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**Buddhist-Christian Relations in Japan:**

A Buddhist Perspective

*Yasutomo Nishi, Koichiro Fujita*

**Introduction**

Among the almost 130 million Japanese, Christians account for around 1.5% of the population, Buddhists constitute circa 66.8% of the population and Shintoists make up 79.2%.\(^1\) The reason this adds up to more than 100% is that many people regard themselves as both Buddhist and Shinto. This may appear somewhat strange from a Western perspective, but multiple religious belonging exists in Japan and reflects the Japanese tendency to accept more than one religious tradition. Despite some fierce conflicts in the past, there are no longer any serious problems regarding Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan, and the two groups have entered into a very productive dialogue. Followers of both traditions have established strong mutual trust. If social problems relating to religion occur, Buddhists and Christians cooperate to find a solution. The lay Buddhist organization, Rissho Kosei-kai (RKK), and the activities of its founder, Nikkyo Niwano, have played an important role in establishing good Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan, as we are going to demonstrate in this paper.

RKK is a worldwide Buddhist organization, which was founded in Japan in 1938 by Nikkyo Niwano and Myoko Naganuma.

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It combines the wisdom of both the Lotus Sutra and the foundational teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Its purpose is to bring these transformative teachings to the modern world. The Lotus Sutra is a teaching of human respect; both the study and practice of a spiritual path that develops human potential and a way of living that seeks peace for all people. Founder Niwano built a church organization in Japan based on the vow of RKK\(^2\) members and the important practice of “Hoza” (hōza), that is, regular meetings of RKK members with a trained leader. Niwano organized the “Union of New Religious Organization of Japan” (UNROJ) in 1951, and was appointed as its second president in 1965. He ushered in a new phase of inter-religious dialogue in Japan, which was subsequently expanded to include international religious activities. Niwano and the RKK also established an organization and facilities to support further activities, such as the publication of the magazine Dharma World\(^3\), which includes discussions on inter-religious dialogue, and the Niwano Peace Foundation,\(^4\) which fosters international peace activities through inter-religious dialogue, etc.

Niwano was also invited to participate in the opening ceremony of the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council, in September 1965, as the first Buddhist observer. He also had a

\(^2\) The RKK Member Vow is:
\begin{quote}
We members of Rissho Kosei-kai
Take refuge in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni
And recognize in Buddhism a true way of liberation,
Under the guidance of our revered founder, Nikkyo Niwano.
In the spirit of lay Buddhists
We vow to perfect ourselves
Through personal discipline and leading others
And by improving our knowledge
And practice of the faith,
And we pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way
To bring peace to our families, communities, and countries
And to the world.
\end{quote}


\(^4\) Niwano Peace Foundation: http://www.npf.or.jp/.
personal audience with Pope Paul VI. Since then he has been even more aware of the importance of Buddhist-Christian dialogue and has actively participated in it: “I deepened my determination to be a bridge between the two religions, and extend this bridge to various other religions, as well.” As a result, he decided to push for the establishment of the “World Conference of Religions for Peace” (WCRP).

Niwano’s life has been dedicated to the realization of world peace. In 1979, he was awarded the Templeton Foundation Prize for progress in religion. In his commemorative lecture, he said his motivation for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation is due to the lessons he received from his grandfather and the teachings of the Buddha. Our founder, Niwano, has vowed firmly that he will persevere in his life of faith until the gods no longer have a use for it. The pictures show the founder saying, in tears: “I

5 Niwano, Nikkyo, 1988, 87ff.
6 Niwano, Nikkyo, 1979, 21: “I was born and raised in northern Japan, in a small isolated village that is snowbound almost half the year. My paternal grandfather made an especially strong impression on me and had an important influence on my later life. He took fond care of me when I was a child and tried to instill in me a sense of the duties inherent in being human. He would often say that, although the smallest insect knows enough to feed itself, as human beings with much broader sensibilities, it is our duty not only to care for ourselves, but also to be people who do good for others. My grandfather’s example did not stop at mere words, for in his practice of traditional Oriental medicine he frequently went to great lengths to alleviate the pain and suffering of people in our village. His admonitions and actions stayed in the back of my mind during my youth and undoubtedly played a major role in guiding me to the world of religion.”

7 Niwano, Nikkyo, 1989, 299: “At the time of the founding Risshō Kōsei-kai, I spent the bulk of each day in serving the Law and was unable to devote myself wholeheartedly to the work of my small milk store. As a result, our income decreased. That was a time when our growing children had large appetites. It was only natural that my wife, on whom the entire burden of the household fell, should sometimes complain. Although she felt that religion is a good thing, she wondered about our daily needs and wanted to know how long I was going to persevere in my life of faith. But I could not abandon the affairs of the members of Risshō Kōsei-kai. Since I could not lie to my wife and give her a spurious deadline for my return to full-time devotion to business and the family, I quoted a line from the Lotus Sutra: “I
interpret the awarding of the Templeton Prize to me as encouragement from God and the Buddha to continue on the path I have followed thus far.”8 In his book Some Thoughts on Peace,9 Nikkyo Niwano stressed the power of nonviolence, the potentially unifying force of religion, the need to rise above confrontation, the joining of east and west, dedication to peace, and religious cooperation for a revolution in consciousness. He steadily promoted all activities, such as interreligious dialogue, which are based on this idea.

Many of the major incidents that shocked the Japanese religious world occurred in the early 1990s. These included issues such as: problems of bioethics that arose in relation to organ transplants, problems of fortune-telling fraud (consultations were at their highest number in 1990), and the Tokyo subway poisonous gas attack. Such events resulted in a deep distrust of religious organizations and this distrust posed a major problem confronting the very existence of Japanese religions. Partly as a reaction to this situation, Professor Hideo Yuki, of the National Christian Council in Japan, and Rev. Tadao Amaya, of RKK, founded the “Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations” (the Forum) in 2002, consisting of Buddhist, Shinto and Christian denominations.10 Nineteen regular institutes and eight observer institutes are members of the Forum.11 The Forum is

shall continue my faith until I hear the voice of the Buddha calling from the sky, ‘Excellent, excellent.’”

8 Niwano, Nikkyo, 1979, 26.
9 Niwano, Nikkyo, 1984, 5.
10 Amaya, Tadao, 2013.
11 List of the member institutes of the Forum
trying to establish a network of religious people (especially of the specialist research workers belonging to each religious organization) for the purpose of communication, cooperation, exchange of information and reciprocal understanding.

The remainder of this paper has two parts. In the first part we will discuss Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan, focussing on the role of the RKK, while the second part will concentrate on the work of the Forum. The latter will be highlighted by addressing issues that engage Japanese society, such as problems of bioethics, the high number of suicides and issues surrounding funeral practices.

Rissho Kosei-kai and Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

In this part of our paper we will first introduce, in chronological order, the activities of the founder and key staff of RKK. Then we will describe the major organizational systems and facilities of RKK. Through this, the tremendous contribution of RKK to the activities of the WCRP and the founding of the Forum will become clear.

The Inter-religious Dialogue of Rissho Kosei-kai: Achievements by Founder Nikkyo Niwano

RKK is a lay Buddhist organization; that is, it is composed of ordinary men and women who have faith in the Buddha and strive to enrich their spirituality by applying his teachings to their daily lives. Like their founder, they are seriously dedicated to the

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search Institute, (17) Tendai Shu Research Center, (18) Tendai Shu Jimon Shu Enjo-ji School, (19) Nakayama Shingo Syoshu Research Institute
8 observer institutes: (1) Shingon Shu Buzan Comprehensive Research Institute, (2) Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan, (3) Sekai Kyuseikyo Izunome Doctrine Board, (4) Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion of Tenri University, (5) Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, (6) Benten Shu Doctrine Laboratory, (7) Yoko Civilization Research Institute (Sukyo Mahikari), (8) Rinzai Shu Myoshin-ji Indoctrination Center.
realization of world peace. Niwano installed a large number of churches in Japan (238 churches and 380 missionary stations in Japan; 16 churches and 54 missionary stations overseas). Activities that promote the realization of the RKK vow (see above in fn. 2) are carried out in close cooperation with the church leadership and church staff members.

The centre of these activities and the life of RKK is “Hoza”, which constitutes a special form of counselling. A member can save other members or can be saved by other members through Hoza. In this Hoza, led by experienced leaders following Shakyamuni’s method of teaching, members usually sit together in a circle, creating a warm atmosphere of unity that encourages them to openly discuss personal problems. One member of the circle speaks about his or her problems, situation, and emotions while the other members of the group listen. Because they all have the basic human desire to be accepted by others, they respond with compassion, trying to become as one with him or her, that is, trying to share that person’s pleasures, sorrows, and sufferings as their own.

Many members of RKK have been saved from the bitterness of everyday life through Hoza; here they were awakened to the true faith and grasped true happiness. Hoza leaders are trained to encourage RKK members to bear the pain of those who suffer from poverty, disease, and all sorts of troubles. Whenever we realize that RKK members are saved through Hoza, we are always convinced that Hoza plays the most important role in the activities of RKK. Although Hoza is actually an internal activity of RKK, Archbishop Ramsey, at that time the head of the Anglican Communion and the principal leader of the Church of England, had realized the importance of Hoza on his first visit to Japan in 1973, when he stated: “The hoza helps you deepen mutual faith and develop a community of understanding and trust. In this sense, it reveals to me the vast energy that will help Kosei-kai grow in the future.”

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12 Niwano, Nikkyo 1989, 262.
At the same time, RKK was deeply aware of the need for a long term study of Christianity. Some members had been sent to major research institutions of universities and Christian organizations overseas in order to do research related to Christianity. In later years, these members, together with Rev. Dr. Tomonobu Shinozaki, the previous director of the Chuo Academic Research Institute, were actively involved in interreligious dialogue and international peace activities.

In 1951, the “Union of New Religious Organization of Japan” (UNROJ) was founded, with RKK a founding member. In 1955, Niwano attended the first gathering of the “Religious World Conference”, which was held in Tokyo. This was his first major experience in dialogue with the religions of the world. In 1963, he took part in the Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons. Lobbying for these activities, he visited the US and Europe and handed the peace proposal statement to Pope Paul VI.

At that time, Paul VI began concentrating on dialogue with religions other than Christianity, by installing a “non-Christian relations office” in the Vatican. These innovative activities of Buddhism and Christianity fostered an openness to dialogue and exchange between the two religions. When Niwano was invited to the Second Vatican Council and had his personal audience with the Pope Paul VI, they both vowed to contribute to world peace through religious cooperation. Niwano had been invited because the Roman Curia recognised the rapid growth of RKK and the role of its founder. Since then, RKK has maintained active communication with the Roman Catholic Church.

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13 WCRP History Compilation Committee (ed.) 2010, 39ff.
14 Niwano, Nikkyo, 2014, 31: Pope VI expressed his appreciation for the founder’s efforts for interreligious cooperation, saying, “I know very well how hard you are working for interreligious cooperation. Please continue to promote this movement in the future. In the Vatican, too, our thinking about non-Christian has changed. We must recognize each other and pray for each other. There is no way for people of religion to render service to humankind other than for the different religions to walk the way of peace hand in hand.”
15 See Takemura, 2006.
Following his meeting with the Pope, Niwano recognized even more clearly the importance of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. He decided to push for the establishment of the “World Conference of Religions for Peace” (WCRP). Niwano and some representatives of other religions met at the Japanese-American Inter-Religious Consultation on Peace in Kyoto, which took place on January 22, 1968 (with 14 persons – Christians and Jews – from the US, and 30 persons – Buddhists, Shintoists, Christians and New Religions – from Japan). Niwano proposed holding a “meeting of religious persons of the world for peace” in either 1969 (100th anniversary of Gandhi’s birth) or 1970 (25th anniversary of End of World War II and the founding of the United Nations). This proposal was agreed on unanimously. After different preparatory meetings, WCRP was established in 1970 as a place for religious persons of the world to devote themselves to the realization of peace. In 1969, Niwano attended the 20th International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF, Boston), and RKK subsequently became a member of the IARF. In the same year, Niwano became chairman of the Japan Religions League’s Committee for International Affairs, which in 1970 sponsored the first General Assembly of the WCRP, held in Kyoto. He acted as the general manager for Japan and the co-chair of WCRP. Some 300 representatives from 39 nations gathered at the Kyoto meeting. Since 1970, WCRP has held general assemblies in Belgium, the United States, Kenya, Australia, Italy, and Jordan. RKK plays a leading role in WCRP Japan. In 1978, Niwano spoke as a representative of WCRP at the United Nations special session on disarmament. In the same year, he took office as the vice-president of the IARF at its 23rd World Congress in Oxford.

Taking advantage of the guidance of our founder Niwano, RKK is continuing to expand its inter-religious dialogue and cooperation activities in Japan and abroad, of which we will now give a brief overview.
The Major Organizations, Construction of Facilities and Activities Relating to the Inter-religious Dialogue of RKK

In 1966, RKK established KOSEI Publishing Co. Ltd., which promotes world peace through interreligious dialogue by publishing books and magazines on Buddhist doctrine and practice, focusing on the Lotus Sutra. In May 1974, the magazine “Dharma World” was launched in order to actively support Buddhist-Christian relations. The purpose of the magazine is described as follows: “Published quarterly, Dharma World is a magazine that presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes interreligious dialogue for world peace.”16 As of 2016, there have been 43 volumes. The magazine has faithfully maintained the spirit of the above mentioned editorial policy. Theme selection of magazines is determined by the Dharma World Editorial Board (RKK religions dialogue/international evangelism headquarters adviser, Chuo Academic Research Institute adviser, Dharma World editor-in-chief/editor in charge), and it is well connected to the interreligious dialogue line of RKK. This magazine is distributed to a large number of Christian and Buddhist organizations and religious institutions in Japan and abroad, and it is very highly esteemed. More recently, Christian scholars such as Juan Masiá,17 Toshimasa Yamamoto,18 or Martin Repp19 have also published in Dharma World.

At the “Chuo Academic Research Institute” (CARI, established in 1966), we are studying religion, especially Buddhism, on the basis of relevant thought, culture, science, etc. CARI has the aim of contributing to the culture of humanity and world peace by fostering useful human resources. As has been mentioned above, in the 1990s religious organizations were often encountered with distrust due to a series of negative events involving religious

17 Masiá, 2014.
19 Repp, 2013.
cults. At that time, the former director of CARI, Rev. Amaya, visited Professor Yuki of the National Christian Council in Japan and asked him to take the initiative in building a network of research institutes associated with religious organizations. Yuki succeeded in the construction of the network and, as a result, the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations (Forum) was founded in 2002. The Forum works against such growing distrust through cooperation with religious organizations. Its activities, which are a good example of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, will be discussed below.

The “Niwano Peace Foundation”, affiliated with RKK, was established in December 1978 to commemorate RKK’s 40th anniversary. The foundation stimulates work and research for world peace in a religious spirit involving contemporary thought, culture, science, education, and related fields. Since 1979, the foundation has annually offered grants to assist activities and research projects that are based on a religious spirit. The foundation has awarded the Niwano Peace Prize to honour distinguished individuals or groups that contribute to world peace through interreligious dialogue, disarmament, defence of human rights, and conflict resolution. The foundation has been financially supporting international peace activities beyond the framework of a specific religion.

The 32nd Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to Mrs. Esther Abimiku Ibanga of Nigeria, a Protestant pastor and an activist. She founded the “Women Without Walls Initiative” in March 2010, born out of her desperation to put an end to the violent and senseless killing of women and children in the Plateau State of Nigeria.

At present, all of these organisations and RKK facilities are operating under the approval of the current President, Nichiko Niwano. While encouraging missionary evangelism as Buddhists, RKK is working on various peace activities in Japan and abroad.

20 Amaya, 2013.
21 http://www.npf.or.jp/english/.
Recent Interreligious Dialogue and International Peace Activities

As one example of the many activities of the WCRP’s national Council in Japan we would like to mention its joint sponsorship of the symposium “Disaster Risk Reduction and Religion” of the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction’s public forum, held in Sendai in March, 2015. 400 religious individuals from 11 religions / denominations / organizations (Buddhist, Catholic, Ennokyo, Muslim, Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP), Kurozumikyo, Protestant, RKK, Sekai Shindo-kyo, Shinto, Taiwakyodan), as well as some non-religious people, gathered for this symposium.

The symposium gave room for sharing experiences of disasters and discussing achievements and problems. The discussion centred on five points: 1. Efforts in disaster risk reduction; 2. Emergency responses in times of disaster; 3. Role of religions in times of restoration and reconstruction; 4. Cooperation with the administration; 5. Construction of an open relationship between religious and local people. Regarding the activities of religious people after the Great Earthquake (2011), a proposal from the symposium suggested that the original disaster response of religious individuals is to pray for the victims of disasters and bring peace to the hearts and minds of people. Prayers, rituals and funerals, actions based on religious traditions unique to religion, are very much required at times of crisis. For instance, religious activities related to the Great Earthquake aimed at overcoming differences between religions/denominations and giving religious comfort to people suffering from disasters. This was an important experience which opened up new possibilities for the future.

As one example of “Buddhist-Christian dialogue” in Japan we would like to mention the “Religious Summit Meeting on Mt.

\[22 \text{ http://www.rk-world.org/}\]
Hiei”. The “Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei” originated in a meeting held in October, 1986, when religious leaders of the world gathered on the holy ground of Assisi, Italy, following the proposal of Pope John Paul II, to pray for world peace in each religion’s fashion. Nikkyo Niwano participated in the first meeting of the summit which was held in August 1987. 24 representatives from 16 countries and 600 representatives of religions gathered in Kyoto and held a ceremony to pray for world peace, and deepen the understanding of each other’s religion. With the slogan of “Praying starts Peace”, the summit meeting saw its 28th anniversary in 2015. RKK has actively supported and cooperated with the summit.

Furthermore, since the establishment of WCRP, RKK has maintained active dialogue and cooperation with Christian organizations, starting with Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the Anglican Communion.

Buddhist-Christian Relations and the Activities of the “Forum”

As has been mentioned above, the “Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations” was established in 2002 in reaction to a range of incidents that shocked the Japanese religious in the early 1990s. These include issues relating to bioethics that arose with relation to organ transplants, cases of fortune-telling fraud, and the Tokyo subway poisonous gas

24 There has been no agreement from the population on whether organ transplantation following brain death should be allowed or not. Also, there has been too little time to consider and discuss the meaning and ethics of death at the National Diet concerning the Organ Transplant Law.
25 Fortune-telling fraud is a kind of fraud done by organizations such as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church). They pretend to possess supernatural powers, and pretend for
Because of the latter two issues, the Religious Corporations Act (RCA) was criticized for conferring the legal status as religious organizations to antisocial groups. The discussion about religious organizations in Japanese society became even stronger after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001. The attitude of distrust against religious organizations in Japan became a major problem challenging the very existence of Japanese religions.

In this situation, religious officials in Japan felt strongly the need to address modern-day problems (such as those relating to bioethics), to reaffirm the social responsibility of religious organizations, and to establish ethical viewpoints. Because the challenge went beyond the individual religious person or religious organizations, the Forum was established as a network of specialist researchers belonging to different religious organizations (see Appendix I). The idea was that through the impetus of such example that ancestral spirits (of the victim) are haunting the victim (because the victim did not care for their graves adequately etc.), or that an evil spirit is putting a curse on the victim, or simply that there is a “bad karma” on the victim, and lure the victim into paying absurd prices for goods or services.

26 This was an incident caused by a religious organization, Aum Shinrikyo, on March 20, 1995.
27 The RCA did not wish, at this time, to put limits on religious organizations. This is because this Act aimed to acknowledge the freedom of religious organizations as much as possible, and to enhance religious activities. This grew out of a desire to redress the mistakes made in setting up control measures against religion before and during World War II. However some groups with a legal capacity as a religious organization committed antisocial activities in the name of religion, leading to the RCA being revised in 1996. The revision aimed to not permit the legal status as a religious corporation to antisocial groups. Under these circumstances, only the dangers of religious organizations were taken into consideration, and its raison d'être was not discussed. RKK published an “Opinion about Problems of RCA’s Revision” (1995, URL: http://www.kosei-kai.or.jp/030katsudo/0301/post_151.html) criticizing this. This text points out that excess control over religious organizations by the revision violates the right to freedom of religion and deviates from the principles of the separation of religion and politics.
28 Organizations with similar backgrounds include the Religious Information Research Center (RIRC) (URL: http://www.rirc.or.jp/xoops/). See N. Inoue,
cooperation, the reputation of religion and its credibility should be restored and religious organizations should be enabled to make their contribution to society.

Members of the Forum are all research workers of affiliated institutes. The membership fees of the Forum, and the importance of each member for its operation, are equal, regardless of the size of the religious organization the member belongs to. Member institutes are all affiliated with a religious organization, including Christian churches. The Forum has annual meetings (mainly held in September or October) and a general meeting is held on the same day. Outside the annual and general meetings, there are three subcommittees: bioethics problems, suicide problems, and inter-religious dialogue. Members of the subcommittees are all volunteer researchers from the member institutes.

Annual Meetings

Since its establishment in 2002, 15 annual meetings have been held, the most recent in 2016. What should be noted here is that all affiliated research institutes and organizations (regular members and observers) attend the annual meetings and participate in active debates. Thus it may be said that the Forum is a very interactive and efficient place for cooperation and dialogue. Here are some of the presentations which have been given by Christian denominations in 7 out of the 15 annual meetings.29

1. (2nd meeting) Creation of Places Where Religious Persons can Gather: Historical Background of Inter-religious Dialogues. About Buddhism and Christianity (This main

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theme was applied continuously until the 6th annual meeting).

2. (5th meeting) Creation of Places Where Religious Persons can Gather: Mystic Rituals of Each Religion. Comparison of Christianity and Vajrayana

3. (7th meeting) the Training of Instructors in Religion, Potential Problems and Future Prospects: Issues in Training Persons in Charge of Religious Education in Catholic Churches

4. (8th meeting) About Suicide: the Problem of Suicide and Christianity

5. (9th meeting) Questions to and from Modernity: Between Secularism and Religion. Insights into The Tale of Genji

6. (12th meeting) Religious Care: Catholic Funerals and Japanese Cultures

7. (13th meeting) Modernity and Religion: Bible-centrism and Attempts in Protestant Meditation

From these presentation themes, it can be seen that the Christian denominations have actively contributed in many different fields and conducted debates with Buddhist and Shinto denominations.

The Forum publishes the proceedings of its annual meeting, and details of the above presentations are given in them. In order to give a better understanding of the Forum’s work, we will present some more details of the 7th annual meeting.

The Forum’s 7th Annual Meeting: Training Situation of Instructors in Religion, Potential Problems and Future Prospects

The 7th annual meeting discussed the training of religious personnel from the perspective of different religious organizations. The presenters came from CARI/RKK, Jinja Honcho (Jinja Shinto, Shrine Shinto) and the Oriens Institute for Religious Research (Christian, Catholic). The presentation of the Oriens Institute addressed issues in training persons in charge of religious education in Catholic churches. It explained the mission of the Oriens Insti-
stitute for Religious Research, the changes in the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the present state and issues in training persons in charge of religious education in Japanese Catholic churches and mission schools, and the qualities that are expected in a religious teacher. In this presentation, the presenter referred not only to Christianity but also to Shinran Shōnin, the founder of the Jōdo-Shinshū sect of Buddhism.

In the response of a researcher from the Sōtō-shū Research Center (Sōtō-Shū is a traditional school of Japanese Zen Buddhism) and during the subsequent debate, a number of questions were raised. Some questions related to the religious oversight regarding religious educators, which is the responsibility of the bishop and or respective convent. Other questions asked why Christianity – despite its many schools – is not expanding in Japan as much as it is in Korea. Finally, questions were raised about the inculturation (indigenization) of Christianity in Japan. It was pointed out that despite some similarities between Christian teachings and Buddhist teachings, such as the teachings of Shinran, many Japanese feel uncomfortable with the idea that God is almighty. It was also argued that the religiousness of Japanese people is multi-layered, and that the idea of chasing something out in order to believe in something else is very uncommon. Some felt that the dialogue between Christianity and Japanese culture is not yet deep enough, and that among Japanese people there is still a strong image of Christianity as a foreign religion.

Having dealt with the Forum’s general structure and annual meetings, we will now turn to its three subcommittees.

Bioethics Problem Subcommittee

This subcommittee was established in 2005, and so far there have been 15 meetings in total. Many religious organizations and affiliated research institutes submitted statements about brain death and organ transplantation to the Japanese government before and after the founding of the Forum. This led to the establishment of
this subcommittee so that the member institutes could share their published comments, standpoints, and opinions about bioethical problems. Issues related to bioethics (including brain death, organ transplantations, etc.) are deeply connected to the doctrines of each religious organization, which requires a thoroughgoing debate.

The work of this subcommittee is communicated in many ways. One way is that ever since 2007, a representative of the subcommittee has participated in the Japan Association for Bioethics’ annual panel discussions. On July 8, 2009, representatives from eight different religious organizations (Jodō Shū, Jodō Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, Shinshū Ōtani-ha (Higashi Honganji), Oomoto, Tendai Shū, Nichiren Shū, National Christian Council in Japan (NCC-J), RKK) met at the House of Councillors of the National Diet of Japan in Chiyoda ward, Tokyo, and presented their opinions on the revision of the Organ Transplantation Law (OTL). The eight religious organizations submitted a joint statement to the Japanese government and the National Diet, saying that “brain death should not be impartially defined as the death of a human”. This statement sums up the importance of protecting the “dignity of life, human rights and death”.

Contrary to this statement, the revised OTL of July 17, 2009, impartially defines brain death as the death of a human. Even if the wishes of the brain dead person are unknown, organ transplantation is allowed simply by the agreement of his or her family members. Moreover, the age limit of organ transplantation has been removed. The older version did not allow children under six years old to donate organs due to the difficulty in determining brain death. They are now legally allowed to donate organs for transplantation in the new version. Under brain death, the heart still beats and blood still flows. The body stays warm. In Japan there are many who judge this status as “alive”, and would not admit brain death as “death”. There was no agreement among the participants from the above eight different religious organizations.

31 The new OTL was put into operation on July 17, 2010.
about organ transplantation following brain death. There was too little time to discuss the concept of death and ethics at the National Diet. The member institutes of the Forum expressed their fear of problems occurring from defining “brain death as true death” by law (such as trade in organs, the issue of guidelines and procedures regarding the declaration of brain death and informed consent, and the general danger of negligence regarding life). They called for more efforts in discussing this matter socially, ethically, culturally, and religiously.

Suicide Problem Subcommittee

In Japan, suicide is one of the major causes of death. In 2006, the statistics of each generation’s top causes of death were malignant tumours/cancer (30.4%), heart diseases (16.0%), cerebrovascular diseases (11.8%), pneumonia (9.9%), casualties (3.5%), and, as sixth in rank, suicide (2.8%). Furthermore, suicide is the top cause of death of people in their 20s and 30s. In 2003, 15.8% (early 20s), 20.9% (late 20s), 22.8% (early 30s), and 25.0% (late 30s) of all deaths were caused by suicides. Additionally, the suicide rates amongst Japan’s middle aged and elderly males were very high in comparison to other countries in the world.

This subcommittee was established in 2010, and meetings have been held annually since then. The subcommittee was established to work out suicide prevention plans for religious organizations. In Japan, there were more than 20,000 suicides a year during the Japanese asset price bubble recession period (1991 to

By 1998, this number had risen to 32,863, when the economic growth rate dropped below zero. Since then, there have been some 30,000 suicides every year, with 34,427 annual suicides at its peak, in 2003. Obviously, suicide is tragic, not only for the individual concerned but also for his or her family and social circle. Suicide is committed by people belonging to different religions. Religious organizations have been working on counselling their followers and members in many regions, but they also feel the need to cooperate in order to decrease the number of suicides.

Local administrations also take the increase in suicide numbers seriously. Kyoto city administration requested the Forum to cooperate on an educational event in 2010. Suicide is deeply connected with views about life and death, and the involvement of religious organizations is essential in this matter. Due to the separation of religion and state, Japanese local administrations usually avoid cooperation with religious organizations. Nevertheless, Kyoto city requested cooperation with the Forum, and one can see this as evidence that the activities of the Forum are beginning to gain recognition in Japanese society. The member institutes of the Forum sent messages to Kyoto city’s edification event “Life Fes’ KYOTO 2010” and donated candles for the event.

Inter-religious Dialogue Subcommittee

This subcommittee was established in 2006 and three meetings have been held so far. This subcommittee was established to provide a place for the free discussion and exchange of ideas about religion and ethics. The goal is that each member can present their basic teachings or doctrines and that any related questions can be discussed in order to foster a better reciprocal understanding. Some researchers belonging to this subcommittee have visited the

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facilities of other religions, and also participated in their rituals. The meetings have not been organized in recent years, and the inter-religious dialogue within the Forum is only halfway to its goal. However, member institutes of the Forum are individually making exchanges through discussions of each other’s teachings or doctrines and visiting each other’s facilities.

The issue of funerals

In conclusion, we would like to mention briefly another problem which has been discussed by the Forum: the issue of funerals. This issue is of particular importance to Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan because Japanese Buddhism is often mocked as “Soshiki-Bukkyo”, that is “funeral Buddhism”, implying that Buddhism has turned into a mere empty shell which is only called upon at times of funerals.

At the Forum’s 12th annual meeting (themed “Religion as a Care”), a Christian, who is a funeral chapel worker and also a researcher, gave a research presentation on “Catholic funerals and Japanese culture”. During the discussion after the presentation, it was pointed out that in Japan “religious persons are foreign beings to the family of the deceased”.36 At the same meeting, a Buddhist reported that according to a Japanese survey, 90% out of all funeral homes think that “Buddhist monks cannot be trusted”, and there is also a research report which states that “the level of trust towards religious organizations is extremely low compared to other social organizations”. Additionally, the presenter explained that “Many workers in funeral homes respect Buddhist monks, but at the same time mock them. Buddhist monks do not touch the body of the deceased, do not try to comfort the family with kind words, but simply execute the necessary rites and then leave straight away”.37 Then he pointed out that “This state can be changed in a moment, just by having the monks care for the hearts of the family.” In RKK, religious persons already make great ef-

36 Suzuki, 2013. See especially the last sentence on page 43.
37 Suzuki, 2013, 42f.
forts in offering support to member families at times of funerals, as well as in everyday life.

When different members of one family have different religions, funerals become a problem. The family of the deceased sometimes thinks that because they have different faiths, the deceased will go to a different afterlife world, and that they may be unable to meet again in the afterlife. In Japanese Buddhism, perhaps due to “religious tolerance”, this issue does not become a big problem, but in Christianity, because of the characteristics of the Christian faith, this issue is more likely to constitute a problem. Because this is an important matter at the time of death, Christians point out that “good care is necessary”.

Another problem concerns funerals in the case of suicide. In today’s Christianity, suicides are often blamed on depression or other forms of mental illness. Thus the funerals are carried out with this in mind. In Buddhism, however, there are some exceptional cases (as in the case of the arhat Vakkali, suffering from a painful disease (Samyutta Nikāya 22:87)) in which suicide is not condemned. In any case, for Buddhist funerals it makes no difference whether the death was caused by suicide or by other reasons.

In this paper we have tried to show that today Buddhist-Christian relations are much improved and that, from the Buddhist side, the work of Nikkyo Niwano and the RKK has played a significant role in establishing good inter-faith relations.

38 Fujimaru, 2009, 10f.
39 I (Y. Nishi) would like to thank the late Former Director of NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, Hideo Yuki, who exerted himself for the establishment of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations; Former Director of CARI, Tadao Amaya; and the other six persons including the late Director H. Yuki. I am also grateful to Professor Y. Ousaka and Associate Professor S. Kasamatsu of SNCT for the instructions they have given me in writing and translating this paper. Moreover, Mr. A. Muto from the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Tsukuba, has given me substantial information and advice. I would like to give him my thanks as well. Last but not least, I would like to give my thanks to the President of ENBCS Prof. E. Harris, and to Dr M. Repp for inviting us to ENBCS in 2015 and giving me this opportunity.
教団付置研究所懇話会設立趣意書（全文）
教団付置研究所懇話会の目的

「教団付置研究所懇話会」発足へのお誘い（趣意書）より

今日、私たちは時代・社会の進展にともない、種々の現代的諸課題に直面しています。平和、人権、環境、生命倫理等から家庭・学校教育の崩壊、種々の青少年問題、倫理の荒廃、そして宗教的価値観の喪失など、無視できない問題が山積しています。こうした状況下に、私たちは宗教者としてどう対応したらいいのでしょうか。これはいわゆる既成仏教とか、新宗教とか、神道とか、あるいはキリスト教とかの宗教、宗派の差を超えて、日本の宗教者全員の関心とするところでしょう。

日本の各宗教付置の研究所としても、それぞれに考え、悩み、何等かの対応を行ってきています。しかし、同様の問題を抱えて努力していながら、同じ宗教者として考えていること、お互いにほとんど見えていません。何か横に連なる機関があり、相互に情報と意見を交換することが出来れば有益であろう、という声がかり前からありました。この傾向は特に昨年9・11の同時多発テロでいっそう強まったといえましょう。

そこで有志が相集い、平成14年2月4日（NCC宗教研究所）、4月24日（浄土宗総合研究所）の2回にわたる準備会を経て、「教団付置研究所懇話会」を発足させようということになりました。その趣旨は、私たち教団付置研究所は、現代諸課題にどのような関心を持ち、何をしているのか。それぞれの教義・世界観を基としながら、現代社会に開かれた教団たらしめるべく、どのように努力しているのか。それぞれの教義・世界観を基としながら、現代社会に開かれた教団をしめるべく、どのように努力しているのか。こうした事柄に関して相互に情報を交換し、それぞれの立場を尊重しつつ協力できる可能性を探りたい。そしてこの動きが、教団の差をこえて、日本社会に「真の
宗教性の復権」をもたらすことに資するものでありたいと願うものであります。
教団付置研究所、といっても規模の大小、教団との関係、純粋アカデミズムか具体的的な教化方法の検討か、など、事情はそれぞれに異なります。しかし、そうした違いを違いとして尊重しながら、日本の宗教者相互の理解を少しでも助長し、宗教者としての協調と連帯を増進する機会となり得れば、と希望しています。

平成14年9月10日
『教団付置研究所懇話会発足準備会』参加団体
大本教学研鑽所、孝道教団国際仏教交流センター、金光教教學研究所
浄土宗総合研究所、浄土真宗教学研究所、神社本庁教学研究所
真宗大谷派教学研究所、曹洞宗総合研究センター、天台宗総合研究センター
天理大学おやさと研究所、辯天宗教理研究室
NCC（日本キリスト教協議会）宗教研究所、立正佼成会中央学術研究所

以上

上記の「教団付置研究所懇話会の目的」は、「『教団付置研究所懇話会』発足へのお誘い（趣意書）」をもって充てることが「第2回教団付置研究所懇話会」において確認されております。

Translation: Aim of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations

From Invitation to Establishment of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations (Prospectus)

Today, we face various modern-day problems accompanied by the development of time and society. Problems that cannot be overlooked are piling up in front of us, from peace, human rights,
environmental and bioethics problems, to family and educational breakdowns, juvenile delinquency, degeneration of ethics, and the loss of religious perspective. What can we, religious persons do in these situations? I believe this is a problem that all Japanese religious persons are interested in no matter what their religion or sect is, whether it be Buddhism, newer religions, Shintoism, or Christianity.

Each religious affiliated research institute in Japan has given thought to this, expressed concern over it, and taken some kind of action. Yet, even though we are all dealing with similar problems and are making efforts to solve them, we rarely have the chance to see what other religious people are doing about these same problems. It has been generally accepted for quite some time that having some kind of organization connecting the religious groups so they could exchange information and opinions would be very beneficial. This tendency became even stronger especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US.

So, volunteers gathered and have decided to establish the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations, after two preparatory meetings on February 4, 2002 at the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions and on April 24 at the Jodo Shu Research Institute. Some of the questions we try to answer are: What kind of interests do we as religion-affiliated institutes have regarding modern-day problems, and what are we able to do about solving them? What efforts are we making to keep our own organization open to the modern world, keeping to each one’s doctrines and world views? We would like to search for possibilities to cooperate while respecting each other’s viewpoints as well as exchanging this kind of information. We hope that this movement will contribute to the “reconstruction of religious authenticity” in Japanese society, overcoming the differences of various religious organizations.

Each religious affiliated research institute has its own concerns, such as the size of the institute, its relationship with the religious organization, or whether it is purely an academic organization or examining specific teaching methods. But still, we hope
this will be a chance for increasing harmony and solidarity as religious people, accepting each other’s differences and possibly helping in understanding each other.

September 10, 2002

“Preparation Meeting of Establishment of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations” Participant Organizations:
Omoto Research Institute, Kodosan International Center, Konkoyko Research Institute,
Jodo Shu Research Institute, Jodo Shinshu Research Institute,
Jinja Honcho Research Institute,
Shinshu Otani-ha Research Institute, Soto Shu Research Center,
Tendai Shu Research Center,
Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion of Tenri University,
Benten Shu Doctrine Laboratory,
NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions,
Chuo Academic Research Institute of Rissho Kosei-kai

The above “Aim of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations” has been confirmed and shall serve as “From Invitation to Establishment of the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations (Prospectus)” at the second annual meeting of the Forum.

References


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