Japanese Christians and the Ancestors

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For a number of years I have been interested in the question, how does a religion change as it moves from one culture to another?

My first acquaintance with this problem came from reading a study that contrasted the pre-exilic and post-exilic forms of the religion of Judaism. The author of this study (R. C. Zaehner if I remember correctly) pointed out a number of significant differences between pre- and post-exilic Judaism. Before the exile there were no angels, there was no devil, no hell as a place of punishment, no judgment after death, and no resurrection. In one stream of post-exilic Judaism, conversely, we find Satan, angels, hell as a place of punishment, judgment after death, and resurrection. Put simply, this is the difference between groups later known as the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees in exile continued the pre-exilic traditions. The question posed by the author of this study was, how did the Pharisees come to maintain a different tradition? His answer, in brief, is that the Pharisees represent the exiled Jews who adopted certain features of the religion then dominant in ancient Persia, the religion of Zoroastrianism.[1]

Lost in the mists of history are the details of how the exiled people of Judah came into contact with representatives of Zoroastrianism, how some of the exiles determined that certain features

[1] He also pointed out that the old name for the area in which Zoroastrianism was temporarily influential was Parsi, and suggested that this is the name the Zoroastrians carried with them when, on losing power, they fled to India, there becoming the group known today as the Parsees. He further surmised that the ancient name Parsi may have led to the name Pharisee. This feature of his argument, however, is not germane to the present essay.

of the religion of Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) were admirable and compatible with their own way of life, how their adoption of such features affected their relationships with the more conservative group that later became known as the Sadducees, and the like. In order to identify theoretically useful features we can, however, begin with known facts and make a few surmises.

It is known, for example, that the people of Judah were forcibly exiled to Persia. Their contact with Zoroastrianism came, therefore, not as a result of contact with Zoroastrian "missionaries to Judah," but as a result of contact with Zoroastrians in a culture where the religion was already established and where they themselves were foreigners. It seems probable, moreover, that just as the Zoroastrians were then in power, so the Jewish group known as the Sadducees represented the people with links to those who had formerly been in power in Judah, people with an interest in maintaining the ancient traditions intact. By the same token, those later known as the Pharisees might represent Jewish people who formerly had little connection with political or religious office and thus might be more open to influence from the Zoroastrian politico-religious elite in the new cultural setting.

The question of how a religion changes as it moves from one culture to another embraces, then, if the Jewish-Zoroastrian experience be taken as a model, a number of interrelated features: (1) the religion under consideration is a minority religion in encounter with a politically and culturally dominant majority religion; (2) the minority religion does not change in toto, but its adherents can be logically divided into two groups, one of which stands for changeless tradition, the other for changing tradition; (3) the changing tradition group presumably advances its opportunities by adopting features of the majority religion, whereas the changeless tradition group does not; and (4) the changes noted can be characterized as ideational (i.e., changes in the realm of ideas or doctrines)—but this does not rule out the possibility that in other cultural settings the changes could be primarily in the realm of ritual behavior.

The idea of "change" necessarily implies comparison between two states. If the undertaking is diachronic, it calls for comparison between a "before" and an "after." If the undertaking is synchronic, it calls for comparison between state X and state non-X.

If a sociologist of religion in the time of the exile had attempted to study how Judaism changed in its encounter with Zoroastrianism,

a diachronic approach would have led the sociologist to compare
pre-exilic Judaism with exilic or post-exilic Judaism and to ask
whether elements distinctive in the latter were traceable to Zoroas-
trianism. If the approach had been synchronic, the sociologist would
have posited the existence of two logically distinct groups in exilic
or post-exilic Judaism, compared each with Zoroastrianism and its
culture, and asked whether the differences between the two groups
could be traced to Zoroastrianism.

The Focus of this Inquiry

The present inquiry is concerned with the question of how Protes-
tant Christianity has changed since its spread from North America
to Japan. It focuses on the question not of official doctrinal or
liturgical change in institutional Protestantism, but of how living
Japanese Christians of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan regard and treat
the ancestors.[2] If a historical approach were feasible, it would doubt-
less show that the Protestant Christianity brought to Japan beginning
in the 1850s, though by no means identical with Puritanism, was
still so strongly influenced by what we may call the "Puritan men-
tality" that there was no room for compromise with regard to "hea-
then rituals." To the extent that missionaries from North America
were the "teachers" and Japanese converts the "students," it would
also follow that Japanese Protestants in the early Meiji period held
fast, by and large, to the Puritan mentality. We can assume, there-
fore, that the first Japanese Protestants represented for the most
part the idea of changeless tradition.

But because the scarcity of historical data concerning funerals and
other rituals for the dead in mid-nineteenth century America and
Japan makes a diachronic approach unfeasible, the approach em-
ployed here will be synchronic. It compares Christian with non-
Christian in present-day Japanese culture, distinguishes two groups
among Christian and non-Christian Japanese depending on how
they relate to their ancestors, and asks whether the differences be-
tween the Christians in these groups signify a change in Protestant

[2] Since the English name of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan is "United Church of Christ in
Japan," I shall refer to it as the United Church. The focus throughout is on "mainline" Japan-
ese Protestants affiliated with the United Church, but for convenience I usually refer to Jap-
anese Christians and Japanese Christianity. For information on Japanese Catholics and how
they regard and treat the ancestors, see DOERNER 1977.

Christianity.[3]

Methodological Parameters

This inquiry relies heavily on data from a small-scale questionnaire conducted in Japan. The survey was distributed to three groups of people in urban settings: (1) church members and other people present at a United Church congregation in Kamakura on a Sunday morning in December 1986, (2) family members and acquaintances of a sizable number of people in the first group, and (3) a group of largely non-Christian people, some in Tokyo and some in Nagoya, concerned about their children's involvement in the Unification Church. Of the 969 questionnaires distributed, 514 (53.0%) were returned. Of this number, however, 63 (6.5%) were incompletely filled out and therefore counted as useless. Primary data are drawn from the remaining 451 questionnaires.

It will be recognized immediately that distribution of the questionnaire did not depend on a random-sampling procedure. This may seem a fatal flaw, but the position taken here is the one set forth by Glaser and Strauss, who distinguish between "theoretical sampling" and "statistical sampling." Theoretical sampling, used to discover conceptual categories, their properties and interrelationships, is for the purpose of generating theory. Statistical sampling, used to obtain factual data on distributions of people among categories, is for the purpose of verifying theory. Theory verification, for which accurate evidence is essential, requires stratified and random sampling. For generating theory, however, "a single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication. . . . Comparative analysis requires a multitude of carefully selected cases, but the pressure is *not* on the sociologist to 'know the whole field' or to have all the facts 'from a careful random sample.' His job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior" (GLASER and STRAUSS 1967, p. 30).[4] Since

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[3] The focus, therefore, is on ritual behavior and on the attitudes and possessions that relate to this behavior. In this connection the cautionary note stressed by McMullin is well worth remembering: in Asia, if not in the West, ritual is not necessarily a child of doctrine; on the contrary, doctrine often functions to make sense of ritual. Cf. McMULLIN 1989, p. 29.

[4] Italics in original; see also pp. 62–65. I should like to express my appreciation to Dr. Mark R. Mullins of Meiji Gakuin University for calling this book to my attention.

this paper seeks to develop theory, not to verify a developed theory, I have chosen to depend not on random sampling but on theoretical sampling.

The questionnaire fashioned for this purpose was entitled "*Nihonjin no shūkyō bunka ni kansuru ishiki chōsa*" [A survey of Japanese people's attitudes toward religious culture]. It was designed as a multiple-choice questionnaire to be returned anonymously. There were 48 questions in all, 41 of which relate to attitude, behavior, or possessions, and 7 of which have to do with age, sex, education, marital status, occupation, and the like. In this article I shall not try to cover the questionnaire in its entirety, but will limit myself to the question of whether, in their relationships to the ancestors, Japanese Christians differ significantly from Japanese non-Christians or from one another.[5]

Division and Subdivision

The first task is to divide the 451 people who turned in usable questionnaires into two groups, Christian and non-Christian. The key question for this purpose is the following: "What religion or religions do you believe in, if any?" To this question, 251 persons replied that they believe in Christianity. The remaining 200 people are counted as non-Christians. Graph 1 shows how these two groups replied to this question.

The second task is to divide the Christian respondents into two groups, depending on how they relate to their ancestors. And in order to compare similar groups, it is important to divide the non-Christian respondents in the same way. This task is not as easy as it would seem, for it commonly happens that the practices observed in connection with the buddha altar (cf. REID 1981), the traditional place for "remembering" the ancestors,[6] are carried out by one

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[5] When theoretical sampling is employed, the question of how to recognize "significant difference" has to be answered differently from the way it would be answered in the case of statistical sampling. For statistical sampling, one would use the regular tests for standard deviation appropriate to stratified and random sampling. Theoretical sampling, however, which is more exploratory, permits a more flexible approach. Accordingly, I shall present percentages in round numbers rather than as decimals.

[6] Ordinarily, the Japanese term *butsudan* 仏壇 is translated into English as "Buddhist altar." The connection with institutional Buddhism is not to be denied, but for most of the year an altar of this kind is the place where a household ritually remembers its ancestors. As ELIOT pointed out long ago (1935, p. 185), Japan is unique among countries that honor the Buddhist

GRAPH 1
"WHAT RELIGION OR RELIGIONS DO YOU BELIEVE IN, IF ANY?"
(RESPONDENTS DIVIDED INTO TWO CATEGORIES)
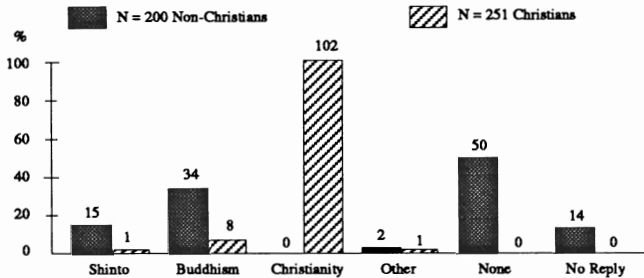
NOTE: The multiple religious affiliation characteristic of Japanese people generally, a feature that theologians call "syncretism," applies to some extent to Japanese Christians as well. Nearly 10% of the Christian respondents indicate belief in a religion or religions other than Christianity. In addition, and this is the reason that the percentage of Christian respondents exceeds 100%, a smattering of the Christians say that they believe in both Protestantism and Catholicism.

person, usually the wife, on behalf of the entire household. The question "What religion or religions do you believe in, if any?" could be answered on an individual basis, but buddha altar practices, which are frequently representative actions, do not permit answers on an individual basis. A rough division may be attempted, however, on the basis of answers to the question whether there is a buddha altar in the home. Among the 251 Christians, 25% said that there is a buddha altar in the home, so the remaining 75% are counted as having none.[7] Among the 200 non-Christians, 43% said that there is a buddha altar in the home, so the remaining 57% are counted as having none. In order to identify each of the four groups, I shall attach to each a recognizable label that makes use of the Japanese word for a buddha altar: *butsudan*. Non-Christians with an

tradition in calling any dead person *hotoke* ("buddha" or "enlightened one"). TAKEDA (1957) maintains, in addition, that the butsudan, since it is only formally connected with Buddhism, is really a place to honor the hotoke of the house. (The ideograph for *hotoke* can also be read *butsu*, so the butsudan is, in practice, an altar not for the Buddha but for the household "buddhas.") Inasmuch as the focus of this inquiry is not on the connection with the Buddha or with institutional Buddhism but with the household dead, I shall refer to this altar either as the "buddha altar" or "ancestral altar," or again, using the Japanese term, as the butsudan.

[7] Two of the Christians gave no answer to this question, and ten of the non-Christians. They are counted as having no buddha altar in the home, but it is possible that they have one. The margin of error in the former case is 1%, in the latter 5%.

ancestral altar in the home I shall call "Japanese (with butsudan)," and those with none in the home I shall call "Japanese (no butsudan)." Christians with an ancestral altar in the home I shall call "Christian Japanese (with butsudan)" and those with none in the home I shall call "Christian Japanese (no butsudan)." Graph 2 shows how these four groups responded to the question "What religion or religions do you believe in, if any?" The closer personal link with Buddhism on the part of people who belong to households with an ancestral altar will be readily apparent.[8]

GRAPH 2
"WHAT RELIGION OR RELIGIONS DO YOU BELIEVE IN, IF ANY?"
(RESPONDENTS DIVIDED INTO FOUR CATEGORIES)

	N = 85 Japanese (with butsudan)		N = 62 Christian Japanese (with butsudan)
	N = 115 Japanese (no butsudan)		N = 189 Christian Japanese (no butsudan)
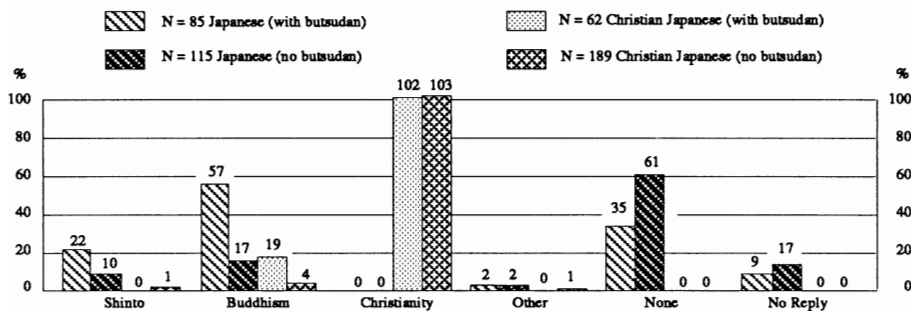
NOTE: On the reason that both categories of Christian Japanese exceed 100%, see the note to graph 1.

One stereotype has it that every "traditional" Japanese home will have an ancestral altar. Takeda (in NEWELL 1976, p. 131) goes so far as to say that apart from nuclear families living in apartment housing in and near large cities, "all Japanese homes contain two sacred altars, one to the buddhas (butsudan) and one to the native gods (kamidana)" — almost as if not having an ancestral altar is a state of affairs so exceptional that it can safely be ignored. In fact, however, much depends on whether a household is rural or urban, and whether it is multi-generational. Dore (1958) found that 80% of the households in one section of Tokyo had butsudan; Sano (1958), for another section of Tokyo, found that 63% had one; Morioka (1970), in still another part of Tokyo, discovered that only

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[8] With regard to belief in Buddhism, graph 2 shows a 40% difference between the two groups of non-Christian Japanese (those with and those without a *butsudan*), and a 15% difference between the two comparable groups of Christian Japanese.

45% had butsudan (all cited in SMITH 1974, p. 88). The survey on which the present inquiry relies shows that 43% of the non-Christian respondents come from homes with a butsudan. This finding is quite close to that of Morioka and probably reflects the fact that most respondents come from neolocal, urban, one- or two-generation families.[9]

Another stereotype has it that no "traditional" Christian Japanese home will have a butsudan. The present inquiry shows, however, that 25% of the Christian respondents belong to households that *do* have one.[10] To some Christian Japanese, particularly those without a butsudan, this may seem improper, perhaps even so shameful that they could wish that it not become public knowledge—especially for people in other countries. This attitude is probably strongest among people who understand butsudan rituals under the heading of "ancestor worship." My own attitude is somewhat different. From the angle of semantic history TAKEDA (1973) mentions that the Japanese term for ancestor worship, *sosen sūhai* 祖先崇拝 , is not "natural" to Japan but was coined to accommodate a Western import. And from the angle of behavioral content, Fujii Masao (in a lecture at Tokyo

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[9] No data are available as to length of residence or family composition, but to a question asking about current place of residence, the respondents' answers (in percentages) are as follows:

TABLE 1.
RESPONDENTS CLASSIFIED BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE
(IN PERCENTAGES)

Current Place of Residence	Christian $N=251$	Non-Christian $N=200$
1. Tokyo or Osaka	18	28
2. Tokyo or Osaka environs	45	29
3. A city of at least 500,000	9	8
4. A city of at least 100,000	19	17
5. A city of less than 100,000	6	8
6. A town or village	3	11

In round numbers, 63% of the Christians live in Tokyo or Osaka or their environs, as do 57% of the non-Christians. Of those who live in areas classified as cities, the Christians number 35% and the non-Christians 33%. Respondents who live in towns or villages come to 11% among the non-Christians and a mere 3% among the Christians.

[10] This is not to say that all 25% belong to, or were raised in, Christian homes. To those who identified themselves as Christians, the question was raised, "Were you raised in a Christian home?" Of those living in a household with an ancestral altar, 69% said no, 7% said yes, and 24% gave no reply. (For other Christians, the percentages were 60%, 32%, and 8% respectively.)

Union Theological Seminary in June 1989) observed that present-day Japanese anthropologists of religion no longer use this term. They now tend to use more neutral terms such as "ancestral rites" (*sosen girei* 儀礼) or "ancestral festivals" (*sosen saishi* 祭祀). Both scholars thus suggest that the term "ancestor worship" is not really adequate to describe what goes on in Japan.[11] Whether it is proper for Christian Japanese families to have a butsudan is finally a matter that Japanese pastors and theologians will be expected to determine on behalf of the church, but whatever they eventually decide will doubtless require factual knowledge as to the present state of affairs.

To anyone engaged in the study of religion and society, it is not surprising to learn that a religion, as it moves from one culture to another, takes on some features of the new culture. Since the socialization process humanizes people by providing them not only with patterns of expected behavior but also with the very categories they think and act with, the surprising thing would be for a religion that survives in a new cultural setting not to change in directions suggested by the socialization process.

At any rate the focus here is not on what is proper or improper, but on whether distinguishing between Christians who live in households with a butsudan and those who do not can be a theoretically useful basis for analysis of change in Protestant Christianity. The closer personal link with Buddhism on the part of people who belong to households with a butsudan has already been pointed out. Among the non-Christian Japanese, people living in households with a butsudan are three times more likely to believe in Buddhism than people living in households with no butsudan, but among the Christian Japanese, people living in households with a butsudan are five times more likely to believe in Buddhism than people living in households without one. This difference among Christian Japanese is enough to suggest that the category division between people who live in households with a butsudan and those who do not may indeed prove theoretically fruitful. It remains to be seen whether this is true.

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[11] Not all scholars of Japanese religion agree with this view, and important insights can be found in recent books that still make use of this term. See, for example, YANAGAWA 1988, pp. 152–65.

Times People Think of the Dead

One question people were asked to answer had to do with when they think about the dead. Not surprisingly, almost nobody replied that they never do so. When it comes to the *times* that they think about the dead, however, certain differences emerge. Graph 3 shows how people answered this multiple-choice question.

GRAPH 3
"AT WHAT TIMES DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE DEAD?"
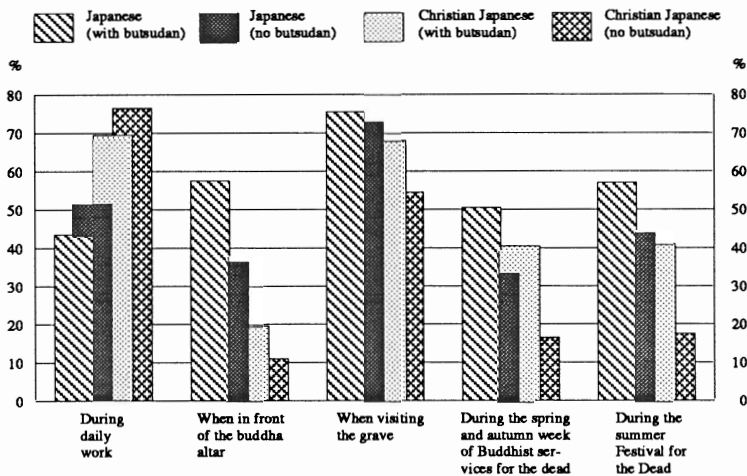
The full form of the first answer to this question is, "During my daily work, I sometimes catch myself thinking about the dead." The 25% difference between Japanese and Christian Japanese with a butsudan, and the 26% difference between Japanese and Christian Japanese with no butsudan, are equally striking. This sizable difference between Christian and non-Christian, together with the negligible 7% difference between the two categories of Christian Japanese, suggests that an ancestor-related version of the "Protestant ethic" is still very much alive among Japanese Christians. This hypothesis may well be worth examining in detail on some other occasion. But the point to note here is that the existence or non-existence of an ancestral altar in the home has no connection with whether Christian Japanese think about the dead during their daily work. In

either case they are more likely to do so than the non-Christian Japanese.

When it comes to the remaining answers, however, a different pattern emerges. In each case Japanese and Christian Japanese who live in households with a butsudan show a higher profile than their "no butsudan" counterparts. Among Christian Japanese, the contrast is particularly strong in relation to *higan*, the spring and autumn weeks of Buddhist services for the dead, and *bon*, the summer Festival for the Dead.

What are we to make of all this? The main difference between the "daily work" answer and the remaining answers is that the former has no particular connection with household or community rituals conventionally associated with Buddhism (not necessarily with Buddhist doctrine), whereas the latter do. It would seem, therefore, that *Christians with a butsudan in the home, as compared to Christians without, participate more fully in household and community rituals for the dead.*

There is no reason to maintain that this difference is caused by the presence or absence of an ancestral altar in the home, but it begins to appear that this factor can usefully serve as a window that permits this difference to come into view.

Other Religious Objects in the Home

If a household has an ancestral altar, the chances that it also has religious objects from other religious traditions would seem fairly strong. Graph 4 shows the percentage responses to the question, "Of the following objects, which ones exist in the house you now live in?"

The left-hand panel of graph 4 demonstrates a consistent pattern. In each case Japanese and Christian Japanese people who live in households with an ancestral altar are more likely to have the object indicated than their "no butsudan" counterparts. The most striking difference occurs in connection with the Buddhist mortuary tablet. Only a handful of people in households without a butsudan have such mortuary tablets. By far the strongest tendency is for people who have Buddhist mortuary tablets to maintain (or obtain) a butsudan in which they are ritually installed.

The right-hand panel, on the other hand, shows a somewhat less consistent pattern. Christian Japanese in households with a butsudan

GRAPH 4
RELIGIOUS OBJECTS IN THE HOME

░░ Japanese (with butsudan)	■ Japanese (no butsudan)	▒ Christian Japanese (with butsudan)	▧ Christian Japanese (no butsudan)
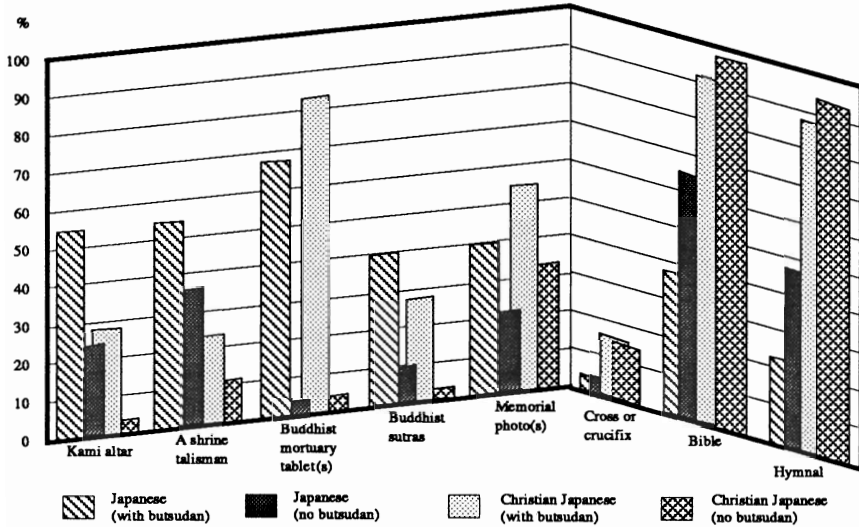
are somewhat more likely to have a cross or crucifix in the home than other Christian Japanese, but when it comes to a Bible or hymnal, it is the other way round. It is also noteworthy that non-Christian Japanese in households without a butsudan are more likely to have a Bible or hymnal than other non-Christian Japanese.

Apart from the specifically Christian items indicated in the right-hand panel, it appears, then, that Japanese and Christian Japanese people living in households with an ancestral altar report approximately similar patterns of religious object possession. The converse also obtains. Japanese and Christian Japanese people living in households with no ancestral altar also report generally similar patterns of religious object possession.

What we see exhibited here, I think, is not one basic pattern but two: one exemplified by the reports of non-Christian Japanese people living in households with an ancestral altar and one exemplified by the reports of non-Christian Japanese people living in households with none. In the case of those living in households with an ancestral altar, we find a comparatively high incidence of possession of a kami altar, a shrine talisman, Buddhist mortuary tablet(s), Buddhist sutras, and memorial photos. In the case of those living in households with no ancestral altar, we find a comparatively low incidence

of possession of each. It is not that comparatively high incidence of possession is "normal" and comparatively low incidence "exceptional," but that there are two normal patterns: one for households that have experienced death in the family, and another for households that have not. If the number of households always remained constant, one would expect that households possessing ancestral altars and other religious objects would gradually increase and that households of the other type would correspondingly decrease. But since the number of nuclear families is always increasing, it is normal for the two patterns to coexist — despite the movement of some households, when a death occurs, from the "no butsudan" category to the "with butsudan" category.

This basic twofold pattern inferred from the answers of the non-Christian Japanese respondents has its counterpart in a similar twofold pattern that obtains among the Christian Japanese respondents. Here too we find that in the case of those living in households with an ancestral altar, there is a comparatively high incidence of possession of the religious objects listed above. Conversely, in the case of those living in households with no ancestral altar, the incidence of possession of these objects is comparatively low.

With regard to religious objects in the home it appears, then, that the basic twofold pattern found in the homes of non-Christian Japanese respondents is repeated in the homes of Christian Japanese respondents — if generally in somewhat less pronounced form. It will be interesting to see if this parallelism occurs in other areas.
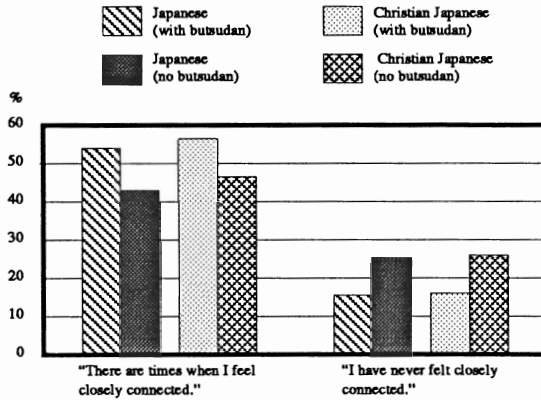
Sense of Connection with the Ancestors

Another question raised in the questionnaire had to do with people's sense of connection with the ancestors. Here is the translated form of the question: "Are there times when you feel closely connected to your ancestors?" Graph 5 shows the relevant responses.

Of those who feel from time to time a close sense of connection with the ancestors, the majority tend to live in households that have a butsudan, but those who live in households with no butsudan are not far behind. Of those who claim never to have felt a close sense of connection with the ancestors, people living in households with no butsudan predominate.[12]

[12] The well-known NHK survey of Japanese religious consciousness (1984), conducted in

GRAPH 5
SENSE OF CONNECTION WITH THE ANCESTORS

Japanese
(with butsudan)

Christian Japanese
(with butsudan)

Japanese
(no butsudan)

Christian Japanese
(no butsudan)

"There are times when I feel closely connected."

"I have never felt closely connected."

In their answers to this question, then, Japanese and Christian Japanese living in households with a butsudan demonstrate almost identical patterns — as do those in households with no butsudan. Here again we see that the pattern of the "with butsudan" households, whether Japanese or Christian Japanese, is one thing and that of the "no butsudan" households another.

The Butsudan and the Memorial Photo

As already seen in graph 4, some 40% of the Japanese respondents living in households with a butsudan indicated that there were memorial photos in the home as well. As for Christian Japanese respondents living in households with a butsudan, over 53% said that memorial photos were present. Keeping this coexistence in mind, we next examine the question of what happens before the butsudan and/or memorial photo. Graph 6 presents comparative data on the former, graph 7 on the latter.

"If there is a butsudan in the house where you currently reside (university students should answer with reference to their parental
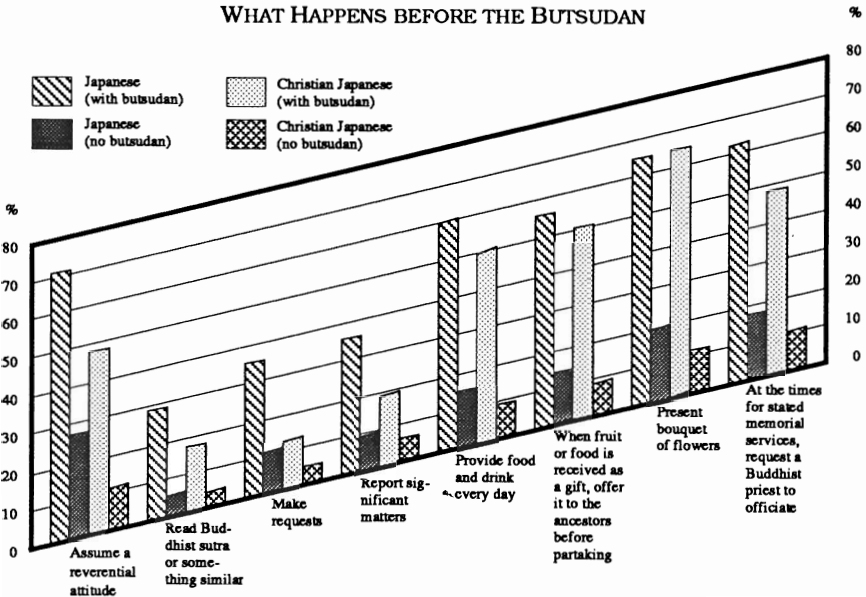
November 1981, showed that 59% of 2,692 respondents said that they feel a deep sense of connection with the ancestors as opposed to 31% who said that they feel no such connection. These figures are roughly comparable to those for the "with butsudan" groups and the "no butsudan" groups in the present inquiry.
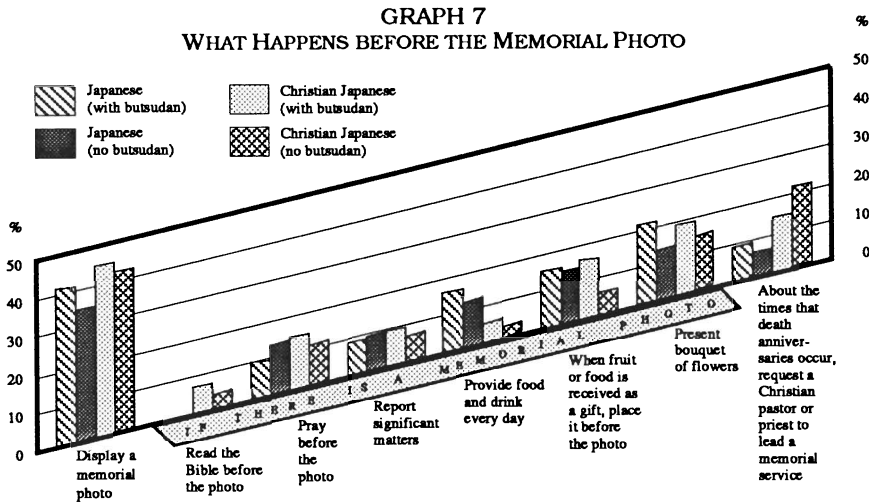
home), what kinds of butsudan-related behavior occur there?" This is the question to which people were asked to respond.

The logical puzzle here is how "no butsudan" respondents, whether Japanese or Christian Japanese, could report on what happens before the butsudan in their house at all. But setting this problem aside, we find again that the behavior reported by "with butsudan" Christian Japanese differs from the behavior reported by "no butsudan" Christian Japanese in much the same way that the behavior reported by "with butsudan" Japanese differs from the behavior reported by "no butsudan" Japanese. In general, the Christian Japanese report, for their houses, lower degrees of these forms of behavior than their Japanese counterparts, but particularly in relation to the last four items, there is a pronounced tendency for the "with butsudan" Christian Japanese to report household behavior which approximated that reported by "with butsudan" Japanese.

"Even if there is no butsudan in the house where you currently reside (university students should answer with reference to their parental home), in what ways are the dead remembered?" This question, and its multiple-choice answers, mistakenly assumed that households with no butsudan might make use of memorial photos

GRAPH 6
WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE BUTSUDAN

Legend:
- Japanese (with butsudan)
- Christian Japanese (with butsudan)
- Japanese (no butsudan)
- Christian Japanese (no butsudan)

Categories:
Assume a reverential attitude; Read Buddhist sutra or something similar; Make requests; Report significant matters; Provide food and drink every day; When fruit or food is received as a gift, offer it to the ancestors before partaking; Present bouquet of flowers; At the times for stated memorial services, request a Buddhist priest to officiate

GRAPH 7
WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE MEMORIAL PHOTO

instead — and that this substitution would be particularly evident in the Christian households. What we find in graph 7, however, is that an average of approximately 40% of the respondents in all four categories indicate that the memorial photo is used in their households.

As for what happens in connection with this photo, Japanese and Christian Japanese are most alike, whether there is a butsudan in their home or not, in indicating that people pray before the photo and report significant matters there. Not surprisingly, none of the non-Christian Japanese reported that people in their households read the Bible before the memorial photo. For the last four items in graph 6, Christian Japanese with a butsudan in the home reported household behavior that approximates that of the "with butsudan" Japanese. Of the last four items in graph 7, however, this pattern holds good for only two: placing before the photo fruit or food received as a gift, and presenting a bouquet of flowers. As compared to the Christian respondents, the non-Christian respondents report that food and drink are more likely to be set before the photo every day. But when it comes to requesting a pastor or priest to lead a memorial service, it is only natural that the Christian respondents, and especially the "no butsudan" Christian respondents, report that this is more likely to occur in their homes than the non-Christian

respondents report for their homes.

All in all, it seems significant that when the issue is what happens before the butsudan, a "traditional" place for ritual behavior concerned with the ancestors, then the degree of practice for a given type of behavior as reported by Christian Japanese with a butsudan in the home stands in fairly sharp contrast to the degree reported by Christian Japanese with no butsudan in the home. But when we have to do with what happens before the memorial photo, which is by no means widely accepted as a substitute place for ritual behavior concerned with the ancestors, the contrast between what these two groups of Christians report about household behavior diminishes almost to the vanishing point.

It appears, therefore, that the presence or absence of a butsudan in the home has a definite bearing on the home environment of Christian Japanese with regard to how they relate to their ancestors. Whether the presence or absence of a butsudan in the home has any bearing on Christian Japanese behavior in other areas is another matter. This is the problem to be examined next.

Religious Behavior

Questionnaires concerned with religious attitudes and behavior and intended for people in societies where the Christian tradition is relatively deep-rooted often include questions as to frequency of church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer. Such questions are generally regarded as useless in a country like Japan, but perhaps they can be useful when put to Japanese Christians.

The result to be inferred from graph 8 is readily apparent. With regard to these three forms of behavior, the presence or absence of an ancestral altar in the home makes no significant difference whatever in the lives of Christian Japanese.

Relatively frequent church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer constitute "expected behavior" in the Christian world. In the world of Japanese culture generally, however, there are other forms of expected behavior. One of the questions posed to respondents was this: "Of the actions listed below, how many do you yourself customarily perform?" The results are shown below in graph 9.

As graph 9 shows, Japanese and Christian Japanese respondents differ most in relation to the third and fourth items. The non-Christian respondents are far more likely to pray for "tangible benefits"

GRAPH 8
FREQUENCY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE, BIBLE READING, AND PRAYER
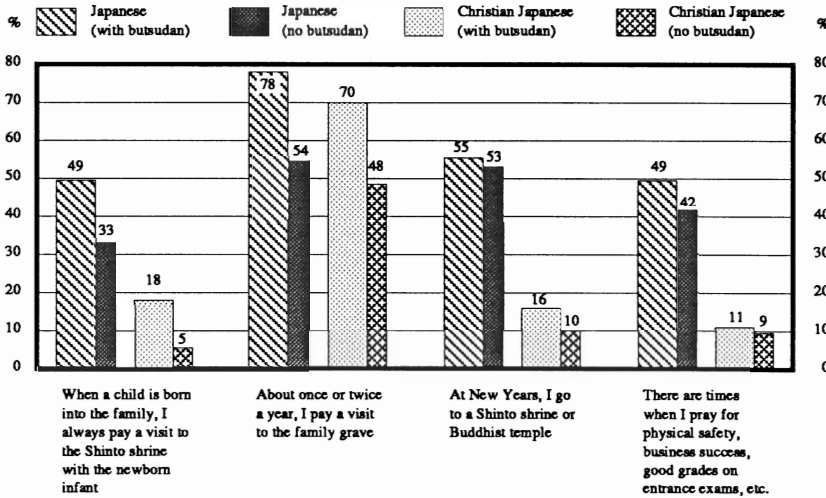ON THE PART OF CHRISTIAN JAPANESE
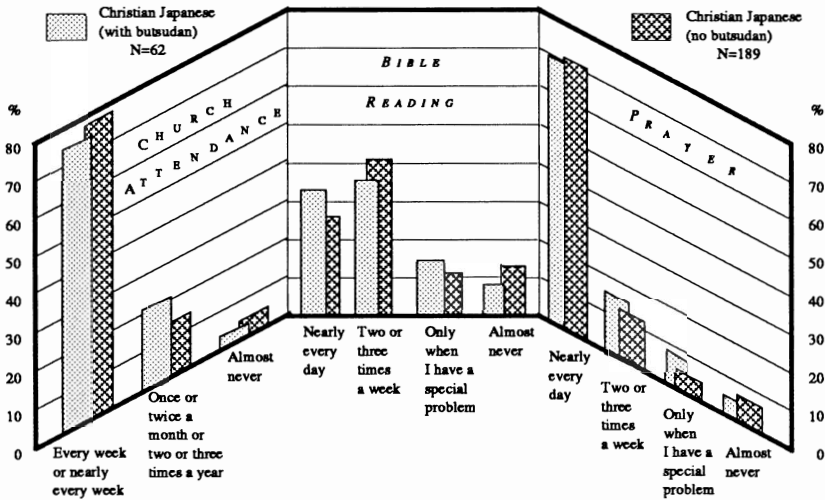
and to visit a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple at the turn of the year than the Christian respondents.[13] In the matter of taking a newborn child to the local Shinto shrine, the Christians move somewhat closer to the non-Christians. But it is in their responses to the second item that Japanese and Christian Japanese are closest.[14] The "with butsudan" Japanese set the pace for the "with butsudan" Christian Japanese, and the "no butsudan" Japanese for the "no butsudan" Christian Japanese. Here again it appears, therefore, that Christian Japanese correspond most closely to non-Christian Japanese in matters pertaining to the ancestors. Where the ancestors are involved, as in visits to the family grave, the difference between the Japanese and Christian Japanese "with butsudan" groups, on the one hand, and between the Japanese and Christian Japanese "no butsudan" groups, on the other, dwindles to insignificance.

[13] A Yomiuri Shinbun newspaper survey summarized by Fujii showed that 31% of the respondents prayed for such "tangible benefits" and that 56% visited a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple at the turn of the year. Cf. FUJII 1981, p. 135.

[14] With regard to visits to the family grave once or twice a year, the Yomiuri Shinbun survey found that 69% of the respondents do so. Cf. FUJII 1981, p. 135.

GRAPH 9
"OF THE ACTIONS LISTED, WHICH ONES DO YOU CUSTOMARILY PERFORM?"

This does not mean, however, that the differences between "with butsudan" and "no butsudan" Christians are insignificant.[15] When these groups are compared, they turn out to be most alike in not praying for physical safety, business success, passing grades, etc. and in not going to a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple at the turn of the year. A perceptible 13% difference emerges with regard to taking a newborn child to the local Shinto shrine.[16] When it comes to

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[15] For the percentage differences between Christian Japanese from homes with and without an ancestral altar, ranked from greatest to least, see table 2.

TABLE 2
RANKED PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTIAN JAPANESE GROUPS
WITH AND WITHOUT AN ANCESTRAL ALTAR IN THEIR PERFORMANCE
OF CULTURALLY EXPECTED BEHAVIOR

Item	Differences Between Christian Japanese Groups	Rank
Visit family grave 1-2 times a year	22	1
Visit shrine with newborn child	13	2
New Year's visits to shrine or temple	6	3
Pray for physical safety, business success, etc.	2	4

[16] It may seem strange that *any* Christian would take a newborn child to the local Shinto shrine, since this act means, according to folk religion scholars, that a family introduces the

family grave visits, however, a substantial 22% difference appears, the "with butsudan" Christian Japanese standing closer to other Japanese than to the "no butsudan" Christians.

For both groups of Christians, grave visits are obviously important, but they are especially important to Christians who belong to households with an ancestral altar.

Political Orientation

The political climate in Japan has changed considerably since the time this questionnaire was distributed (December 1986), and at least one of the parties then in existence has disappeared from the scene. But if we divide the parties of that day into right-wing and left-wing groups, it is possible, as shown in graph 10, to get a rough idea of the political orientation of Japanese and Christian Japanese in the "with butsudan" and "no butsudan" categories.

Among those who support left-wing parties, the Christian Japanese generally outnumber other Japanese, and within these two groups, the "no butsudan" Christian Japanese outnumber the "no butsudan" Japanese by about 15%. Among those who support right-wing parties, on the other hand, the "with butsudan" respondents, Japanese and Christian Japanese alike, outnumber their "no butsudan" counterparts by an average of 10%.
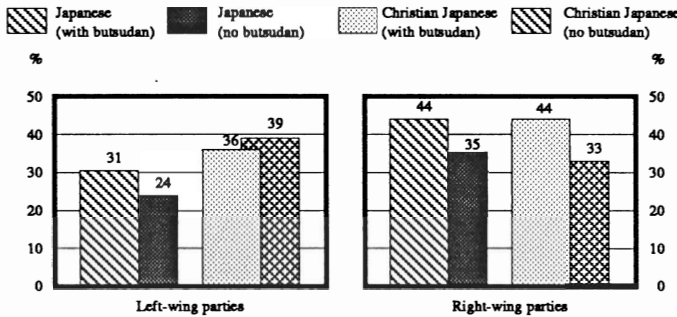
infant to the shrine kami and entreats its protection for this new member of the "parish." One must immediately add, however, that few people, Japanese or Christian Japanese, think of this meaning when observing this convention – if, indeed, they are aware of it at all. Equally important, there is a clear division of opinion among Japanese people, both Christian and non-Christian, as to whether Shrine Shinto is to be understood as a religion. One of the questions put to respondents deals with this issue. Table 3 shows the responses.

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "DO YOU AGREE WITH THE OPINION THAT WHEREAS 'RELIGION' INCLUDES BUDDHISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND MANY OTHER RELIGIONS, THE ORDINARY SHINTO SHRINE AND ITS FESTIVALS DO NOT FALL INTO THIS CATEGORY?"

| | Japanese | | Christian Japanese | |
	With butsudan $N=85$	No butsudan $N=115$	With butsudan $N=62$	No butsudan $N=189$
Agree	34	37	37	43
Disagree	34	37	32	44
Can't say either way	19	19	21	10
Don't know/ No reply	13	9	10	2

GRAPH 10
POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Japanese (with butsudan)   Japanese (no butsudan)   Christian Japanese (with butsudan)   Christian Japanese (no butsudan)

Left-wing parties: 31, 24, 36, 39

Right-wing parties: 44, 35, 44, 33

NOTE: The groups here classified as "left-wing" are the Japan Socialist Party, the Komeito, the Japan Communist Party, and the Social Democratic Federation. The groups classified as "right-wing" are the Liberal-Democratic Party, the New Liberal Club (now defunct), and the Democratic Socialist Party.

Among the Christian respondents, supporters of left-wing parties roughly balance the supporters of right-wing parties. The difference between the "with butsudan" and "no butsudan" groups is not pronounced.
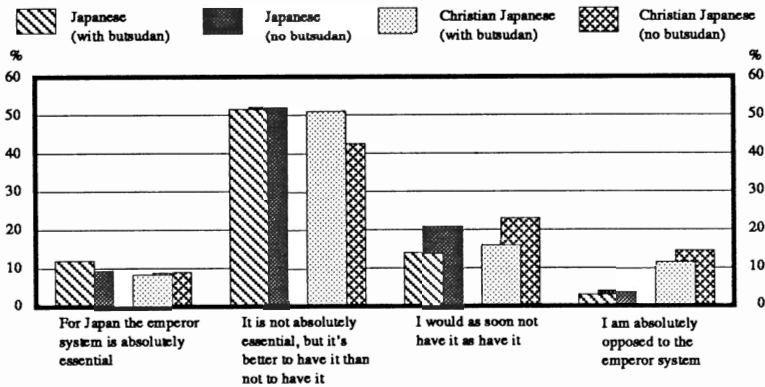
With regard to political orientation, therefore, it must be concluded that the presence or absence of an ancestral altar in the home makes no discernible difference.

Support for the Emperor System

Since the death of the Emperor Shōwa in January 1989, the question of whether to support the emperor system has been raised in many quarters. Awareness of this issue is doubtless much stronger today than it was when the questionnaire was distributed on which this inquiry is based. The questionnaire did include, however, one question having to do with support for versus opposition to the emperor system. The responses to this question are shown in graph 11.

Not surprisingly, the preponderant percentages are on the side of those who support the emperor system. Those who support it unconditionally, whether Japanese or Christian Japanese, hover around the 10% line. Among those who support it as a matter of preference, however, it is interesting to observe that Christian Japanese who live in households where there is an ancestral altar are

GRAPH 11
ATTITUDES TOWARD THE EMPEROR SYSTEM

| ▨ Japanese (with butsudan) | ▧ Japanese (no butsudan) | ▦ Christian Japanese (with butsudan) | ▧ Christian Japanese (no butsudan) |

For Japan the emperor system is absolutely essential

It is not absolutely essential, but it's better to have it than not to have it

I would as soon not have it as have it

I am absolutely opposed to the emperor system

almost indistinguishable from other Japanese respondents—though "no butsudan" Christian Japanese trail only a short way behind.

Among those who oppose the emperor system as a matter of preference, it is interesting to note that the "no butsudan" groups, both Japanese and Christian Japanese, perceptibly overtop the "with butsudan" groups. And among those who oppose it absolutely, the Christian Japanese exceed other Japanese by approximately 10%.

The most striking differences among the Christian Japanese occur not at the extremes but in relation to the preference items. The differences are not great, but perhaps it is no mere coincidence that Christians who live in a household where there is an ancestral altar tend to support the emperor system more than other Christian Japanese, just as Christians who live in a household where there is no ancestral altar tend to oppose it more than other Christian Japanese.

Conclusion

In general terms, the Christian Japanese from households with and without an ancestral altar are most *similar* in respect of frequency of church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer. They are also quite similar to each other in the degree to which they think about the dead during their daily work, in household possession of a Bible and hymnal, in *not* praying for tangible benefits, and in *not* going

to a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple at New Years. With reference to the memorial photo they similarly report that people in their household read the Bible before the photo, pray before it, and report significant matters there.[17]

Conversely, they *differ* most from each other in the degree to which they believe in Buddhism alongside Christianity, in the degree to which they think about the dead during *bon* and *higan*, in household possession of a kami altar, of Buddhist mortuary tablets, Buddhist sutras, and memorial photos, in the degree to which they take a newborn infant to the local shrine, and in frequency of family grave visits. In each of these cases the Christians from households with an ancestral altar chalk up higher marks than Christians from households with no ancestral altar.[18]

These areas of similarity and difference can generally be characterized as "behavior generally expected of Christians" and "culturally expected behavior" respectively. The fact that Christian Japanese, whether from households with an ancestral altar or not, attend church, read the Bible, and pray with almost identical frequency will surprise no one. It is surprising, however, to learn that there are striking differences between these two groups of Christian Japanese in the area of culturally expected behavior.

What calls for explanation in this context is not similarity but difference. The interesting thing about the contrast found among the two groups of Christian Japanese is that it is virtually a mirror image of the twofold pattern found among the non-Christian Japanese. Where Christian Japanese from households with and without an ancestral altar differ from each other, their differences tend to approximate the differences among non-Christian Japanese from households with and without an ancestral altar. It appears, therefore, that the two patterns that normally occur in present-day Japanese society, one for households with an ancestral altar and the other for households with none, serve as models for ancestor-related

[17] The memorial photo can perhaps best be understood as a non-standard locus for ritual behavior relating to the ancestors. The fact that differences between the two groups of Christian Japanese become almost indiscernible where the memorial photo is involved probably reflects its ambiguous status.

[18] In respect of political orientation and attitude toward the emperor system, we found a slight tendency toward conservatism on the part of Christian Japanese from households with an ancestral altar (as opposed to those from households with none), but no pronounced differences were observed. Accordingly, these matters need not be considered further.

behavior among Christian Japanese in the area of culturally expected behavior. In this area it is through comparison with the ancestor-related behavior of present-day non-Christian Japanese that the differences between Christian Japanese need to be understood.

This inquiry began with the question whether Protestant Christianity has changed through contact with Japanese culture. If the assumption is correct that the Protestantism that first came to Japan was so deeply imbued with the Puritan mentality that it would have nothing to do with ancestral rituals beyond the funeral, it follows that mainline Protestantism as found in Japan today has changed considerably. The analysis does not show that Christian Japanese can be divided into a "changeless tradition group" and a "changing tradition group" (into "Sadducees" and "Pharisees"). It shows, rather, that in the area of culturally expected behavior, both Christians from households with an ancestral altar and those from households with none have changed in such a way that their differences tend to correspond to the differences found among the same two groups of non-Christian Japanese.

It has also been shown, I believe, that the analytical division of Christian Japanese into those coming from households with and without an ancestral altar opens up data hitherto unrecognized. It is to be hoped that this type of analysis will prove fruitful in future research.

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