

Appendix: Methodological Notes: Sampling, Access, and Interviews

There were two periods of field work in the summers of 2002 and 2003. Prior to these, a number of Buddhist temples were sampled. Temples and their postal addresses were found through the Internet. Temples of Nichiren-shū and their postal addresses were found through the temple search web page (www.otera.co.jp).

In June 2002, 138 letters were sent to all 120 Nichiren-shū temples in six wards within the Tokyo prefecture (Shinjuku [28], Itabashi [6], Toshima [15], Nerima [12], Taitō [49], Bunkyo [10]). In May 2003, the same letters were sent to all 254 Nichiren-shū temples in the other 15 wards of Tokyo prefecture (Adachi [17], Arakawa [9], Edogawa [21], Ota [49], Katsushika [20], Kita [7], Koto [17], Shibuya [5], Shinagawa [17], Suginami [21], Sumida [16], Setagaya [12], Chuo [5], Chiyoda [0], Nakano [5], Minato [26], Meguro [7]), and 14 temples in Hachiōji City¹.

Out of the initial letters sent off in 2002, I received replies from eight Nichiren-shū temples. From this, however, by doing so-called snow-balling, the number of interviews was increased to 19. For the field work in 2003, there were responses from 32 Nichiren-shū temples replied, and 16 of them

¹In 2003, there were 17 Nichiren-shū temples in Hachioji City. 3 of them had been visited in the previous year's field work, and those temples were excluded from the mailing list.

were positive to the request. However, 5 of the positive responses arrived after I departed for Japan, so that only 11 temples could be contacted. From 11, the number of interviews in 2003 was snowballed to 22. I telephoned all of them and arranged dates and times of interviews.

However, a high non-response rate can threaten the validity and reliability of the study. Some comments need to be made on this issue. The low response rates are limitations to the findings and representativeness. Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of the initial letters was not to survey, but to gain an initial access to the Buddhist temples, which are normally almost totally unfamiliar to outsiders like myself. Without being affiliated to any established Nichiren Buddhist denominations which I was studying, I did not have any personal connections. In this regard, the sum of 19 initial contacts in two sampling processes seems to be a reasonably good result.

As a result of active snow-balling, I obtained 41 interviews. In the summer of 2002, interviews were held with 18 Nichiren-shū priests. In the summer of 2003, another set of interviews was conducted. It consisted of 23 interviews with Nichiren-shū priests. The ages of the interviewees varies from 22 to 76 years old. 26 priests who were occupying the abbeys of their temple were more like to be married and older, while the other 15 were more single and younger. All interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Interviews were generally very loosely structured.

The interviews with priests were usually held at their own temples in very informal contexts. When the interviewees saw how young I appeared, they seemed to feel at ease. They were generally very co-operative in the interview and seemed to have no hesitation at all about answering any question. In many cases, they even gave me “honest” but “anonymous” opinions or off the record comments. They seemed to feel secure in giving information to a young researcher.

I composed 8 main questions and 18 sub-questions for the interview. These helped to create a direction in the conversation. These questions were posed in no particular order. Depending on the flow of each conversation, the order of the questions was often changed. However, careful attention was made to ensure I went through all the questions to be answered. I typed up all the questions and sub-questions onto sheets of

paper so that I could ensure that all the questions were asked. The first question was to ask the priests about their initial motives to become priests and the processes they actually went through to become qualified priests. This question leads to three sub-questions. The first one gauges the reasons the interviewees chose to be priests out of many other choices. The second one is about training that they have taken to become qualified priests. The third sub-question asks priests how they feel about their current lives as priests. The second question is what priests think of their roles. This is about their own self-image. They were asked to answer how they define roles which are distinctive from those in any other occupation and profession and how they define their status as a priest in comparison to the laity. In addition, those who have been priests for a number of years were asked, how the relationship between the priest and the laity has changed, if at all. The third question is about their thoughts and experiences of lay Buddhist organisations, especially Soka Gakkai. This led the interviewees to be asked about their thoughts and sentiments on the Nichiren Buddhist concepts of *shakubuku* (refutation of other teachings) and *kōsenrufu* (widespread dissemination). These concepts have been disseminated to the Japanese public by the rise of Soka Gakkai. Interviewees were asked how they practise these concepts in their priestly duties, how important they are for their priestly lives, and how they feel about the image of these terms created by Soka Gakkai.

In addition, when any interviewee had one or more other jobs, he was asked how he compared his other occupations with that as a priest. Then, their thoughts and sentiments towards the popular criticism of “Funeral Buddhism” were gauged. Finally, I asked them about the prospects of their “job” for the future. As virtually all of the young and youthful priests I interviewed had a priest father, I asked them to tell me their experience of being brought up in a temple by a priest father and how they feel about doing the same as their fathers. Moreover, I asked these young priests what it meant to be a priest during their youthful life. This was an open-ended question. Many of them expressed a variety of feelings, sentiments and enthusiasm about being priests.

All interviews were recorded with the agreement of the interviewees. I was originally concerned that the interviewees would get nervous because of the presence of a tape recorder. However, none of them actually

appeared to be so. Nevertheless, when a conversation developed into some sensitive issues, for example, about any personal thought on the newly developing lay Nichiren Buddhist organisation, called Kenshōkai 顕正会, I was asked to stop the recording. Interviewees were generally extremely cautious about the movement of this particular organisation, because they felt that their temple could be attacked if their personal criticisms against Kenshōkai were heard. In most cases, these kinds of conversation occurred after the recorded conversations. I took some notes, but it was not always possible in such sensitive conversations. Therefore, in the latter case, notes were made after the interviews depending upon my own memories of the interviews.

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