Gender Equality & Social Inclusion in Japanese Buddhism

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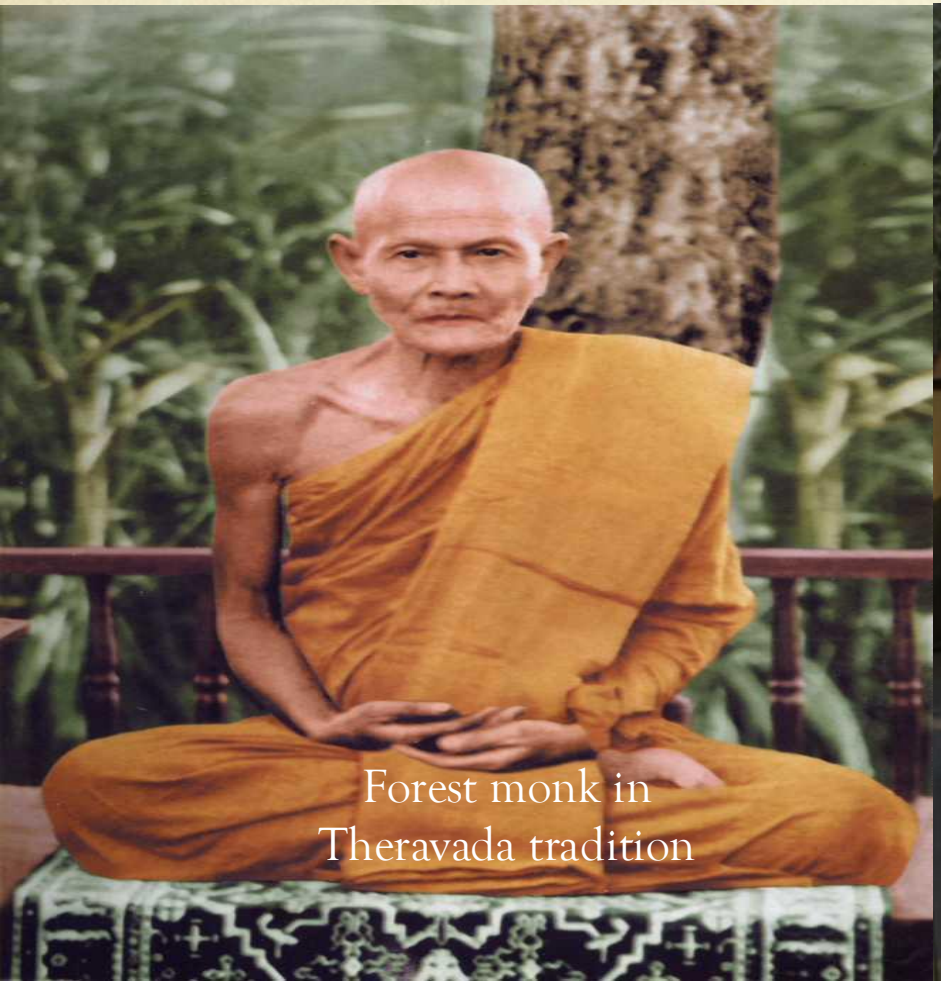
The Classical Buddhist Monk (*bhikkhu*)

- Must follow 226 rules prescribed during the time of the Buddha including absolute celibacy.
- This included Japanese monks, except for the Jodo Shin Pure Land denomination, until the modern era.



Forest monk in Theravada tradition



Zen monk in Mahayana tradition

Bhikkhuni: The Order of Buddhist Nuns

- After some initial hesitation, the Buddha established full ordination for women with 311 rules, including 8 special ones that made them subordinate to monks administratively but not spiritually
- This order died out in the Theravada for over 1,000 years but has been re-established since 1996
- In East Asia, *bhikkhuni* are better established, especially Taiwan where 75% of monastics in Taiwan are *bhikkuni*



Taiwanese *bhikkhuni*



A new community of *bhikkhuni* in Thailand

Japanese Pure Land Buddhism

In the Kamakura period, Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1263) took his teacher Honen's 法然 teachings on the inability to practice the monastic way in this age of decline (末法 *mappo*) to their logical conclusion by marrying and fathering 7 children.





contemporary Jodo Shin temple family with father-son blood lineage

Meat, Marriage, and Military: The Japanese Buddhist "priest" in the Modern Era

- In order to de-sacralize the Buddhist monk and Buddhism so as to put it in service of the state, the emperor, and Imperial Way Shinto, a series of policies were created in the early Meiji period
- 1872 "meat eating and marriage" (肉食妻帯 *nikujiki saitai*) policy allowed monks to:
- Eat meat
- Marry
- Grow their hair grow
- Abandon monastic robes in daily life

Other policies that followed:

- classifying priests as common citizens (国民 *kokumin*), who had to
- take a common surname, as opposed to the Mahayana monastic convention of taking *shaku* 釈, the Buddha's name, as a surname
- register as belonging to a household, even as a "temple family" (寺族 *ji-zoku*)
- serve in the military as common fighting soldiers

Ji-zoku: 3rd Class Buddhist Citizen

- The term "temple family" (寺族 *ji-zoku*) is now commonly used to refer to the wife of the abbot.
- From the Meiji era, the temple came to replicate social standards with a **hetero-normative nuclear family** and the *ji-zoku* as a common housewife fulfilling her patriotic role of raising sons for the new society.
- *ji-zoku* have no ordination status like *bhikkhuni* and with the **lack of acknowledged status comes a lack of opportunity to cultivate themselves** as practitioners, much less as leaders in the sangha.
- Only 2% of the members of denominational parliaments (宗議会 *shugi-kai*) of the 10 major traditional Buddhist sects are women.
- The threat exists that if they are **unsuccessful in raising a male heir, they can be pushed out** of the temple when their husband dies with no claim to the home they have built.
- At the time of death, they may be **buried separately in small graves** while their husbands are buried in much larger ones alongside previous abbots.

Principal Traditional Buddhist Denominations

Denomination	# of Temples	Ordained Men + Women, & Lay Followers	Female to Male Ratio
Tendai	3,319	3,608 men & 319 women, 1.533m lay	8.8%
Shingon Koyasan	3,586	5,234 men & 790 women, **N/A**	15%
Shingon Chisan	2,899	3,261 men & 195 women, 547K lay	5.9%
Shingon Buzan	2,635	2,840 men & 330 women, 1.42m lay	11.6%
Rinzai Myoshin-ji	3,336	3,165 men & 80 women, 794K lay	2.5%
Soto	14,501	15,010 men & 432 women, 3.67m lay	2.9%
	Soto ordained temple wives (寺族得度 *jizoku tokudo*) 15,733 in 2011		
Nichiren	4,654	6,862 men & 849 women, 3.25m lay	12.4%
Jodo	6,870	9,695 men & 980 women, 6m lay	12.4%
Jodo Shin Hongan-ji	10,117	16,548 men & 2,833 women, 7.838m lay	17.1%
Jodo Shin Otani	8,470	14,274 men & 2,788 women, 7.345m lay	19.5%

New Lay Buddhist Sects Derived from the *Lotus Sutra*

Denomination	# of Centers	Ordained Men + Women, & Lay Followers	Female to Male Ratio
Rissho Kosei-kai	600	17,432 men & 58,794 women, 2.22m lay	77.1%
Reiyu-kai	2,865	1,660 men & 1,121 women, 1.18m lay	40.3%
Myochi-kai	11	857 men & 2,292 women, 709K lay	72.8%
Kodosan	5	136 men & 262 women, 132K lay	65.8%
Sokka Gakkai		8.3m members	
Shinnyo-en non *Lotus Sutra*, Shingon	14 temples 1 center	20,524 men & 87,414 women, 930,748 lay	80.9%

Shouldn't Socially Engaged Buddhists Care?

- Kawahashi Noriko 川橋範子, one of the leading scholars and activists on gender issues in Japanese Buddhism today, has noted that in terms of Japanese Socially Engaged Buddhism, "I have seen many male priests who are enthusiastic about environmental issues and social contribution suddenly become unaccepting when it comes to gender issues." She also comments that, "Most of the priests who are active in 'social contribution activities' and attract media attention are men".

- In the national network map of the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB), **17 Socially Engaged Buddhist women are listed amongst a total of 89 activists**, that is, **19% of the entire network**.

- compares favorably to the ratio of 3-8% of ordained female teachers in the more monastic orders of Japanese Buddhism and about the same for the Jodo Shin orders

- significantly below the new lay Buddhists orders, where women leaders often outnumber male ones, especially at local levels.

Kawahashi, Noriko 川橋範子. "What should a sustainable religious community look like?" (持続可能な宗教界はどうあるべきか *Jizoku kano-na shukyo-kai-ha do-aru-beki-ka?*). In *The Earth and Its People Seen from the Eyes of Fieldworkers* (フィールドから地球を学ぶ *Fuirudo-kara chikyu-wo manabu*). Eds. Satoshi Yokoyama 横山智編 et. al. (Tokyo: Kokon Shoin Publishers Ltd. 古今書院, 2023), p. 38. https://www.kokon.co.jp/book/b621043.html

End-of-Life Care: Rev. Keido Iijima 飯島惠道

- Adopted by two elderly Zen nuns and raised in a local monastery
- In 2000, began training as a palliative care nurse at Suwa Central Hospital in Nagano
- Studied and practiced temple-based hospice care with a Rinzai Zen priest Rev. Takahashi Takushi 高橋卓志 at Jingu-ji temple
- In 2006, established the Heartbeat Care Group to support:

1) counseling on psycho-social, spiritual, religious, economic, and legal issues;
2) self-help groups of the elderly, disabled, bereaved, abused, alcoholic, and so on;
3) dispatch of chaplains to medical and welfare institutions; and
4) referrals to outside specialized agencies.



Ven. Iijima Keido 飯島惠道
Soto Zen 曹洞宗
palliative care nurse
Yakuozan Tosho-ji temple
薬王山東昌寺

End-of-Life Care: Rev. Mari Sengoku 千石真理

- Rev. Sengoku Mari 千石真理 worked here for 4 years and now is a Buddhist Chaplain trainer at the Rinbutsuken Institute and founder of the Awakening Mind & Body Naikan Center

- The Asoka Vihara terminal care clinic and the adjacent Vihara Hongwanji nursing home in Joyo City on the outskirts of Kyoto city established by the Jodo Shin Pure Land Hongan-ji denomination.



the Rinbutsuken Institute for Chaplaincy Training

L-R: Rev. Daihaku Okochi,
Rev. Hitoshi Jin (Director),
Rev. Mari Sengoku,
Rev. Gakugen Yoshimizu



NEW!

End-of-Life Care & Suicide Prevention



- Rev. Kamiyama Senshin 神山泉心 (upper right) (Soto Zen) 10 years at the Hope House (きぼうの家 *kibo-no-ie*) hospice in Sanya, founded by Catholics to serve the poor and homeless. Rev. Yoshimizu Gakugen (Jodo Pure Land), a leader in helping the homeless is a board member.
- Rev. Kimura Enka 木村演佳 (lower right) (Jodo Pure Land) member of the Association of Buddhist Priests Confronting Suicide and Self-Death 自死・自殺に向き合う僧侶の会.

Suicide Prevention: Rev. Eka Shimada 島田絵加



- Jodo Pure Land priestess and vice-abbot of a temple in Tokyo
- Works at an important NGO called the Center to Support Measures Against Suicide, commonly called Life Link, as a telephone counselor and trainer of other counselors
- one of the main representatives of the The Association of Buddhist Priests Confronting Self-Death & Suicide 自死・自殺に向き合う僧侶の会

NEW!

Suicide Prevention & Clean Energy: Rev. Kazuha Fujii 藤井一葉

- Jodo Shin Hongan-ji denomination priest
- Studied in the new Graduate School of Practical Training Studies at Ryukoku Buddhist University
- Interned at a hospital in Osaka under the Professional Association for Spiritual Care and Health (PASCH)
- Joined Sotto, the Kyoto Self-Death & Suicide Counseling Center in the early 2010s and has organized Death Cafés, casual discussions about death with fellow monks
- Now at Tera Energy, a Buddhist energy company and social enterprise, founded in the late 2010s by the priests of Sotto to fund social development programs by Buddhists for suicide prevention



NEW!

Buddhist Chaplaincy: Kumiko Magome 馬籠久美子

- Japanese translator for the famous engaged Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh
- Advocates for people with Alzheimer's disease
- Recently certified Buddhist Chaplain (臨床仏教師 *rinsho-bukkyo-shi*)





Sustainable Development: Rev. Chisa Yamashita 山下千朝



- Jodo Pure Land priestess who grew up in rural Wakayama
- Resonated with Rev. Hakamata's analysis of rural decline in Akita
- Participated in Hitosaji Association
- Studied Buddhist Holistic Development (*kai-hotsu* 開発) in Sri Lanka
- Established the Amrita Social Enterprise to redevelop her home area to provide opportunities for young people to move back from the cities
- "harmony" (*wa* 和) that is tolerant to diversity not negating individuality

Sustainable Development: Yuki Nara 奈良由貴



- Co-founder with Rev. Okochi of Soku-on Net/Edogawa Citizen's Network for Thinking about Global Warming (ECNG)
- established in the summer of 1996 in the run-up to the Third Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP3) held in Kyoto in December 1997, resulting in the Kyoto Protocol.

➢ Establishing community solar energy systems, whose profits support a variety of community activities, such as:

1. general educational activities
2. supporting another local temple to install solar panels on their roof
3. supporting a special house for children-at-risk in the community.



Dolls of Rev. Okochi and Yuki Nara made by the children at the off-grid house

NEW!

War & Peace





❖Ven. Yuki Yako 矢向由季, a nun of the Nipponzan Myoho-ji 日本山妙法寺 denomination, travels the world bearing witness to the suffering caused by war and chanting the *daimoku* 南無妙法蓮華経 of homage to the *Lotus Sutra* to bring peace to all.

International Cooperation & Advocacy: Mika Edaki 枝木美香

- Lay Buddhist from a Jodo Shin Buddhist family.
- Director of the AYUS International Buddhist Cooperation Network.
- AYUS is part of the family of Japanese Buddhist NGOs formed from the late 1970s to 1990s to address a variety of humanitarian crises across Asia.
- AYUS was created by a group of Jodo Pure Land denomination priests, including Rev. Yoshiharu Tomatsu and Rev. Hidehito Okochi.
- supporting other grassroots NGOs in local areas in Japan, Asia and other crisis points in the world like Palestine and Afghanistan.
- Mika has also partnered with other female Buddhists in Japan to raise awareness of discrimination and structural barriers to women's empowerment in Buddhism.



Mika leading a study tour of Fukushima in October 2023

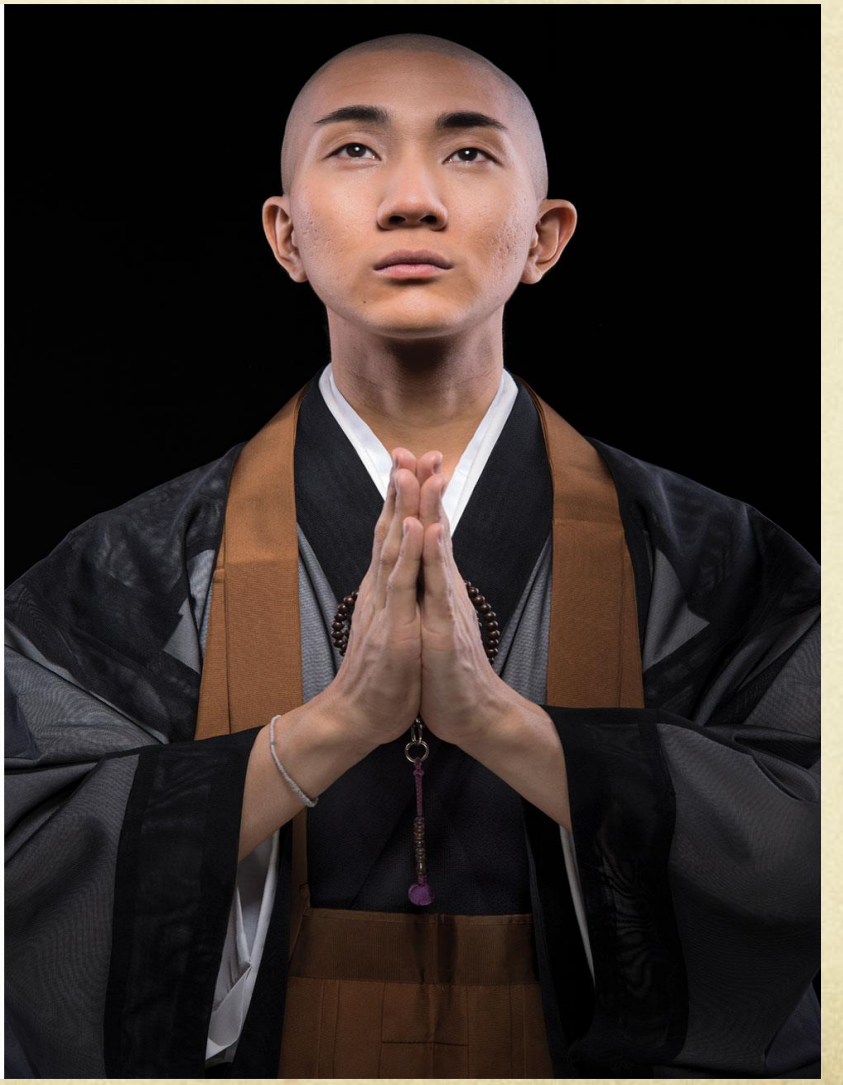
Gender Advocacy: Misa Seno 瀬野美佐

- Temple daughter of Soto Zen priest
- Administrator for the Soto Zen denomination
- founding member of the Tokai-Kanto Network of Women and Buddhism
- AYUS International Buddhist Cooperation Network Board member



LGBTQ+ in the Japanese Buddhist Sangha





Rev. Kodo Nishimura – Jodo Pure Land Denomination

The Buddhist Social Ethics in Contemporary Japan Study Group

started in 2023 by a group of Buddhist scholars, priests, and social activists concerned with the nature of social ethics in Japanese society

2024 Symposium on "How Buddhists can be active in society from a gender perspective"

Yasuko Miyoshi
from the lay
Buddhist group
Rissho Koseikai



Mika Edaki
From AYUS

Rev. Bettina
Teramoto
A temple wife
from the
Pure Land Jodo
Shin order

Prof. Susumu
Shimazono
Leading scholar
on modern
Japanese religion

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Action

Coordinator Anchalee Kurutach & the INEB Sangha for Peace



