The Tenrikyo Teaching of "No Distinction Between Male and Female Pines" and Present Society: Proposing Gender Equality Based on Tenrikyo's Teachings

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Abstract

In 1966, religious scholar Kazuo Kasahara published *Religion at a Turning Point*. In this book, Kasahara discusses Shinshu (True Pure Land Buddhism), Tenrikyo, and Soka Gakkai, and states that it is necessary to look back historically at the role of religion when specific religions emerged in response to the demands of people in a new era.

Tenrikyo, founded in 1838, incorporated a faith that transcended the framework of the traditional Buddhist parishioner (*danka*) system, and provided ordinary people the freedom of faith. Its doctrines presented the meaning of the creation of human beings, stating that each human being is equally a "brother and sister" as a "Children of God" and that there is no hierarchy based on origin, status, gender, or other factors. In other words, the religion's doctrine aims to build a world realizing DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion).

Here, I would like to consider what Tenrikyo can propose for the realization of a gender-equal society, taking the Foundress's words, "No distinction between male and female pine trees," as a clue.

These words of the Foundress, Miki Nakayama (1798–1887) encouraged religious activity among women of that time, who customarily had low social status. In today's society, which is trying to move toward true gender equality, I will examine the contemporary potential of these words.

Keywords: Tenrikyo; Children of God; Gender equality; Foundress; *Kagami-yashiki*

Introduction

In 1966, religious scholar Kasahara Kazuo published *Tenkanki no shūkyō* (転換期の宗教 [Religion at a Turning Point]). In this book, Kasahara discusses Shinshū (True Pure Land Buddhism), Tenrikyo, and Soka Gakkai, and states that it is necessary to look back at the historic role that religion played when it emerged in response to the demands of the people of that era (Kasahara 1966). Tenrikyo, founded in 1838, incorporated a faith that transcended the framework of the traditional Buddhist parishioner (*danka*) system,[1] and provided ordinary people the freedom of faith. Its doctrines presented the meaning of the creation of human beings, stating that each human being is equally a "brother and sister" as "Children of God" and that there is no hierarchy based on origin, status, gender, or other factors. Here, I would like to consider what Tenrikyo teachings propose for the realization of a gender-equal society, taking the Foundress's words, "No distinction between male and female pine trees," as a guiding clue.

These words from the Foundress encouraged religious activities among women of that time, who traditionally had a low social status. Women, characterized by menstruation and childbirth, were considered "unclean" and "polluted." This prejudicial view of impurity had the adverse effect of excluding women from religious activities. For example, they were not allowed to participate in festivals. The Foundress Nakayama Miki left the following anecdote, conveyed by Yamamoto Rihachi.

> "That is it. Did you notice those pumpkins and eggplants? They are big, aren't they? The plants bear fruit because the flowers bloom. Not a single plant bears fruit without its flower. Now ponder deeply. The world says that woman is unclean, but there is nothing unclean about woman. Men and women are equally children of God and there is no discrimination. Woman has a duty, a duty to bear children. Her monthly period is the flower. Without the flower there is no fruit. Understand this well. Take the example of the pumpkin; if its big flower is gone, that is the end of it. In many things, there are flowers that bear no fruit. But to bear fruit without any flower is impossible. Ponder deeply. There is nothing unclean about it."(Tenrikyo Overseas Department 1976, 127–128)[2]

Furthermore, when she bestows the "*Obiya Yurushi*, (Grant for Safe Children)"[3] to Moroi Kunisaburō, she instructed him as follows:

> "This is for the Grant of Safe Children. A high pillow[4] or a binder[5] is not necessary. And, as this is the season of persimmons,[6] do not be afraid to eat them."[7]

This showed that there were many sayings (customs) that had to be observed during childbirth, and that the mothers could have an easy delivery without worrying about the folklore legends concerning childbirth. These words and actions which are a total

affirmation of the way women are, also taught that woman, who were considered as being born with impurities, were no different from men as "children of God." Considering that the image of women in the *Onna Daigaku,*[8] published in the Edo period, was considered the feminine ideal during this time, it can be said that this "image of women" has been fundamentally overturned. However, in reality, women were still not treated the same as men in society. In the *Rongo to Soroban* ('The Analects and the Abacus'), written in the Taishō period (1912–1926), Shibusawa Eiichi pointed out that before the Meiji period (1868–1912), spiritual education was provided (by the *Onna Daigaku*), but knowledge such as wisdom, scholarship, and theory was not recommended or taught. Further, he stated, "In the Meiji period, women's education also progressed, but only a small number of people received this new education, and it is no exaggeration to say that the true nature of women in society did not coincide with the *Onna Daigaku*(Moriya 2018, 196–197). In order to change ingrained customs and ways of thinking, women as the people involved needed to relentlessly put it into practice, and continue to make their presence visible, in society.

What Does Verse 7:21 in the Ofudesaki (*The Tip of the Writing Brush*)[9] Teach to Humans?

> Of these trees, I do not say whether male pine or female pine.
> Tsukihi has an intention for any tree. (Ofudesaki 7:21)

Before and after this verse the Foundress has taught the following:

> As it is Tsukihi who rules over all,
> Never say that this is large or that is small. (7:14)
> Even until now, from My desire for useful timber,
> I have searched most everywhere. (7:15)
> This time, in the low valleys
> I see promising trees in abundance. (7:16)
> When Tsukihi enters these trees and brings them to
> Completion step by step, they will become pillars of nations. (7:17)
> Then, looking closely day by day,
> Tsukihi will prepare for more timber. (7:18)
> Step by step, I shall nurture trees, starting with aged ones,
> And assemble them in preparation for the future. (7:19)
> Day after day, as the intent of Tsukihi is deep,
> Two or three trees will be found even at one place. (7:20)
> Of these trees, I do not say whether male pine or female pine.
> Tsukihi has an intention for any tree. (7:21)
> What I shall talk about in the time to come
> Will be nothing but the preparations for My timber. (7:22)

Of these timbers, it is not to be just a few.
I desire fifty or sixty in numbers of people. (7:23)

According to the *Ofudesaki-tyūshaku* (Tenrikyo Church Headquarters ed. 2001, 116–117), everything is under the protection of God the Parent, so there is no point in measuring it by human standards like big or small, strong or weak. God the Parent nurtures those who work as God's hands and feet, and trains those who are now at the bottom of the valley (those considered lowly socially) to become God's tools (yoboku, useful timber). Men and women alike can become God's youboku, and there is no gender discrimination. In other words, those who become tools of God and work in the real world can be used by God as *yoboku* or *yogi* [用木], regardless of age or gender, as long as they are in line with God's will. In the current teachings, a person who has received the principle of *sazuke* is called a *yoboku*, and a *yoboku* contributes to the salvation of mind and body by passing on the principle of *sazuke* (a grant bestowed by Oyasama) to the sick, and thus also conveys the will of God the Parent. In addition, the *Ofudesaki* teaches as follows:

Step by step, the Parent, who began the world,
Will enter all of these useful timbers. (15:60)
When the Parent, who began this world, enters them,
There is no knowing what I shall do. (15:61)

These verses and the *Osashizu*[10] states, "Everyone must agree and be convinced. It is not enough for each individual to understand and be convinced. This is not in everyone's heart. If the heart does not feel it, there is nothing. If, regardless of gender, one purifies one's mind at one time and walks the path of faith, there is no distinction between men and women. It is the same no matter how many people there are. I speak of it as being like tools. Some do rough things, some do fine things, and some do things in between. Unless you understand this principle, you cannot go on. [. . .] Is it a man or a woman who begins on this path? If you attain enlightenment from this, you will understand anything. (March 25, Meiji 31)" and "If, regardless of gender, one purifies one's mind at one time and walks the path of faith, there is no distinction between men and women. (March 26, Meiji 31)."

Activities of the First Female Believers

Teachers (教人, *kyōto*) and Female Church Head Ministers (教会長, *kyōkai-chō*) in Tenrikyo

Yoboku is one of the terms used to refer to Tenrikyo believers. It can also be understood as the equivalent of a believer in other religious organizations. The term

likens the construction of God the Parent's ideal world of "*Yōki Gurashi* (Joyous Life)" to the construction of a building, and those engaged in missionary work to the lumber called *Yoboku*. In Tenrikyo, it refers to human resources in the field of missionary work. As mentioned above, the Foundress herself emphasized the necessity of *Yoboku*. The term *Yoboku* began to be used as a term within the Tenrikyo Church Headquarters after the publication of the *Tenrikyō Kyōten* (*The Doctrine of Tenrikyo*) in 1949. In 1959 (Shōwa 34), the religious rules were revised to refer to believers at the following stages: "*shin'ia* (信者)," "*yoboku*," and "*kyōto* (教人)." Once a "*yoboku*" has completed further training in faith through attending seminars and other courses, they reach the stage of "*kyōto*." This "*kyōto*" is a necessary qualification to become a church head minister and is considered to be the equivalent of a "teacher" in Tenrikyo. According to the Tenrikyo Statistical Yearbook, the number of *kyōto* was 58,728 at the end of fiscal year 1931, of which 21,994 (37.8%) were women. In 1947, the number of *kyōto* who became women exceeded that of men, and since 1956, the total number of female *kyōto* has exceeded that of male *kyōto*, and thereafter women have accounted for approximately 60% of the *kyōto*.

Table 1. Amount of Teachers (Kyōshi)

Year	Number of people	Number of Men	Number of Women	Percentage of women
1931	58,728	36,728	21,994	37.5
1932	60,126	36,998	23,128	38.5
1933	62,518			
1934	64,842			
1935	78,508	45,862	32,646	41.6
1936	82,620	47,245	35,375	42.8
1937	84,705	47,763	36,942	43.6
1938	85,053	47,720	37,333	43.9
1939	77,567	42,768	34,799	44.9
1946	401	222	179	44.6
1941	79,926	42,814	37,112	46.4
1942	81,562	43,511	38,051	46.7
1946	79,448	41,791	37,657	47.4
1956	96,261	45,396	50,865	52.8

Year	Number of people	Number of Men	Number of Women	Percentage of women
1966	108,606	45,782	62,824	57.8
1976	149,622	59,734	89,888	60.1
1986	183,039	71,596	111,443	60.9
1996	192,781	75,392	117,389	60.9
2006	174,206	68,232	105,974	60.8
2016	158,887	62,955	95,932	60.4
2024	145,636	58,096	87,540	60.1

Table 2. Annual Amount of Teachers (Kyō shi)

Year	Number of people	Number of Men	Number of Women	Percentage of women
1946	401	222	179	44.6
1947	2,122	985	1,137	53.6
1948	3,582	1,670	1,912	53.4
1949	2,863	1,330	1,533	53.5
1950	1,835	908	927	50.1
1951	3,141	1,391	1,750	55.7
1952	4,095	1,704	2,391	58.4
1953	4,592	1,869	2,723	59.3
1954	4,889	2,004	2,885	59
1955	5,213	2,126	3,087	59.2
1956	3,887	1,690	2,197	56.5

Table 3. Number of active churches (As of December 31, 2024)

	Domestic	Abroad	Total
Number of Churches	13,728	301	14,029
Number of Female Church Ministers	1,862	55	1,917
	15.10%	*22.40%*	*15.30%*

As of December 2024, Tenrikyo has 14,029 active churches[11] of which 15.3%[12] are headed by women. In the Tenrikyo Women's Association magazine, *Michi no Dai*, the serial stories "Women Described in the "Traces of Predecessors" (issues no.1–no.100, [1954–1988]) describe the journeys of faith of 116 women who converted to Tenrikyo. Of these women, 21 (18%) became church head ministers and 77 (66%) became wives of church head ministers and were involved in the establishment and management of churches.[13] All of the first female believers described here heard about Tenrikyo, organized their affairs, and started afresh. Among these women, including the Second generation and later generations, 54 became missionaries, 33 supported missionary work by raising funds for missionary work or making a living (in cases where they were married couples), and 44 worked as housewives to support their husbands((Horiuchi 1994, 74) They lived a life of missionary work with great joy. For example, it is noted that they have recounted:

* If you make people happy, God will be happy too. That's what Oyasan[14] said (Tenrikyo Women's Association 1960 October, no.20, 37).
* "It would be a shame to waste time on sewing and laundry when there is no time left for saving others," my mother said, and she researched ways to sew kimonos quickly and devised various methods to tackle household chores. (Tenrikyo Women's Association 1964 October, no.29, 61)
* My mother always walked by holding my hand. I wondered how she could look so happy in the midst of such hardship. ...All she said was "Oh, God the Parent, thank you, so much," and there was never a trace of complaint or lack of praise. Every time I heard my mother speak, I couldn't help but marvel(Tenrikyo Women's Association 1981 October, no.80, 79).
* Even as a child, I thought she was a wonderful woman, admonishing men in her own Kumamoto dialect in this exclusive, male-dominated land. (Tenrikyo Women's Association 1982 January, no.82, 77)
* There were days when the birds didn't sing, but not a day went by when she wasn't there to help others(Tenrikyo Women's Association 1983 May, no.85, 68)
* "Even someone like me, a country female who knows nothing, can perform *tsutome* (service) and pray to God the Parent, and then anyone with any illness can be saved. It's interesting and I'm grateful..." (Tenrikyo Women's Association 1985 October, no.92, 41).

There are many stories like this. A female believer said, "If I rely on God the Parent, I can't go wrong," and even in her old age, she gave loud speeches day and night at places where many people gathered, such as Toji Temple, Kyōto Station, and Kitano Tenmangū Shrine (Tenrikyo Women's Association 1985 October, no.92, 44). Another 80-year-old woman went on a missionary trip to Sendai, saying, "God has a mission for me, so I must carry it out. As long as I am carrying out this mission, I cannot stop helping others." (Tenrikyo Women's Association 1986 January, no.93, 126).

The women's ability to spread the teaching was remarkable, and it was backed by their confidence and joy in their faith.

On the other hand, when one looks at the "descriptions about wifely support," one can see that the number of descriptions of wives supporting husbands increases as time goes on, and at the same time, expressions such as "do as your husband says" and "the power of the shadows," which place emphasis on the ideal image of a woman that was spoken about in society in general, rather than on the image of a believer specific to Tenrikyo, come to be used. It can be said that the writers were influenced by such social conditions. *Shinkō ni ikiru joseitachi: Michi no sendatsu to shite tsuma to shite* (信仰に生きる女性たち：道の先達として妻として [The Women Who Lived by Faith: As Pioneers and Wives]) compiled and published by Tenrikyo Doyusha in 1990, this book depicts the female figure of a "wife," and in its preface it is written,

> There are as many churches that have been established in the 100 years since the founding of the Tenrikyo Church Headquarters as there are lanterns offered every year at the Spring and Autumn Services and on the Foundress's Birthday. Hidden in each of those lanterns is the infinite sincerity of our predecessors, and there is as many dramas of struggle, blood and sweat. The majority of the protagonists in these dramas have been men. However, these dramas would not have been possible without supporting characters. Rather, it must be said that it was because of the supporting characters that the drama of the principles of each and every name was born.

The main text describes the conversion stories of 22 female believers and their subsequent religious lives. While these are accounts of the lives of individual believers, the subtitles of their stories seem to emphasize the role of women as supporting characters. For example, there are titles such as 'The Unsung Efforts of a Woman Who Was Said to Be "One Step Ahead" of Her Husband' (Umetani Tane), 'The Loving Words of a Wife Who Encouraged Her Husband on the Path of Awa' (Tosa Masa), 'The Person Who Became a Dai' (Yamanaka Sono), 'The Devoted and Tender Care for Parents' (Uehara Sato), and 'The Gentle Endurance and Fierce Protection' (Ike Hana). Regarding Umetani Tane, who was regarded as a model of faith to be passed down to future generations, the following description is provided:

> The faith of Tane who has devoted herself entirely to working behind the scenes is too modest. In place of Shirobei, Tane's husband, who was often away, she supported 'Senba's (later, Senba Grand Church) household by her own self. It was this, her work behind the foundation of Shirobei's fierce faith for blossoming in the open. Furthermore, it is precisely because of the nurturing work that connects people with kindness that Shirobei's strict training has come to shine. [. . .] Not only did she support her husband behind the scenes, but she also believed the

> Truth of Jiba and steadfastly walked the path of gratitude. (Tenrikyo Doyusha 1990, 46–47)

At the same time, the women described in this book lived their lives according to their own beliefs and decisions. Some of them lived in different areas from their husbands, spreading the teachings and laying the foundations for what would later become grand churches. It is clear that they lived their lives not according to what they 'had to do' but according to what they 'could do' based on their beliefs. Their hardships were transformed into joy.

The teachings of the Foundress which appeared during the end of the Edo period (1603–1868) and spread through the Meiji period (1868–1912), changed the way people lived and caused great ripples in the surrounding society. For women, it was the realization of "women's liberation," or in modern terms, "gender equality." It can be said that the joy of faith, which fully affirmed the way women were, enabled women to take action.

Even today, as can be seen from statistics, women can become church leaders in Tenrikyo with few obstacles. However, the way in which they are perceived seems to be the image of women described in the *Women Who Live by Faith*. This suggests an ideal marital relationship, and at the same time, a relationship in which the wife and husband reciprocally support each other. To put it simply, isn't it because men expect women to be "wives" (as supporters of their husbands) and to play the role of "mothers (parents)?"

Construction of the Image of Women in Tenrikyo?

At the 25th International Congress of Oriental Studies held in Moscow in 1960, the Second Shinbashira,[15] Nakayama Shōzen gave a speech entitled "Woman's Position Viewed by Tenrikyo," which began with the following statement:

> Nowadays, when woman's status in society has been remarkably raised, equality of sexes is regarded as an everyday affair in all civilized countries. But the fact is that women are still held in low esteem by some religions, especially by established religions, in which both sexes are deemed equal only intellectually.

And he continued that "Tenrikyo was unique in regarding women's status originally as important and its doctrine demonstrated this fact as follows:"(Tenrikyo Church Headquarters 1961, 420–421)

> 1. The first step Tenrikyo took for salvation was to protect woman in childbirth.
> 2. The Foundress of Tenrikyo did not teach that women were more unclean than men. Women had been associated with pollution in the older religions on account of the menstruation peculiar to their sex.

3. Woman is in no sense lower in social standing than man, but both are originally equal. If they live with well-governed minds, there is no essential difference in personal values between both sexes.
4. Woman is not an evil spirit, but an important foundation of the religious faith of her family members. In short, "woman is the foundation of the faith."
5. The main difference was the primary duty of woman is to give birth to a child and bring it up.
6. Woman is passive by nature in contrast to the activeness of the other sex.…Yet the female sex has an expansible nature and an inquisitive mind, whereas the male is characterized by motivity, activity and dynamics.
7. The essential nature of a woman should be mildness and kind-heartedness.
8. Woman is attributed a natural inclination toward joining and perseverance. (Tenrikyo Church Headquarters 1961, 423–427)

Nakayama stated that these views of woman in Tenrikyo are also seen in actual practice. The first place is that the *Tsutome* or Service, the most important of the Tenrikyo rites, is performed by the ten people (five men and five women). And as mentioned before, many females act as heads of branch churches and female *kyōto* are more numerous than male ones, and so on.

He concludes "What I really mean is, that both sexes should help each other—each with its own sense of responsibility and its own peculiarity." (Tenrikyo Church Headquarters 1961, 430) These eight characteristics, especially the first three, are shown in song 7:21 of the Ofudesaki, and directly refer to the teachings on women in the *Anecdotes of Oyasama, the Foundress of Tenrikyo* section. The following characteristics seem to incorporate theories on the essence and roles of sex. The Second Shinbashira further spoke as follows in a speech at the 36th Tenrikyo Women's Association General Meeting:

> God created humans, dividing them into male and female, and protects them so that new life is born through each and every action of both. From the perspective of the two, there is no difference between high and low, and both female and male pines are equal. However, although men can conceive children, only women are allowed to give birth. As a result, although both men and women are equally parents to their children, when children look at their parents, it seems natural that they feel a stronger sense of parenthood towards their mothers than their fathers. (...) The special skill of a mother is the role of giving birth. It is also the joy of raising children. When this special skill is joyfully carried out in accordance with the teachings of nature, does not a harmonious bond between parent and child naturally arise? (Nakayama 1954, 2–3).

In this way, the precepts by the Second Shinbashira for women, which were based on the idea of "mother," created an image of women who were privileged with the "role of mother," and gradually came to preach the importance of men and women cooperating

while fulfilling their respective positions and roles. However, it is difficult to find lectures to men based on the concept of 'fatherhood,' while the privilege of the "role of mother" is taken for granted and linked to 'motherhood.' For example, there is little discussion of women who cannot become mothers or who choose not to become mothers. Since 'motherhood'[16] is often perceived as an innate quality of women, acts such as 'giving birth' and 'raising children' are easily recognized as part of a woman's role. As a result, childcare can become a 'privilege' for women. Women in the midst of childcare anxiety may feel self-doubt.

The aforementioned lecture by the Second Shinbashira at the annual meeting of the Tenrikyo Women's Association considered why women came to be called 'the foundation of the path (*michi* [=Tenrikyo])' and shared the process and results of that consideration with the members of the Tenrikyo Women's Association. In the latter half, the Second Shinbashira stated that this was related to the fact that the founder was a woman.

The Second Shinbashira's Precepts of the Third and Fourth Shinbashira also continued this trend and based on the "Moto no Ri (Truth of Origin),"[17] they emphasized the importance of women's position and role. In other words, the role of "giving birth and raising children" is the role that women should play. In terms of faith, this leads to the upbringing of the next generation of *yoboku*.

In the Osashizu concerning child raising, it is advised, "If you approach with a big heart, a child will become great; if you approach with a small heart, a child will become small. How can children grow up if their parents are angry? Everyone must take the place of Oya, God the Parent. It is the role of parents to satisfy their children and guide them along the way." (7 July, 1888) This is not for mothers but for parents. Raising children[18] is the role of parents.

About *Kagami-yashiki* (The Mirror Residence): A Mirror Reflecting Society and a Mirror Reflected in Society

The "good wife, wise mother" education that began in the latter half of the Meiji era emphasized women's roles in the home, and this value is thought to have created a division of roles based on gender, which seems to have led to the valuing of men and women differently in society. A notable example of this is "universal suffrage." Women did not have the right to vote or to be elected. The division of roles based on gender in society continued unchanged after World War II, and since it was a system that was convenient for industrial development, it is said to have become popular during the period of high economic growth in the 1960s. For a long time, the system in which the husband worked at a company and the wife played the role of housewife at home continued. In Japan, people's lives are viewed in terms of households and couples, and the differences in the social positions of individuals - husbands and wives - that had been buried in these units and became invisible, can be said to have been incorporated as the

basis of the broader social structure.

As seen in the previous section, the description of "Traces of Predecessors" in the *Michi no Dai* tends to emphasize the importance of 'the contributions of women behind the scenes' as time goes on. The fact that the Second Shinbashira highlighted 'motherhood' as a female privilege may be interpreted as demonstrating a gender-based approach to faith, which ended up discussing faith in terms of gender roles. It cannot be said that this trend was not influenced by the social trends of the time.

In his aforementioned presentation, the Second Shinbashira stated that one-third of Tenrikyo's church head ministers are women, reflecting the teaching of "no distinction between male and female pine." However, the current number of female church head ministers has now fallen to 15.3%. How to interpret this fact is a matter of faith, but it may also reflect the current state of the organization. In Japan, since the enactment of the Basic Act for Gender Equality, Japanese society has promoted women's participation in society and is promoting policies such as gender equality and awareness of unconscious gender bias. In this situation, how can female (and male) believers realize the religious conviction of 'no distinction between male and female,' which delighted them and would have surprised society? The following advice is given in the Osashizu. The Mirror Residence (*kagami-yashiki*) reflects society, but the reverse is also possible.

> "There is no distinction between men and women. Everyone understands this principle. Every day, we have our own tasks to perform. Depending on the circumstances, some tasks are necessary, and others are not. However, when the time comes, we are all of one mind. From the perspective of the world, this is truly the case. A pure heart is truly the way, and it can be explained later in the Mirror Residence. If it cannot be explained, it cannot be called the Mirror Residence. Understand this. There is no need to worry about your illness. If you are truly convinced in your heart, your illness will be cured. Everyone is the same, regardless of gender. There is no distinction between men and women. When reason is established, reality is settled. This is called an obstacle. Regardless of the type of obstacle, understand that reason is sufficient. No matter how difficult it may seem, it will be settled. Obstacles are not easily overcome. All reason is the same. There is no distinction between men and women. Understand this well." (19th May 1900)

And the Osashizu teaches, "This residence [19] is called the Four-fronted Mirror Residence[20] " (January 11, 1897) and "The world is a mirror, here is the Mirror Residence. If the World's foundation becomes cloudy, the world will also become cloudy. Think of it as shining again" (December 7, 1896). If the teaching of "there is no distinction between female and male pines" can be reflected in the world as it is, then it is possible for the world to change in the same way. In situations where people are considered to be female or male, it will be necessary to visualize and show the "state in which there is no distinction between female and male pines" in the "Mirror Residence" even in

situations other than religious rituals.

Conclusion

In *Shi-shūkyō no suitai to jendāmondai: Ōmoto no jireikara* 新宗教の衰退とジェンダー問題：大本の事例から[The Decline of Japanese New Religions and the Problems of Gender: From an Example of Omoto], Kumata Kazuo (2025) states that "Since the 1970s, the decline of new religions up to the third stage (those that had completed their expansion by the 1960s) has been noticeable. It's been explained by linking it to the increasing individualization of society. However, the article suggests that gender issues may also be significantly involved, and discusses the example of Oomoto, whose influence on a religious organization has not declined." He argues that one of the reasons Oomoto has not declined is that its Foundress, Deguchi Nao, instituted matrilineal succession, the "unintended consequence" of which was that wives were guaranteed equal voice with their husbands. He also states that the gender issue of "deep-rooted male chauvinism" is also related to this background and has led to the decline of the new religion. It also points out that many religious orders may have failed to break away from the family ethic of the "modern family" (a nuclear family with a husband who is a full-time employee of a company, a wife who is a housewife and two or three children), which was compatible with society until the 1960s.

Fujiwara Masato, who serves as the director of the Tenrikyo missionary post in Lyon, France, said, "While engaged in missionary work for Tenrikyo in France, I have often heard women say, "It is wonderful that the founder is a woman." Recently, at the missionary post's lecture of monthly service in Lyon, I gave a brief introduction to the life of the Foundress, Nakayama Miki, and what Tenrikyo refers to as "*binagata*" (divine model). Apparently, the story caught their attention, an elderly woman remarked, "Why haven't you shared such stories before? I would like to hear more about this." I had only briefly touched on the subject, but the unexpected reaction left me surprised. It seems that the significance of having a female founder in France is greater than I had imagined, and after more than 20 years in France, I am beginning to understand this"(Fujihawa 2025, 4).

Fujiwara stated, 'There are many French women who are interested in the fact that the founder of a religion that advocates gender equality was a woman, and moreover, a woman born in feudal Japan at the end of the 18th century.' He further stated that the doctrine of gender equality taught by the female founder had been established as a doctrine and ideology since the time of Miki Nakayama's lifetime. The highest ritual of faith practice, the '*tsutome*,' is a ceremony directly taught by the Foundress, where men and women perform together in the same place. Additionally, he points out that the '十全の守護 *Ju-zen no Shugo* [ten aspects of complete providence] '[21], which forms the core of the teachings, contains equal parts male and female elements. He then states the following.

> "On the other hand, it could be said that gender equality in Tenrikyo is not as clearly achieved as the teachings suggest. It is not uncommon to feel a male-centred bias in various situations, and this tendency is likely reinforced by the conservatism inherent in religion. The degree of gender equality within Tenrikyo is lower than that found in modern Japanese companies, families, and society in general. There are female church ministers. However, it is questionable whether male and female church ministers are treated as completely equal. While I do not have sufficient statistical data, it should not be difficult to demonstrate that even if the head of a local religious organization (church) is a woman, there are few women among the members of the larger organizational body that holds decision-making authority." (Fujihawa 2025, 4)

In Tenrikyo, it is clear that "the teachings about sexes are equal" and with regard to men and women, "there is no institutional distinction between them." How do people react when this assertion is put forward more strongly than in general society? Do they "see" the teachings being put into practice?

It will be possible to reflect the joy of the first female member of the Tenrikyo faith, who started from scratch and relied solely on her personal faith to preach, in the present day, not only through the activities of individual believers, but also through the Mirror Residence reflecting the joy of faith from a gender equality perspective to the world.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

[1] The *danka* system (檀家制度 *Jp. danka seido*), also known as *jidan* system (寺檀制度 *Jp. jidan seido*), is a system of voluntary and long-term affiliation between Buddhist temples and households. During the Tokugawa shogunate, the system was turned into a citizen registration network and became a government-mandated and Buddhist temple-run system to monitor and control the population as a whole.

[2] "No.158. Monthly Period Is the Flower."

[3] Grant of Safe Childbirth. *Obiya-yurushi* is one of the grants bestowed at the Jiba (the Tenrikyo axis mundi) by the eternally living Oyasama, which ensures an easy and safe childbirth. *Obiya-yurushi* was granted in the early days with three breaths and three strokes but was later changed to the grant of sacred powder made of roasted grains. Roasted grains were replaced by sugar candy around 1878, and later by washed rice from 1904 on.

[4] *Takamakura*, a wooden pillow to which a small pillow is attached. Also called box pillow or boat-bottom pillow. Used to keep Japanese hair in place and to prevent blood from rising to the head during childbirth. It is also known as a *kōchin*.

[5] On the first dog days of the fifth month of pregnancy, a pregnancy band is wrapped around the abdomen to celebrate a safe birth. In the past, the risks were significantly higher than they are now, and the pregnancy band was worn on the skin to protect the mother and the baby and to express the desire for

a safe childbirth. The dog day is also considered a lucky day because of the lightness of the dog's birth.

[6] An old folkloric belief was, "if a pregnant woman eats a persimmon, she will miscarry."

[7] It was in the autumn of 1884. Moroi Kunisaburō requested the Grant for Safe Childbirth for the sake of his fourth child. The Foundress herself cut the paper into squares, then brought out about one hundred and fifty grams of small sugar candies. She put three candies on each of the three sheets of paper and wrapped them and said these words ("No.151. Grant for Safe Childbirth," Tenrikyo Overseas Department 1976, 123.)

[8] The *Onna Daigaku* (Women's College) is a book of lessons for women that had been widely disseminated since the mid-Edo period. The book emphasizes feudalistic and submissive morality, such as "A chaste woman has only one husband," and the importance of submitting to the husband as the heavenly (absolute) ruler. In the Meiji era (1868–1912), several works were written that criticized the *Onna-daigaku* and explained alternatives to the ideal state of women in modern social life.

[9] Ofudesaki, *The Tip of the Writing Brush*, is one of the Three Scriptures of Tenrikyo. It consists of 1,711 verses contained in seventeen manuscripts that are traditionally called 'the seventeen volumes of the Ofudesaki' and preserved in Tenrikyo Church Headquarters" (Nakayama 1995, 34). The Ofudesaki was written in Oyasama's own handwriting between 1869 and 1882. Until it was first printed in 1928, it was only available in the form of hand-copied manuscripts. (Tenrikyo Overseas Department 2010, 249.)

[10] These are from the Divine Directions, one of Tenrikyo's Three Scriptures, the one that was complied from the transcriptions of those verbal revelations through the *Honseki*, Iburi Izo. Divine Directions can be classified into two groups according to the nature of what prompted the delivery. One is comprised of those that God took the initiative to deliver as befitted the time and situation in order to bring about salvation. The other group consists of those that were delivered in response to inquiries made by individuals or groups about illness, natural disasters, other issues of various sorts encountered in the course of life, and ways of handling church affairs. The former is known as "Timely Talks, *kokugen*" and the latter as "Directions in Response to Inquiries, *ukagai*." (Tenrikyo Overseas Department 2010, 71–72.)

[11] Churches where there is a church head minister (church bearer).

[12] Horiuchi counted the names of church ministers registered in the *Tenrikyo Statistical Yearbook*. Some names are used for both men and women, so this figure is approximate.

[13] In Tenrikyo, female believers are called 'the foundation of the path.' Literally, this means that women are the foundation of Tenrikyo's faith (Horiuchi 1994, 70–73)

[14] The Foundress, Nakayama Miki, was called "Oyasan" or "Oyasama" by her followers.

[15] The term "Shinbashira" refer to "the one who governs Tenrikyo" in the Ofudesaki (I:58 56) and would be a post created out of necessity after Tenrikyo established itself as a religious organization. Article 9 of the Constitution of Tenrikyo states that "The Shinbashira shall bear the family name of Nakayama. The successor to the Shinbashira shall be designated, based on the lineage of Oyasama, at a meeting of *Honbu-in* [Church Headquarters executive staff members]." The Shinbashira is descended from the founder's bloodline and inherits the Nakayama surname, so it does not matter whether the person is male or female. However, all previous Shinbashira, (the First Shinbashira, Nakayama Shinnosuke who was the son of the Foundress's daughter Masa, was appointed by the Foundress) have been male, and the current Shinbashira successor is also male. Incidentally, all current *Honbu-in* staff are male.

[16] 母性(*bosei*). The term 'motherhood' is a translation of the Swedish word 'moderskap.' In Japan, the term "motherhood" was first used in Hiratsuka Raicho's translation of '母性の復興(*Bosei no fukkō* [The Restoration of Motherhood])' (1919) and became established during the Showa period (1926–1989). According to the *Kōjien* dictionary (3rd edition), 'motherhood' is a natural trait that women naturally possess when they become mothers, and 'maternal love' is something that is innate and instinctive. The term 'motherhood' came into use after the 'motherhood protection debate (*bosei hogo ronsō*)' in the late 1910s, meaning that it has only been around for about 100 years.

[17] The term "truth of origin" appears as the heading of chapter 3 of *The Doctrine of Tenrikyo*, followers

often use the term to refer to the Story of Creation, which constitutes much of that chapter. The "truth of origin" (the Story of Creation) is referred to the origin of human creation in order to save all humankind. This consists of the foundation of God's providence, the truth of the Parent of Origin, the significance of the Service, "the Causality of the Soul of Oyasama, the Causality of the Residence, and the Causality of the Promised Time" and other fundamental teachings.

[18] The following anecdote is recorded in '9 According to the Parents' Minds' of the *Anecdotes of Oyasama, the Foundress of Tenrikyo*. "Toward the middle of July 1863, when Yoshimatsu, the eldest son of Chūsaku Tsuji, was four years old, his face became pale, and he was in danger of dying. Oryū, Chūsuke's mother, came to pray, carrying her sick grandchild on her back. Oyasama saw them and said: "His parents should bring him instead." So Masu, Chūsaku's wife, carrying the boy on her back, came to pray. "I will save the child according to the parents' minds," was the teaching of Oyasama. The boy was completely restored to health in four or five days." Furthermore, in the *Anecdote of Oyasama, the Foundress of Tenrikyo* '57 A Boy Should Be Accompanied by His Father,' when the son, who was nine years old at the time, fell ill, his grandmother and mother took turns praying to Oyasama for his recovery, but he did not recover easily. When his mother went to pray, she heard from Tsuji Chūsaku that 'a boy should be accompanied by their father.' So, his father, who had been reluctant until then, took his son with him to pray, and his son recovered in a few days.

The first anecdote teaches us that children grow up according to the hearts of their parents. The second anecdote can be interpreted as emphasizing the importance of the father's role in the growth of a boy, as well as encouraging fathers to participate in childcare.

[19] Jiba, the place where God the Parent descended at the time of human creation. Followers call God, who created and nurtured humans, Oyagami-sama, meaning "God the Parent." The *Kanrodai* (the Stand for the Heavenly Dew) is located at that spot and is the focus of worship.

The Foundress left behind the following story about the way of life of the people who lived in the Residence. "All of you who are living in this Residence are brothers among brothers. When one of you goes out somewhere, the rest of you should choose the best clothing from among your clothes, put it together, even if it is only to own, and have the person go out wearing it. Furthermore, those who happen to have money should one or two *sen* (currency units formerly used in Japan) from each and give it as pocket money. And you should see him or her off in high spirits. This is what brothers and sisters should do." ('163 Brothers Among Brothers in the *Anecdotes of Oyasama, the Foundress of Tenrikyo*.)

[20] Using the analogy of a mirror, the Osashizu teaches that the Residence (*yashiki*) needs to have the perfection of charity and purity. Not only are the things happening in the world reflected in the Residence, but the minds of people in the Residence are also reflected to the world; thus, if their minds are purified and spirited, their purity and spiritedness will help purify the minds of others. Further it is referred among followers that "This Residence is the 'Four-Fronted (*shihō-shō men*) Mirror Residence'" (Osashizu, April 23, 1887).

[21] The teaching of "the ten aspects of the complete workings of God" indicates and explains a number of concrete workings of God that typify "ten aspects" in order to help people clearly recognize and understand God's complete providence, enable all things without exception to exist. A sacred name is applied to each aspect. They consist of five male names and five female names. At the *tsutome* (Service), the ten Service performers represent the ten aspects of God's providence when they perform the Kagura Service around the central pillar in Jiba. Each pair of aspects of the providence, represented by the two performers facing each other in the Kagura Service, is a mutually complementary pair. This pair consists of a male performer with a male divine name and a female performer with a female divine name, conveying the message of cooperation between men and women.

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