Female priests, she explained, would have no issue performing ground purification ceremonies as long as the priest in question explained herself, prepared appropriately, made sure that she was dressed neatly and appropriately, performed the ceremony appropriately, and was self-confident. She suggested that female priests who came across as lacking self-confidence or not knowing what they were doing were much more likely to have problems.

Takashima was quite well-connected—she was the president of an organization for female priests and had been an active (sometimes founding) member in numerous organizations and activities for female priests—so her disconnection was strange. Did she never talk to her fellow female priests? Or did they not confide in her, guessing (perhaps correctly) that she would be dismissive? I suspect a little of both. Many of the women I spoke to believed their experiences to be so singular that they were unrepresentative, often apologizing to me for giving me such a unique narrative that could not possibly help my research—when they were, in fact, echoing sentiments or experiences shared by numerous other women I interviewed. On the other hand, I found that the older women I interviewed for the project—especially those who were highly ranked—were much less likely to correctly guess what their younger colleagues had expressed or experienced. However, a third factor was the undercurrent of victim-blaming in many of my interviews: if female priests (especially female priests who the interviewee was not personally acquainted with) had issues, perhaps *they* were the ones to blame.

"My *Senpai* Really Suffered": Harassment in the Shrine World

There are two major barriers to discussing issues around harassment and sexism in the shrine world. First is the issue raised in chapter 3 around naming harassment—female priests are

generally unwilling to use the word "discrimination" to refer to their own experiences. Second is the tendency by my interviewees to be very willing to discuss others' suffering while demurring when it came to their own. "My *senpai* really suffered," was a common refrain, "but it hasn't been too bad for me." Of course, when I went to interview those *senpai*, they insisted that *their senpai* were the ones who had really suffered, and that they had experienced little of note.

Again, I don't wish to claim that my interviewees are lying or suffering from false consciousness. It is notoriously difficult to report sexual violence or sexual harassment, and the victim is much more likely to take a reputational hit than the perpetrator, so there are legitimate reasons why someone who has been harassed may want to downplay the severity of what they experienced. It is also often difficult for victims of harassment to recognize what they went through as legitimate or valid, and much easier for them to recognize harassment experienced by others. It is also worth noting the survivor's bias inherent in my interviewing pool—all the women I spoke to either were priests or wanted to become priests, so I was only able to hear the stories of those who were driven from or opted to leave the priesthood second-hand.

Additionally, as my interviewees constantly reminded me, the shrine world is very small. While I was often a fun and comparatively "safe" person to share gossip with, as (especially in Aichi Prefecture) I knew many of the players and had sworn not to repeat anything they said without anonymizing it, there were limits to the safety I could offer them. When I offered a copy of a paper that I was presenting at Nanzan University to one of the priests at my main field site, she immediately identified everyone quoted in the paper, despite my best attempts at disguising their identities. Even if I attached a pseudonym and changed or obscured details about their lives, there was (and is) a high risk of being identified, so my interviewees may have been unwilling to say anything that might implicate specific people.

The most common statements for interviewees to make were very nebulous ones. "Men are seen as better," one woman said, explaining that because of that "there are times when I think too much about what other people think of me." Others described how parishioners would "look down" upon women or see them as "inferior" to men. "Men are willing to say things to a woman that they wouldn't to a man," one woman explained. Others called out older people (sometimes older men specifically) as the source of resistance to female priests or would blame misogynistic undercurrents in the "regional characteristics" (地域性 *chiikisei* or 土地柄 *tochigara*).[49]

The systematic exclusion of women by religious institutions has been well-documented in other Japanese religions—women are placed in powerless positions via their ambiguous status, receive ordination that confers credentials that are perceived to be inferior, are barred from engaging in the same types of training or certification, or are treated as inferior to their male colleagues.[50] My interviewees frequently identified similar patterns of "bias" (偏見 *henken*) in the shrine world or by Jinja Honchō specifically, noting the lack of women in leadership or the ways that special events (such as advanced training or study sessions) were only ever hosted at shrines run by male priests. Several women noted the lack of official recognition for the Female Priests' Associations—while other organizations were "designated

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[49] The latter explanation was *very* common in Aichi Prefecture, and I have not heard much elsewhere. There was a consensus among many of my interviewees who worked in Aichi that Aichi Prefecture was more conservative, traditionalist, and unwelcoming to outsiders (whether they were gendered outsiders, national outsiders, or just from a different prefecture) than other areas of the country.

[50] See, for a few examples, Kawahashi Noriko, "Women Challenging the 'Celibate' Buddhist Order: Recent Cases of Progress and Regress in the Sōtō School," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 55-74; Kobayashi Naoko, "Sacred Mountains and Women in Japan: Fighting a Romanticized Image of Female Ascetic Practitioners," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 111-115; Miki Mei, "A Church with Newly-Opened Doors: The Ordination of Women Priests in the Anglican-Episcopal Church of Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 37-54; Niwa, *"Sōryō-rashisa" to "josei-rashisa" no shūkyō shakaigaku*, 21-48, 141-168.

groups" (指定団体 *shitei dantai*),[51] which allowed them to receive special funding from Jinja Honchō, FPAs failed to be recognized. Among many of my interviewees, there was a sense that male priests were only likely to be understanding and supportive of female priests if they had a female relative serving as a priest, and otherwise would look down on them. "If male priests have women from their own households doing *hōshi*, they understand female priests. If they don't, they don't," one woman explained, succinctly. Several priests in Aichi Prefecture named specific high-ranking members of their prefectural Jinjachō as either speaking out against female priests or "bullying" (虐め *ijime*) them.

One issue that several of my interviewees raised—in part because they had petitioned to change the rules—was the way that women had been banned from participating in mid-level training sessions (中堅神職研修 *chūken shinshoku kenshū*). This training is necessary to hold several advisory and teaching roles within Jinja Honchō, as well as to advance through the ranks (see chapter 1), but women weren't allowed to participate until the late 2000s. As a result, many of the women I interviewed (especially those who came out of the short-term training courses rather than the Shinto universities) had never had a female instructor. An older interviewee also noted that until 1989, women couldn't receive a certificate of completion of training (研修終了証 *kenshū shūryō shō*) from Jinja Honchō—these certificates are necessary for certain types of advancement. Several of my interviewees also reported being given different work than their male colleagues when they went to do their mandated internship (実習 *jisshū*) at a major shrine

[51] A complete list of currently recognized organizations can be viewed at Jinja Honchō, "Kankei dantai ichiran," *Jinja Honchō*, https://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/jinjahoncho/concerned.

as part of their certification (see chapter 1). They were asked only to clean and prepare offerings, write *goshuin* (御朱印 a special seal stamp given to visitors at a shrine or temple), or do clerical work. In some cases, they were specifically told to do the same work as *miko*, while male interns were allowed to do priests' work.

My interviewees also reported negative interactions within their own shrine communities. The most common type of negative interactions were simply negative remarks—usually from parishioners but sometimes from other priests. Kotani, for example, reported that she had had an older woman complain that she was employing *miko* to do individual prayers—because she saw young women in unfamiliar robes and thought that they must be *miko*. Many of my younger interviewees reported being mistaken for *miko*, but older women also received similar remarks—Fukano, who was in her mid-forties when I interviewed her, reported being mistaken for a *miko*. Often, however, the instances of misogyny they reported were second-hand or in the passive voice. For example, Honda, a priest in her thirties who served full-time at her family shrine, noted that she'd heard that some people preferred men's voices over women's because women read the *norito* (祝詞 liturgy) in much smaller voices,[52] but she had never been told that directly. Maruki, a woman in her sixties who had priest credentials but only served as an assistant at a local shrine, said that the woman who had held her position previously had quit because visitors to the shrine had refused to have her perform ceremonies for them.

Power struggles were often a source of harassment for female priests, but the person affected often demurred or downplayed its severity. Yamashita, for example, took over the

[52] Interestingly, this maps onto similar criticism of female Buddhist priests—although Buddhist priests are criticized for the pitch of their voices, not the volume. See Rowe, "Charting Known Territory," 94-95.

shrine when the parishioners found the previous successor inappropriate. When one of the other priests at her shrine discovered that Yamashita had mentioned how she became a priest in her interview with me, she asked me if I knew about the rumors, which (according to her) persisted into the present. Yamashita had not explained them to me, instead laughing the whole incident off as a minor inconvenience that was resolved. "They say she's a demon woman who chased away [the previous person in line for head priest]," the other priest explained to me. This claim was repeated to me by several of my other interviewees who were friends with Yamashita—"I heard all these terrible things about her," one of them confided to me, "but then I met her and she's so nice!"

Similarly, Harakami reported that while she had no issues with her parishioners, "some people" were "jealous" (羨ましい *urayamashii*) of her because she was innovating at her shrine and there had been no full-time priest there before. Later in the interview, when I asked what she liked and disliked most about serving as a priest, she said that what she most disliked was how many conservative (保守的 *hoshuteki*) priests there were. She said the female priests were mostly energetic and trying to do things at their shrines, but… She paused for a long moment before finally saying that she did as she liked. I asked her if people had complained to her directly, and she said that some complaints were explicit and direct while others were much more indirect. She explained that if she were operating the same way at a company, she would have been offered a promotion and a raise, but the shrine world was a "narrow world" (窮屈な世界 *kyūkutsu na sekai*). A friend of hers, however, who had I had interviewed a month earlier, had told me that Harakami had been a victim of the judgement of the priests in the area, partially due to her innovations at the shrine and partially due to an internal power struggle for management of

the shrine (in which the parishioners sided with her, rather than her [male] challenger). She spoke at length about how Harakami had suffered and urged me to ask her about it when I interviewed her.

However, some were willing to share much more about sexual harassment they had either experienced firsthand or witnessed. I spotlight three examples below, as they contain many of the themes that emerged across my interviews.

I sat down for a lunchtime interview with Itsuki, with Okada tagging along (since she was introducing us). Itsuki is an extroverted and wickedly funny woman in her fifties, who took over as head priest from her late father-in-law. I asked whether there were any specific expectations placed on female priests aside from vestments and ritual technique.

> **Itsuki:** As you might expect, there's the system of [women] serving tea (お茶出し制 *ocha dashi sei*). Men won't serve it. [Male and female priests] are the same, but it's like, when you have a meal together, you have to serve tea, and when the teachers from the lectures come [after a training session, for example], well, there's an atmosphere like, "Hey, serve the tea!" Well, we're usually moving before anyone says anything, but it kind of feels like, [in a sing-song voice] "Aren't we the same?" Oh, I just remembered! *Sake*-pouring. […][53] So, at a party, when an eminent guest comes, you can't just leave that person alone, right? You have to pay attention to them and pour *sake* for them. Men do it too, but for women it's like, "Hurry up and do it!" That's unpleasant. In Japan, the meaning of a man pouring *sake* and a woman pouring *sake* is still different. Since there's this image of [women as] hostesses... (laughs) I can't really drink either, so it feels bad to go only to pour for other people. But I have to go just to pour.
>
> **Okada:** It becomes like a duty.
>
> **I:** Exactly, it's a duty. It really is unpleasant.
>
> **O:** [People] always say, "Can we get a greeting (挨拶 *aisatsu*) from the women?"
>
> **I:** Yes, yes, yes. If I want to talk, I'll talk, but I really don't enjoy talking and having to pour alcohol—if you're having a proper conversation, I think that's really good, but sitting in an *izakaya* and saying, [puts on falsely cheerful voice] "Thank you so much for all your help!" [Okada laughs.] Doing that is kind of boring, right? Even in the bus to

[53] There was a brief interlude here where they taught me different terms for pouring alcohol and then realized that since I don't drink, I might not be familiar with *sake*-pouring etiquette.

the Ise Shrines, it's incredible! The shrine representatives at my shrine don't really drink much, but others [parishioners from other shrines] ride with us, right? When we go to the Ise Shrines, everyone from the district (支部 *shibu*) rides together in nine buses. So a priest gets on, another priest gets on—it's usually about two priests [per bus]—and then their parishioners all get on the bus together. And then the *sake*—in the middle of the bus! In a moving bus, they have a one *shō* bottle [about 1.8 liters]—even now that kind of culture persists! Now, my bus mostly has shrine representatives who don't drink, and they say, "No, I'm good," but the people who drink are like, "Bring me the *sake*!" And with snacks too, they're like, "Won't you give us some service?"—on the bus! I think it's kind of sad if we don't have anything, so I bring some dried squid,[54] but then they're like, "What, don't you have anything else?" Anyway, they say that to men too, but I'm like, don't you think that your impression that women will just go around pouring *sake* for you is incorrect?

O: They expect the priests to pour for them?

I: Yes.

O: Not the tour conductor?

I: No, I think it would be fine if they expected the guide on the bus to do it, but they have this attitude like, "Can't you just do this for the shrine representatives you're so indebted to?" That attitude still persists. I just don't want to thank them in that way—I'm always happy to thank them in a different way! But they're like, "Show me you're grateful by pouring me *sake*!" That's kind of a minus for women. [...][55] So, for that reason, I think going to Ise is fine, but thinking about that bus makes me depressed.

We see several themes here that reoccurred across my interviews—the intrusion of problematic corporate assumptions (see below), the worsening of behavior with the introduction of alcohol, and the way that priests' reliance on parishioner support can be leveraged for power harassment. Priests—as community leaders—should not be expected to serve tea, but female priests found that their gender often outweighed their credentials, and it was easier to do work they found demeaning than fight back. It is worth noting here who is subjecting Itsuki to this treatment—in

[54] Dried squid (鯣 *surume*) is a common fixture at shrines, served alongside a sip of *sake* after many ceremonies.

[55] Here we talked about when the parishioners started drinking (from the moment they got on the bus), the role alcohol played in historical Ise pilgrimages, and how districts that bordered the ocean tended to be assumed to have a lot of heavy drinkers.

the first case (being forced to serve tea and pour alcohol) it is fellow priests, while in the second it is parishioners from a different local shrine.

Sadly, many of the experiences of sexual harassment reported by female priests are very similar to those reported by women working in corporations. Women in Japanese firms are often relegated to being assistants (regardless of their job title) and excluded from training.[56] Career-track women reported having to "prove" that they "were actually women," when they started, "[s]o they did all the typical assistant tasks, including tea pouring and cleaning of workers' desks, so as not to 'stick out' from the large number of non-career-track women."[57] Kumiko Nemoto's interviewees described "obligatory" workplace sexual interactions:

> (1) taking clients to hostess clubs, which women workers often see as "a part of their job"; (2) playing the hostess role at after-work drinking meetings, where a certain amount of touching and groping by men is seen as "joking around" or simply as behavior that is to be expected from men; and (3) repetitive or threatening sexual advances occurring during normal working hours, which are seen as harassment and frequently cause women to take corrective action.[58]

We have already seen the second example in Itsuki's story, and we will see an example of the third below.

Additionally, Nemoto found that many of the women she interviewed "tried to ignore sexual interactions that took place during informal drinking settings or viewed them as a 'joking'

[56] Kumiko Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 137.

[57] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 138. See also Nemoto, "When Culture Resists Progress," 162.

[58] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 202. For more on after-work drinking culture, see Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 210.

type of interaction to be expected in the male-dominated workplace culture."[59] Testimony from one of Nemoto's interviewees almost perfectly mirrors Itsuki's experience:

> Misa, a 24-year-old career-track worker at Daigo Life Insurance, reported that she was often asked to sit next to male workers or managers in after-work drinking meetings because '[the men] want me to listen to them'. Although attending drinking events was important for her new career, she believed she was wasting her time and felt uneasy about her career prospects. 'I feel like I am a hostess in a club ... I have to constantly say, "Wow, that is great", or "I understand" and nod at whatever they say', she asserted.[60]

Misa, like Itsuki, is expected to play hostess to her male colleagues, making sure to verbally signal that she is deferent, listening, and impressed when they speak. While Itsuki's colleagues were not working directly with her (she was the only priest at her shrine), they still held sway over her through the interconnected and hierarchical shrine world. If she was not deferent enough, one of her colleagues might refuse to come help at her shrine's major festival, leaving her understaffed, or might engage in the subtle types of sabotage and rumormongering that Harakami and Yamashita experienced.

However, the conditions of female priests' employment—especially for female priests working outside of their family shrine—compound their existing vulnerability. Matsui was born into an ordinary family and worked as an Office Lady (OL) for several years before quitting due to ill health caused by the strenuous work conditions. She decided to go back to school and get her credentials as a priest. Although she wound up taking a research position in Tokyo, she also took a position at a rural shrine in her grandparents' hometown. Her grandfather had served as a shrine representative at the shrine, so he introduced her to the head priest. She made the trip

[59] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 213.

[60] Nemoto, "When Culture Resists Progress," 162.

from Tokyo three times a year to serve at the shrine's largest festivals. I asked her what she most liked and disliked about her work as a priest, and she explained:

> **Matsui:** Well, what I'm bad at is the seating for *naorai*. Mm, maybe I'm not bad at it so much as it makes me nervous. It's not that I dislike it, it just makes me nervous. There's a lot of pressure.
>
> **Dana:** [misunderstanding why the seating made her nervous] The shrine representatives have a lot of complicated interpersonal relationships, so if you don't know them well...
>
> **M:** Yes, well, and...at my shrine, I'm the only woman, so, well, at the beginning, there was stuff like sexual harassment. (laughs nervously) Now everyone has gotten used to me, and they treat me like a relative, but at the beginning, how do I put this? They treated me like I was a hostess (コンパニオンさん *konpanion-san*), like a girl at a drinking establishment (飲み屋の女の子 *nomiya no onna no ko*). So that was a shock.
>
> **D:** Was that from the shrine representatives?
>
> **M:** The shrine representatives and the head priest. (laughs)
>
> **D:** Eugh.
>
> **M:** Well, it's rural, and that kind of thing happens frequently in Japan. But when they got used to me, they really started treating me like I was family. Now there's nothing like that, so I can laugh it off. But because that happened, I just have this uncomfortable feeling about [the seating at *naorai*].

Later in the interview, Matsui said she thought that sexual harassment was one of the biggest problems facing female priests. She explained:

> **Matsui:** [A] young woman who is raised at a shrine, a daughter, everyone around her is like relatives, so they will take care of her, but a woman who comes from outside... In urban areas, there are comparatively more people who are careful about sexual harassment, but as you get more and more rural... It's not malicious (悪意 *akui*). They're excited that there's a woman. But there's a lot of sexual harassment. [Female priests] are rare, right? In rural areas they're rare.
>
> **Dana:** Do you think that's a societal problem? Would there be similar problems in any other company or is this a problem that's specific to Shinto?
>
> **M:** I've only done normal work within Tokyo, and I know that there is sexual harassment [in Tokyo], but there were a lot of gentlemanly (紳士的 *senshiteki*) [men at the company] and I never experienced it myself. But I think that in the countryside (地方 *chihō*),[61] it is

[61] Matsui, like many of my interviewees from Tokyo, referred to everywhere that wasn't Tokyo as "the

> a societal problem, and in the world that we call "Shinto," in the shrine world, it still feels like we've stopped in the Shōwa period [1925-1989]. To be clear, that's not entirely a bad thing. I think there's some individual variation, but structurally speaking, shrines and the countryside, societally and organizationally…I feel like we have to say that they have that structure [that facilitates sexual harassment].

Here we see Matsui using similar language to what was discussed in chapter 3, of the shrine world as stalled in time, to explain why sexual harassment is more prevalent. It is also worth flagging the way that she is careful to note that she doesn't think sexual harassment is born of malice—similar to the types of circumlocutions of "discrimination" already discussed in chapter 3. Instead, sexual harassment is caused by the "rarity" of female priests. Being the only woman in the room (and often being a young woman in a room of older men) was identified by many of my interviewees as particularly dangerous or anxiety-provoking. Some found workarounds, like inviting their female relatives or husband to come with them, refusing to drink alcohol, or making sure that their seat was separated from the male parishioners. Others simply bit their tongues and tried to power through their discomfort.

Since Matsui was not from a shrine family—and her current shrine was her only employment prospect—she had no choice but enduring sexual harassment if she wanted to continue serving as a priest. Her distance from the shrine during most of the year may have helped her endure long enough for the head priest and parishioners to become "familiar" with her—although her memory of the harassment continued to color her interactions with them.

Others were not so lucky. When I asked Iida what problems she saw facing female priests, she responded:

> **Iida:** To tell you the truth, I know a young priest who was sexually harassed. There was a girl who came to help at our [shrine] when it was busy, but at the shrine she served at first—well, she graduated from Kōgakkan's Shinto department with *meikai* (明階 the

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countryside" (地方 *chihō* or 田舎 *inaka*).

second highest rank and the highest with which a priest can graduate [see chapter 1], denoting that she was a high-achieving student), but there was nowhere to employ her (奉職先がない *hōshokusaki ga nai*). That's still a problem. So, at big shrines, at *beppyōsha* [see chapter 1], they absolutely won't hire female priests, right? But, anyway, there wasn't anywhere to employ her, so finally I started calling priests in my address book, just going down the list, asking if anyone would be willing to employ her. But a certain shrine within Nagoya city limits said they'd take her, so she went there. But...it seems like the head priest there, for some reason, sexually harassed her. So at the 10th anniversary [of the Aichi Prefecture Female Priests' Association],[62] that girl—she plays *gagaku*—so I asked her if she would come perform for us, so we could have a live performance [for the ritual]. So she came [to perform] for us. She did really well, so I asked her, "Won't you come play the flute for our festival? Come hang out with us again!" But she said, "[Iida]-san, I have something I want to talk to you about." So when I asked, "What is it?" [Iida hisses through her teeth.] She looked me in the eyes and burst into tears. It's deplorable (情けない *nasakenai*) that such a terrible head priest exists! So I consulted with my husband, and told her that she could register as a priest at our [shrine]. So I rushed to Jinjachō and asked them, "Is this okay? This girl had a dream to become a priest, she saw becoming a priest as desirable—she wasn't from a shrine family or anything, she just wanted to become a priest—but after she became a priest, the head priest at the shrine where she was employed did such deplorable things! We'll take her on at our shrine, so please let her quit." Jinjachō said that she had to tell [her current] head priest that she wanted to resign, and if he said okay, then she could come to [Iida's shrine name]. So that paperwork took a little while, but eventually we put her name down for our shrine as a *gonnegi*. [...][63] So female priests still—if you're from a shrine family, if you're a daughter, you're safe. You have somewhere to go, where you'll be employed. But *beppyōsha* won't employ [female priests]. So that means that [the only way to be employed] is if it's a relative, someone you know well, if the head priest is a woman, that kind of thing. [...]

Dana: Was there any punishment for the head priest who sexually harassed her?

I: No, no, no, no.

D: Oh, I see.

I: I don't really know how bad it was. The only one who knows is [the woman who was harassed]. But it's deplorable. [pause] It's deplorable, but...the road [for female priests] is still very narrow, isn't it?

[62] The tenth anniversary festivities for the Aichi Female Priests' Association came up numerous times in my interviews with priests from Aichi Prefecture as they featured a ritual performed entirely by women, which was apparently the first of its kind in Aichi Prefecture.

[63] She here identified another person I knew as holding the same rank, details of which have been omitted here for the sake of privacy.

We can see in Iida's story how vulnerable female priests from "ordinary" families often are, especially when placed at shrines where they have no one to advocate for them. The difficulty of finding work at all for female priests who aren't from shrine families (see chapter 2) gives them far fewer choices than their male peers in terms of workplaces and gives them no Plan B if their workplace is toxic. The only reason the young woman was able to escape from her first shrine and find work at Iida's shrine was because she was already acquainted with Iida—who was also the one to find her work in the first place, and thus felt somewhat responsible for her.

It is also notable how sexual harassment is dealt with here. Despite Iida explaining the situation to Jinjachō, there was no punishment for the head priest—nor did Iida expect there to be. As much as Iida recognizes the head priest's behavior as "deplorable," she also recognizes that female priests are constrained by their lack of power and options. There is no dispenser of justice to whom female priests can appeal—their only recourse is to leave.

I saw firsthand the ways that men who were known to sexually harass women continued to be not only integrated but highly placed in shrine communities. At best, the women in the community would warn each other, and then try to protect each other without upsetting the status quo. In one shrine community where I worked, for example, I was told that a certain shrine representative—one who was an established fixture in the community—"liked women too much." He would try to grope the women on the shrine staff and bragged about his sexual exploits (including cheating on his wife). I was told not because the shrine staff was concerned about me—they believed that I, like the female priests, could swat him away and laugh it off. Rather, I was told so that I could help protect the teenage *miko* he liked targeting, since the shrine staff were less sure that they would be able to defend themselves. On another occasion, an older female priest scolded younger female priests for claiming that parishioners were sexually

harassing them if they “accidentally” groped them while helping them with vestments. She explained,

> The other party isn’t doing it with a feeling of wanting to sexually harass you! They’re trying to help you dress. But sometimes, well, how do I explain it? When they’re helping to dress you, they accidentally caress (触れられちゃう *furerarechau*) you, but you shouldn’t scream (キャッキャッ *kya-kya*).

The limited human resources in the shrine world—both the successor problem (see chapter 1) constraining the number of people willing to serve as priests and the necessity of maintaining existing community support, no matter how aggressive, argumentative, or unpleasant—means that shrine communities are often loath to eject members or censure problematic behavior. As a result, shrine communities are full of missing stairs,[64] who must be navigated around, warned away from, or simply endured.

Readers may remember that in chapter 2, Usui Sadamitsu was quoted as refusing to hire women because of the belief that they would inevitably leave the priesthood to become wives. Unfortunately, some of Usui’s concerns may have a grain of truth—or at least, they are perceived that way by my interviewees. Ochi Miwa notes this trend as well, noting that while some of these young women quit after marriage, others find physically demanding shrine work impacts their health or are driven out by a hostile work environment.[65]

My interviewees who served as priests were often less sympathetic. On one occasion I was spending time with some female priests from Aichi Prefecture. One of them mentioned (in

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[64] “Missing stair” is a term coined by Cliff Jerrison that is commonly used in feminist communities to refer to a person in a community who is known to be abusive, but rather than fixing the issue (by ejecting the person from the community), everyone simply navigates around them, much like a missing stair in a staircase that everyone jumps over instead of repairing. See Cliff Jerrison, “The Missing Stair,” *The Pervocracy*, June 22, 2012, http://pervocracy.blogspot.com/2012/06/missing-stair.html.

[65] Ochi Miwa, “Joshi shinshoku—josei no shinshutsu wa aru no ka,” in *Shintō wa doko e iku ka*, ed. Ishii Kenji (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2010), 108.

an undertone) that one of the major shrines in the area had just hired their first ever female priest, but she had quit after less than a year. Speculation immediately started flying in the group as to what had happened. It was probably a "difficult" environment, everyone agreed, especially with no other women in the shrine office to advocate for her, but they were frustrated by how little the woman in question had been willing to persevere. She was "selfish," in their eyes, and probably immature. Now the shrine would have "evidence" that women shouldn't be hired—after all, their attempt to employ a female priest had failed after less than a year! This reaction was common—when I was in groups of female priests, the topic of which major shrines had hired women (and whether those women would "tough it out" or "give up") often came up. Female priests who chose to leave were treated with a certain amount of empathy—their colleagues understood how hard it was to be the only woman in the room—but also disdain and disappointment. *They* had toughed it out, so why couldn't this woman?

In this respect, they were similar to the female company workers Nemoto interviewed, who were often critical of their peers, questioning whether they were really willing to work hard.[66] Nemoto reports large amounts of antagonism and bullying between women in the firms she studied, as well as many women being more critical of other women than their male peers.[67] In particular, Nemoto's interviewees were critical of other women and their endurance of unequal treatment. One of her interviewees, for example, complained,

> Some women whine and complain too much, saying, "I don't want to do that job" or "I don't like to be treated like this"….I think women's consciousness needs to change first. They need to do everything that they are told to do because that's what being a career-track worker means….There are not many women who work very hard or make sincere

[66] Nemoto, "When Culture Resists Progress," 161.

[67] See, for just a few examples, Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 99, 123-125, 146.

> efforts….I see some career-track women who want to take advantage of the firms' support of even those women who don't get their jobs done.[68]

In the same way that female priests are often heavily policing other female priests' gender expression (see chapter 3), they are also often hard on the young female priests they see as failing to live up to the opportunities offered to them.

Maruki offered a different perspective. Maruki graduated from Kokugakuin University with certification but was unable to find a job as a priest due to both her gender and her age (she was in her fifties when she took certification). She explained:

> **Maruki:** Even if women get jobs in shrines, they quit immediately. They don't stick around long. If they're from a shrine family, they have no choice [but to succeed], but if they're not from a shrine family, even though it was very rare [for them to get a job as a priest] (せっかくなったのに *sekkaku natta noni*), they have no endurance and quit. And that means that the shrine won't hire women again.
>
> **Dana:** Why do they quit so quickly?
>
> **M:** Probably because it's really hard once you become a priest. I have never been a priest, so I don't know, but most of them are sent to the countryside (地方 *chihō*),[69] not Tokyo. So they go to the countryside, they are living alone for the first time, they have to do all their own cooking...so I think it's that. One of my classmates went to [shrine in a different region of the country], and she quit after two years. She was 40. A woman. She managed to barely scrape by [the ageist and sexist barriers that bar many older women from the priesthood, which we had discussed earlier in the interview] and become a priest, but... It really was a waste. She said she wanted to get married—although I don't know if she did [get married] or not. She wanted to try being a priest, and once she got used to it, I think she was like, "Okay, I'm good now."
>
> **D:** Do you think that's because...how do I put it? Do you think that's because of how difficult priests' work is or because of how difficult female priests' work is?
>
> **M:** I think it's both. If female priests can get married to someone at the same shrine, they can do it, but if they get married to someone totally different, it's very difficult for them to continue on as a priest. They have to be up early in the morning, and because there are few priests at the shrine, it's hard to take time off. In terms of labor conditions, it's harsh (厳しい *kibishii*) for both men and women. I worked at a normal company, so I know what [normal] labor conditions are like, but if you compare the work environment [at

[68] Nemoto, *Too Few Women at the Top*, 154.

[69] See footnote 61.

> shrines], it isn't the same at all. There's no union either, right? At a private company, you'd have a union. They would work to improve the labor conditions, and they'd negotiate salary increases. Since priests have no union, they always receive the same salary. [...][70] As for days off, if you don't have paid time off—actually, to tell you the truth, I don't know that much about this [whether shrines have PTO]. But it's physically exhausting, right? [Priests] must get really tired.

Maruki highlights here some of the major issues facing priests, which compound the issues female priests experience. Serving as a priest is physically grueling work for poor pay with little time off in a workplace with little to no oversight. There is no Human Resources department to complain to, no union to advocate for increased salaries or more paid time off, and no one to force the shrine management to comply with existing labor laws. Priests who are sent to far-flung prefectures—away from both their home community and the community they developed during college in Tokyo (or Ise City)—are removed from their support networks. They cannot turn to Female Priests' Associations, which are not engaged in the type of collective action to promote gender equality that we see in other Japanese religious contexts.[71] When compounded with the discomfort or even harassment young female priests may experience as the only women in the room, they may see quitting as the only means of escape.

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[70] She explained here how salary negotiations work at companies, details of which have been omitted here.

[71] See, for example, Starling, *Guardians of the Buddha's Home*, 138-142; Kawahashi Noriko and Kobayashi Naoko, "Editor's Introduction: Gendering Religious Practices in Japan: Multiple Voices, Multiple Strategies," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 4-7; Kawahashi Noriko, "Women Challenging the 'Celibate' Buddhist Order: Recent Cases of Progress and Regress in the Sōtō School," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 55-74; Kobayashi Naoko, "Sacred Mountains and Women in Japan: Fighting a Romanticized Image of Female Ascetic Practitioners," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 103-122; Kawahashi Noriko, "Feminist Buddhism as Praxis: Women in Traditional Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003), 291-313; Yamaguchi Satoko, "Christianity and Women in Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003), 315-338; Kawahashi Noriko and Kuroki Masako, "Editors' Introduction: Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 3-4 (2003), 207-216; Miki Mei, "A Church with Newly-Opened Doors: The Ordination of Women Priests in the Anglican-Episcopal Church of Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017), 42-50.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the work experiences of female priests are dependent not only on their gender but also their local shrine context. While many of my interviewees reported similar experiences—anxiety around performing ground purification ceremonies, the strain that physical labor placed on their bodies, disparaging or dismissive remarks about their validity as priests—their experiences were heavily mediated by other factors. Priests who had supportive parishioners had markedly different experiences than those who found interfacing with parishioners an uphill battle. Priests who had a husband, father, or uncle supporting them might be shielded from some of the misogyny leveled at female head priests who had no male coworkers they could send in their stead. Female priests working in their family shrines often had a much larger support system—and, most importantly, people they could turn to for help—than female priests placed at large shrines with otherwise all-male staffs. As a result, what female priests do—as well as what type of femininity they are expected to perform—is influenced by their shrine context.

It is worth noting, however, that almost all the methods female priests used to survive their circumstances were individual and personalized. They invited their husbands to sit with them to ward off sexual harassment, sent their sons to perform *gaisai* in their stead, and tried to convince Jinjachō to let a sexually harassed priest leave her current shrine. With the exception of petitioning to reverse their exclusion from certain types of training, they did not engage in collective action to improve their circumstances. This lack of collective action does not mean that women did not recognize the ways that they were systematically excluded and marginalized. Rather, most of the women I interviewed were focused on their own survival—how to maintain their financial base, how to deal with unpleasant parishioners, how to avoid fellow priests who

might spread malicious rumors about them. Doing physically exhausting work for long hours at financially struggling shrines with no oversight left them little time or energy for organizing—and organizing may have imperiled their community support, both among parishioners and other priests. So, instead my interviewees learned to endure—they bit their tongues, watched what they wore, smiled no matter the demands, and packed a bucket so they could discreetly vomit.

Conclusion
Looking Forward, Turning Back

On June 27, 2015, I woke up in Nagoya to discover that the Defense of Marriage Act had been struck down by the Supreme Court while I had been asleep. My community back in the United States was exploding in celebration. Two of my friends—who had trekked from Texas to Massachusetts to get married over spring break only two years earlier—were in shock: their marriage was now federally recognized, meaning that they could finally share health insurance.

A few days later, one of the shrine representatives came to the shrine office. He wanted to talk to one of the priests about same-sex marriage being legalized in the United States. He demanded that "those people" not be allowed onto the shrine grounds. The priest, trying to be placating, noted that the world was changing, and same-sex marriage would probably eventually be legalized in Japan as well, which he reacted to both negatively and violently. The priest pointed out that there had been a (symbolic, not legal) same-sex wedding at Tokyo Disneyland, and he responded that it was fine if people did that outside, but he never wanted to see it happen at K Shrine. I sat in the back of the shrine office, hoping desperately that no one would turn to me and ask my opinion, as the token American in the room.

I keep returning to this story, because it highlights so many of the tensions I felt navigating the field, but also because it highlights the fundamental difference between our orientations toward hope and the future. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz argues that "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always in the horizon."[1] He focuses on the connection between hope, utopia, and queerness, and argues that

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[1] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009), 11.

"hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present."[2] Queer and trans communities strive toward a better, unimaginable future—for all that the present may be hostile and cruel and unlivable, through coalition building and radical care, something better can be built.

On the other hand, the people of the shrine world—the Jinja Honchō administrators, priests, and shrine representatives—strive toward a future that returns to an imagined past. They see themselves as a bulwark against the catastrophic change wrought by modernity and Westernization, one of the last bastions of "pure" Japanese traditional culture. Their hope is in a return to a better time, not imagining a future yet unseen. They long for the glory days—a hazy pre-1945 time when shrines were the center of community life, priests were government employees, shrine sons dutifully followed in their fathers' footsteps, and everyone espoused the same politics as Jinja Honchō. That these days never existed does not matter.

For female priests, this vision of the future creates a certain amount of dissonance. They may believe in and espouse this vision of a future-past, a return to a Shinto nation-state, but this ideal world does not contain them. After all, as Jinja Honchō officials and ideologues call for a return to a prewar system, they implicitly call for the banishment of women from the priesthood, for female priests are a postwar perversion, brought about by postwar insufficiencies. In an ideal world, they would not exist. How do female priests support and strive toward a future in which they simply cease to be?

[2] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 12.

I saw this dilemma play out at K Shrine. For years, the shrine staff discussed hiring a male priest. There were many benefits to having a male priest on staff—he might be able to start a "proper" shrine family to take over the shrine, and he would be able to perform ceremonies for parishioners who only wanted a male priest. There were also logistical challenges to having a male priest. Since the entire staff is female, there is only one changing room at the shrine, so they would have to find another space for a male priest to change or else change in shifts. The dynamics of the shrine office would also certainly shift, which gave staff members mixed emotions. Some welcomed the "seriousness" a male priest might bring to the staff, while others worried that they would lose the tight-knit, homosocial camaraderie that characterized the shrine office. I asked whether one of the female priests might be able to establish a shrine family instead, but the staff thought this was unlikely. Yamashita's children were already adults with children of their own, so they could not be expected to suddenly pivot careers; Ebara had no interest in marriage; and Okada wanted to start a family but had no marriage prospects. Their shrine was successful—able to support three full-time priests with a strong and vibrant shrine community—but there was still the creeping doubt about the future of the shrine. Could they simply pass succession down the line of women, creating a completely non-hereditary shrine lineage? Could they deny Jinja Honchō's vision in the name of maintaining the community they built themselves?

Near the end of my interviews, I always ask, "How do you think the increase in the number of female priests will change Shinto?" Some of my interviewees answered that the increase in female priests would make priests feel more approachable, which would make Shinto feel more intimate and familiar, which would in turn bring the disconnected people of Japan back to the shrine communities they had abandoned. These answers are telling—they are about how

parishioners' orientation toward Shinto will change, not about a change in the *content or structure* of Shinto or the shrine world. However, by far the most common answer was that the increasing number of female priests would not—or *should* not—change Shinto. In fact, several of my interviewees suggested a cap on the number of female priests so that their presence could not destabilize Shinto. After all, how could a tradition that claims to be the heart of the Japanese—an unbroken tradition stretching back to time immemorial—be changed by something as minor as the gender of its priests? How could female priests, who tend to support Jinja Honchō's vision of Shinto even if they have quibbles with specific policies, want to wreak such irrevocable havoc on the Japanese nation?

Let us return to the question that started this dissertation: How do female priests survive a system that is hostile to their existence? They find ways to endure. They chisel out space for themselves. They fight for incremental changes that will not threaten the institution. They find ways to protect themselves when they can, and they grit their teeth when they cannot. They reinterpret Jinja Honchō's rhetoric and directives to make more space for themselves to live and work, but they tend not to debate the underlying logic of their marginalization. They focus on their local communities, implementing context-dependent solutions to systemic problems. If the situation becomes truly unbearable, they leave—if leaving is an option.

The shrine world is changing. If current trends continue, 20% of the priesthood will be female within the next ten years. We have yet to fully grasp the economic and demographic impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on shrines, but it will certainly not be positive. As parishioner bases continue to age, shrines will have to find new ways to appeal to the younger generation or risk losing the remainder of their income. Japanese society is experiencing (slow, incremental) social change as well. Gender roles are shifting, making the shrine world's

construction of gender seem stuck in an increasingly distant past. Recent opinion polls have found high levels of support for same-sex marriage among the Japanese public, and some municipalities and prefectures have begun issuing partnership certificates to same-sex couples. The disorientation people from "ordinary" families feel entering the shrine world is exacerbated by the temporal lag so many of my interviewees identified as characterizing Jinja Honchō.

In examining the case of female priests, we can see the growing divide between Jinja Honchō and local shrine communities, exacerbated by the changing world priests must navigate and the lack of guidance from Jinja Honchō. Female priests have created their own rituals for dealing with the menstrual pollution Jinja Honchō refuses to resolve, constructed their own understandings of how best to serve both the *kami* and their parishioners, and found ways to build their shrine communities as part-time priests when Jinja Honchō continues to focus on full-time priests at major shrines. They have created their own forms of priestly femininity and developed individualized methods for navigating the invisible maze of gender norms in their local shrine communities. They struggle with their unfavorable position in their shrine world—their inferiority in Jinja Honchō's eyes, their lack of power and authority within shrine communities, the way their precarity leaves them open to abuse, and the friction they feel between the women Jinja Honchō wants them to be and the women that they are. Still, Jinja Honchō's lack of interest in female priests (or small shrines, for that matter, as long as they keep paying their dues) allows my interlocutors relative freedom from Jinja Honchō's oversight. They widen the gap between Jinja Honchō and their local shrines not through overt resistance or rejection but with dozens of tiny decisions—small adjustments and adaptations to better their local environment that create their own form of Shinto.

Female priests create, too, their own vision of the future—not quite as sweeping of a vision as Jinja Honchō espouses, but one informed by their local shrine context. As much as they might yearn to return to "better days," their priority is the continuance of their local shrine community. They continue to hold positions of power rather than passing them onto their sons. They encourage their aunts, sisters, daughters, and granddaughters to get certification, creating matrilineal lines. They hire Shinto university graduates from "ordinary" families, or they endorse their *miko* so they can get priestly certification. They find new ways to get the surrounding community involved. They imagine new, vibrant futures for their communities.

As I write this conclusion, Yamashita is serving her last few days as a priest—she will be retiring at the end of March 2022 after more than two decades of service. K Shrine ultimately chose not to hire a male priest. Instead, they added a new female priest to their staff in April 2021. Ebara will take over as the new head priest, with Okada as her second-in-command. This is not the future Jinja Honchō imagines for their shrine—nor is it a decision made without guilt or worry—but it is the future the community has chosen. What happens next is up to them.

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