

CHRISTIAN WEDDINGS:  
RELIGION AND RITUAL IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the rise of Christian weddings within the context of contemporary Japan. In particular, it challenges the manner in which religion as an object of study is traditionally understood in an effort to reveal both the popularity and significance of Christian (and, more generally, religious) wedding ceremonies in a society where the vast number of members claim to be “non-religious” (*mushūkyō*). The author draws on numerous interviews with individuals both inside and outside the wedding industry to reveal the manner in which Japanese individuals with no proclaimed religious identity, affiliation or faith still vicariously rely on the religious.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Chapter 1: Christian Weddings, Religion and “Non-religion” .....	1
Definitions of Religion and “Non-religion: Defining Religion and Exploring the Religious in Contemporary Japan.....	2
“Non-religiousness” as Religion in Contemporary Japan .....	6
Methodological Parameters .....	9
Structure of the Thesis.....	10
Chapter 2: Japanese Religiosity and Christianity by the Numbers .....	13
Trends in Contemporary Japanese Religion: A General Outline of Japanese Religiosity .....	13
Christianity and Christian Weddings by the Numbers .....	16
Chapter 3: Researching Christian Weddings .....	19
Consumerism and the Importance of Expertise and Repositories of Tradition.....	19
Christian Weddings as Hyper-reality .....	22
Christian Weddings as Scenery.....	23
Chapter 4: Religious Authenticity, “Non-religiousness” and Christian Weddings .....	27
Interview Results: “Non-religion” as Affective Belief.....	28
“Non-religiousness”: Cognitive Religious Strategies for Affective Religious Behavior .....	32
“Non-religiousness” as Normalcy .....	33
“Non-religiousness” as Non-exclusiveness.....	37

“Religiousness” as Beneficial Specialization and “Vicarious Religion” .....	40
Chapter 5: Contemporary Japanese Christianity in the Context of Wedding .....	43
A Church Opened by God: Church Directives and Catholic Weddings of Non-Christians .....	44
The Decline of Catholic Weddings .....	48
Easy Access: Protestant Churches and Christian Weddings .....	50
Christian Wedding No Questions Asked: Christian Bridal Mission .....	52
The Commercial Success of Religious Weddings .....	54
Chapels and “Wedding Churches”: The Architecture of Contemporary Japanese Christianity .....	55
Seeking an Authentic Minister: Religion and Ethnicity in Japanese Christian Weddings .....	58
Chapter 6: Dynamic Religion in an Uncertain Future .....	64
Appendices .....	67
Bibliography .....	77

## CHAPTER 1: CHRISTIAN WEDDINGS, RELIGION AND “NON-RELIGION”

Nobuko, a single Japanese woman in her twenties, dreamed of getting married and, although she was not currently seeing anyone, that did nothing to hinder her ambitions. At the time of my interview with her, she was, like many other Japanese women her age, actively involved in a search for a possible partner frequently described as *konkatsu*. Not only did Nobuko have a fairly precise image of the kind of person that she wanted to marry, she had also already imagined many of the details of her marriage to a level that was remarkable. Curiously, although Nobuko did not consider herself Christian or even religious, she already knew exactly what sort of marriage ceremony she wanted—a Christian ceremony. During the interview, Nobuko expressed an avowed disinterest in the traditional Shinto marriage ceremony (*shinzenshiki*) which, at first, seemed to confirm her dispositions toward religion. However, she expressed a similar disinterest in the secular options for marriage (*jinzenshiki*) which exist widely throughout Japan despite the fact that a secular wedding would give her an opportunity to don the white wedding dress that seemed to be a rather crucial part of her marriage day plans. Secular weddings were “just made up” and “not authentic” marriages. In Nobuko’s mind there was only one form of marriage ceremony for her—a Christian wedding.

Nobuko dreamed of appearing, along with her future husband, before a Christian minister in a church to validate their vows before God and witnesses who would respond by blessing their union with the sincerity of their prayers. To Nobuko, such a wedding was the perfect embodiment of happiness and, would not only set her marriage off on the right foot, it would propel her happiness and the happiness of her husband into the future. A Christian marriage ceremony meant a happy, prosperous and, above all, successful marriage in a future that might be fraught with troubles and uncertainties. Furthermore, it was backed by the guarantee of authenticity afforded to it as part of the Christian tradition. According to Nobuko, in these respects the secular wedding could not compare. Moreover, in contrast to her statements regarding her personal identity in which she described herself as “non-religious” or *mushūkyō*, Nobuko felt that Christian weddings were religious and that they should be because no marrying couple would expect anything less.

Nobuko and her dreams of a Christian wedding are by no means a rarity in contemporary Japan where, for at least the last decade, the solid majority of individuals marry Christian. However, few investigations into this marriage ceremony have made

any attempt to explore what role, if any, religion might have in the process of obtaining marital happiness. In fact, more often than not, the apparently Christian motifs, prayers, scripture readings, blessings, hymns and religious professionals present in the ceremony are widely regarded as mere trappings which are the largely irrelevant characteristics of a commercial event that demonstrates a Japanese indifference toward religion or an infatuation with superficiality. However, this approach to Japanese Christian weddings utterly fails to explain the role or even existence of what would otherwise be considered Christian elements.

Christian wedding ceremonies have in the last twenty years moved from the sideline to the mainstream of Japanese society. In a socio-cultural environment where the vast majority of individuals claim to be “non-religious,” the continuing popularity of Christian weddings and other forms of religious experience remain partially or largely unexplained. The purpose of this thesis is to:

- 1) Examine the current state of Christian wedding ceremonies of contemporary Japan and, in particular, the religious character of these ceremonies.
- 2) Describe the characteristics of “non-religiousness”—one of the most prominent cognitive strategies for explaining affective religious behaviors held by a vast number of Japanese.
- 3) Demonstrate the way in which “non-religious” attitudes shape the interaction with portions of society considered “religious”—a relationship that can often be characterized as “vicarious.”

### **Definitions of Religion and “Non-religion”:**

#### **Defining Religion and Exploring the Religious in Contemporary Japan**

The role and nature of religion continues to be a debated topic. In 1991, one particularly striking example of the debate over authentic religion and the role of faith claims appeared in two articles in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* entitled, “What Constitutes Religious Behavior?.” One of these articles was written by folklorist Richard Andersen in response to an earlier article produced by Ian Reader on *ema* and a rebuttal produced under the same title by Reader as a counter-response.<sup>1</sup> In the first article, Andersen presents a very concise critique of the position taken by Reader regarding the purchase and inscription of *ema*, plaques for writing one’s prayers which

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Andersen, “What Constitutes Religious Activity?” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no.4 (1991): 369-72.

are ubiquitous and found at most Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. In particular, Andersen's experience with informal statements made by Japanese (both ordinary people and temple/shrine authorities) that either downplay or deny the religious dimension of purchasing and inscribing an *ema* led him to conclude that these statements were convincing evidence that much, if not all, of the activity surrounding *ema* possessed no religious character. Andersen concludes his argument by asserting that "objects and actions cannot, in and of themselves, be considered 'religious' without investigating the intent or feelings of the person who chooses to possess an object or perform an action." Because the Japanese people who Andersen encountered say their actions are not religious then scholars are forced to concur: "Many of the people inscribing the *ema* do not judge it a religious activity, the temple or shrine does not view it as a religious activity, and we should not."<sup>2</sup> According to Andersen, if the Japanese say that something is a "custom" or "not religious," then scholars are obliged to submit and refrain from exploring these issues any further.

In his response to Andersen, Reader reaffirms his original standpoint that the use of *ema* takes place in a religious setting (not just a religious location) and involves processes and actions that can and should be discussed as religious—a position with which I agree.<sup>3</sup> Quite naturally, Reader affirms Andersen's position that scholars do need to make careful use of both statistical and ethnographic sources and, subsequently, moves on to respond to Andersen's critique. However, one cannot help but feel that his response does not exactly satisfy one of the issues raised by Andersen—namely, Andersen's discomfort in instances where Reader presents the activity surrounding *ema* as religious when the Japanese themselves state that these activities are not. Andersen's claim that statements of non-religiousness must be taken both literally and at face value goes partially unchallenged and largely unremedied. Of course, Reader is not totally silent on the subject of religious denial or requalification but sums up these remarks as an informant tendency to tell researchers what they think researchers want to hear or avoid appearing superstitious.<sup>4</sup> Reader is correct in assuming that statements downplaying or denying the religiosity of a particular activity cannot be taken at face value but there is more to this phenomenon than an intuitive appeal to researchers' intentions or an attempt to hide an embarrassing indulgence in magic.

Despite, leaving one portion of Andersen's critique largely unanswered, Reader

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 372.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Reader, "What Constitutes Religious Activity?" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no.4 (1991): 373-6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 375-6.

does make a case against focusing exclusively on a type of rigid, cognitive, self-expressed belief as a measure for religious activity. Reader states, “I would strongly argue that the widespread nature of such activities as inscribing *ema*, taking part in *hatsumode*, and praying for help at times of stress to gods one otherwise may cognitively not believe in tells us more about the nature, form and structure of religion in Japan.”<sup>5</sup> In conclusion, Reader’s argument is far more, and not less, an investigation into dynamic religious activities.

Reader’s position is that statements of faith or espoused belief cannot be employed as an easily recognizable barrier at the frontier of what is and what is not religious in scholarly discussions of *ema*. By making this argument, Reader is also implying that statements made by informants should not be ignored but rather that these statements are often problematized by different levels of understanding which must be properly interpreted and accounted for.

In order to examine the religious character of Christian weddings, I make use of four separate but often overlapping or interlocking definitions of religion and religious behavior: 1) substantive/cognitive, 2) functional/affective, 3) “non-religion,” and 4) “vicarious religion.” The first of these definitions comes from the work of Hervieu-Leger who divides the various ways of defining religion in modernity broadly into two camps, which she terms “substantive” and “functional.” Both of these definitions represent an attempt to equip researchers with a definition of religion capable of articulating the boundaries of classification in order to investigate observable phenomenon.

The “substantive” definition results from a compromise reached within the social sciences early on, wherein a consensus regarding what exactly religion consists was achieved. This definition is decidedly restrictive in nature and delineates a religious object of study that is identical with those forms and meanings which have already been accepted by society at large as “religion.” These are also the religious forms and practices which call explicitly upon the references and symbols which belong to the “traditional historic religions.” As substantive definitions of religion attest, by their sheer religious gravity, the “great religions” are still able to largely assert a plausible equivalence between themselves and “authentic religion.”

According to Hervieu-Leger’s taxonomy, there is another classification of definitions which undertake to describe the theoretical nature of religion which she calls “functional.” In contrast to the restrictive formations of the “substantive” definitions which frequently rely on the contents of belief (e.g., belief God), “functional” definitions

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 376.



represent an attempt to reach out past the socially established and, thus, accepted barriers of the historic churches in order to exam the often individualized and *a la carte* nature of the religious in modernity. This research, enriched as it is by the exploration of a diffuse religiousness that commonly emerges free of the holds of the specialized institutions designated as “religious” under more substantive investigations, finds religious potentiality in nearly all forms of modern “sacredness”—even those of a highly personalized nature and those without a larger social agenda beyond an individualized production of meaning. This “secular (i.e., modern) religiousness” expands the definition of religion in such a manner as to include any “system of signification” that addresses issues of “ultimate” or “fundamental” meaning which groups or individuals create in order to bring sense to their lives. Both of these definitions of religion will be critical in the exploration of contemporary Japanese religion.

The two definitions of religion proposed by Hervieu-Leger bear a striking resemblance to the bifurcation of belief offered by Ian Reader and George Tanabe in their exploration of contemporary Japanese religion. Unlike Hervieu-Leger who ultimately rejects both the substantive and functional definitions in favor of the search for a “new definition” of religion, Reader and Tanabe consider religious behavior as the complementary interaction of two mutually dependent types of belief—“cognitive belief” and “affective belief.” The first of these is “cognitive belief” or belief in its substantial form. This type of belief is composed of “content that is cognitive in nature and can therefore be explained and discussed in the mode of theology or its secular counterpart philosophy.”<sup>6</sup>

The second kind of belief, “affective belief,” may also include a cognitive dimension but is better described as belief of a more emotive order and is characterized by “affective sincerity” when in engaging in rituals and acts of prayer which involve interactions with culturally postulated supernatural agents or their earthly representatives. It is this affective sincerity during acts of prayer and ritual that allows for Christian weddings to be discussed as religious phenomenon and not merely emotive or aesthetic experiences. In order to affirm the methodological potency and necessity of both the substantial and functional definitions of religion and to better illustrate the role of belief in identifying and understanding religious acts such as Christian weddings, following Reader and Tanabe, I employ this same distinction between two kinds of belief and affirm both the substantive and functional definitions of religion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Reader, Ian and George Tanabe. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 129.

<sup>7</sup> It worth noting that despite Hervieu-Leger’s rejection of both the substantive and

For the purpose of this thesis, I largely equate “substantive religion” with “cognitive belief” and “functional religion” with “affective belief” and employ the following working definition of religion: religion is the sincere engagement in acts of prayer and ritual (functional/affective religion) which involve culturally postulated supernatural agents and/or take place within the context of the “great religious traditions” or make use of the people or locations considered to be the earthly representatives of such agents and traditions (substantive/cognitive). Or in the words of Hervieu-Leger, religion exists when the act of belief invokes (explicitly, semi-explicitly or implicitly) the authority of a recognized tradition in support of the act of belief. Religion is the ritualized remembering of a core lineage which grants meaning in the present through the appeal to a tradition capable of authenticating the individual act of sincere belief. In this respect, what I intend to show is that Christian weddings of Japan are undeniably religious and can for the purpose of investigation be treated as religion.

### **“Non-religiousness” as Religion in Contemporary Japan**

Having established a working definition for religion, at this point, I will continue on to investigate the “non-religiousness” (*mushūkyō*) in contemporary Japan and its frequently “vicarious” character. According a vast number of sociological surveys and investigations, the number of Japanese who describe their religious disposition as “non-religious” is a clear majority. Despite the fact the prevalence of “non-religiousness” among the members of contemporary Japanese society there exist very few explorations of this occurrence and even fewer explanations discussing its nature and/or popularity.

There are numerous and detailed accounts of the complex and often problematic importation and application of the concept of “religion” (*shūkyō*) as one part in the development of modern Japan. The topic is mentioned consistently in scholarly research in a variety forms. In particular, the debates over what forms of socio-culture get categorized as “religion” in the Meiji period and the political agenda enacted by the Meiji government to actively manipulate the religious identity of Shinto are obvious examples. It appears that many of these programs to disguise religion as “Japanese culture” were, at least in part, successful in removing the label of religion from widely

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functional definitions of religion, which ultimately hampers the formulation of her “new definition” of religion, Hervieu-Leger’s “new definition” of religion should be better regarded as a useful recombination and affirmation of both the substantive and functional definitions.

shared religious practices.<sup>8</sup> Postwar attitudes toward religion have almost certainly inherited the tendency to equate “normal” behaviors—that is, behaviors that are perceived to be widely shared—with “non-religious” behaviors. The implication of this equation of normalcy and non-religion is that in cases of widespread acceptance, the more popular a religious act the less likely it is to be discussed as “religion” and the more likely it is to be described as a part of Japanese “tradition,” “culture,” or simply “normal” behavior.

Furthermore, the extensive and decidedly negative coverage of the religious terror (both foreign and domestic) in the postwar period appear to have had a dramatic impact on religious attitudes and attitudes toward religion. The perceived “foreign” fervor for religion as opposed to the perceived domestic indifference to it, the fear of cults, the role of Shinto and Buddhism in the colonial efforts of Japan and Second World War are but the most obvious among countless social and psychological factors that destabilize the cognitive acceptance of “religion” and incorporate prejudice not just against certain contents of belief but, as with the Japanese case, also, inculcate bias against “religion” itself. “Religion” is in many instances easily and readily equated with deviance or abnormality. The result is a massive shift in manner in which certain behaviors are categorized and articulated. Although Japanese scholars have certainly not abandoned the word “religion,” those acts which can be considered religious (in particular those which are functionally/affectively religious) are far less likely to be discussed as “religious” and more likely to be described as “non-religious” in the climate of modern Japan.

The way in which the “non-religious” members of Japanese society interact with “religious” traditions bears a striking resemblance to “vicarious religion”—a conceptual model of religion originally developed by Grace Davie and intended exclusively for the contemporary European case. However, despite Davie’s suggestion that this modern restructuring of religious belief be reserved for the “European exception,” I believe that “vicariousness” can also be fruitfully applied to the Japanese case. “Vicariousness” is a term which describes the systematic linking of “unchurched” populations who relate to and are dependent on religious institutions, practices and customs. Generally speaking, vicarious religion is “the notion of religion performed by an active minority on the behalf of a much larger number, who not only understand, but, quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing.”<sup>9</sup> Specifically, religious vicariousness is most evident when religious

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<sup>8</sup> Helen Hardacre etc.

<sup>9</sup> Davie, Grace, “Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge.” In *Everyday Religion*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22.

institutions and religious professionals perform ritual on behalf of others, religious institutions and religious professionals believe on behalf of others, and that religious institutions and religious professionals embody moral codes on behalf of others.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Japanese Christian weddings, “non-religious” individuals are dependent on the “repositories of religion”—i.e. the “religious” people and locations that make the enactment of a religious ritual possible and successful.

I define “non-religiousness” as a normative, non-exclusive, largely affective religious outlook that also depends on substantive forms of religion which are accepted vicariously. “Non-religiousness” is a religious attitude characterized by the cognitive rejection of or disassociation from substantive religious traditions while simultaneously providing for the affective acceptance of and vicarious association with those same traditions. “Non-religiousness” also allows for members of Japanese society to express the normality of their religious beliefs and behaviors and facilitates comfortable engagement in multiple religious traditions simultaneously or sequentially.

Nobuko who appears in the opening of this introduction is a typical example of a “non-religious” religious attitude. For her personally, Nobuko expressed a general distaste for anything “religious” and regarded individuals or organizations with “religious” agendas as potentially dangerous and socially deviant. However, Nobuko felt that both Shinto and Christian weddings were “authentic” precisely because they were “religious.” In this case, “religion” indicated the appropriate and requisite level of “authenticity,” “affiliation,” and “expertise”—none of which Nobuko herself possessed or hoped to possess. In general, Nobuko felt that generally “religion” should be avoided where possible but that, simultaneously, one should also participate in “religious” events such as Buddhist funerals for family members and Shinto traditions such as shrine visits on New Year’s—acts that she felt would be far less meaningful outside the context of their respective “religious” traditions. Furthermore, in Nobuko’s view, her participation in all of these activities was consistent with a healthy disposition which was both “non-religious” and “normal for most Japanese people.” The rejection of substantive religion and its vicarious appropriation, which occurs simultaneously, are the key characteristics of the “non-religious” religious attitude.

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<sup>10</sup> Davie uses the terminology “churches and church leaders” or “churches and churchgoers” but I feel that “religious institutions and religious professionals” more accurately reflects the Japanese case—at least in terms of Japanese marriage rites.

### **Methodological Parameters**

At this time I would like to address the methodology of the field interviews I conducted over the past year of which Nobuko is representative. I am indebted to these in-depth interviews for providing the data upon which this inquiry into the religious character of Christian wedding ceremonies and “non-religiousness” relies. In addition, the interview questions themselves are included in the appendix for further reference.

I performed interviews with sixty-six different individuals. Included in these interviews are statements taken from twenty married individuals (each of which has had a Christian wedding or is planning a Christian wedding) and twenty single individuals who have either attended the ceremony of a friend or relative, or are considering marriage. Of the married group, eight of the interviewees were male and twelve were female. The single individuals consisted of nine males and eleven females. In addition to these individuals who are primarily on the receiving end of Christian weddings, I also conducted interviews with several groups of people who are involved in producing and conducting Christian marriage ceremonies. These include statements from five chapel ministers, ten choir members, ten musical performers and the owner of a company which is subcontracted by venues to provide ministers, vocalists and musicians who conduct Christian wedding ceremonies. All interviews took place with individuals who live and work in the Kanto area and typically took between one and half to two and a half hours each to conduct. Some of the interviews were conducted with people I was acquainted with prior to the interview and others were with people I met expressly for the purpose of the interview.

Anyone familiar with collecting sociological data will immediately recognize that this is not a random-sampling. However, I am in agreement with David Reid who suggests that this is not necessarily a fatal flaw. Borrowing the distinction made by Glaser and Strauss between “theoretical sampling” and “statistical sampling,” Reid states, “Theoretical sampling, used to discover conceptual categories, their properties and interrelationships, is for the purpose for generating theory.” Whereas, “[s]tatistical sampling, used to obtain factual data on distributions of people among categories, is for the purpose of verifying theory.”<sup>11</sup> Naturally, theory verification requires stratified and random sampling to produce a set of data which is capable of serving as accurate corroborating evidence. However, in generating theory, “A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the

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<sup>11</sup> David Reid, *New Wine: The Cultural Shaping of Japanese Christianity* (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press 1991), 123.

indication...the pressure is not on the sociologist...to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior.”<sup>12</sup>

I am attempting to develop a theory capable of accounting for the religiosity of Christian weddings and “non-religiousness.” In-depth interviews afford more opportunity to clarify specific utterances made by informants—e.g., those concerning “non-religiousness”—which may otherwise go unexplained or misunderstood, I have selected to depend on theoretical sampling as opposed to statistical sampling in this particular inquiry. Although the sample is limited to sixty-six individuals, the consistency of my interviewee responses was striking. Each of the individuals I interviewed claimed to have prayed or participated in religious acts (prayers, ritual, etc.) sincerely indicating a compatibility between “non-religiousness” and genuine religious behavior. I should clarify that these interviews are also meant to be understood in conjunction with a variety of other sources I employ to develop a richer textured understanding of Japanese religion and the Christian marriage within that context.

Also, in the name of full disclosure, I should mention that I worked as a bridal industry insider—that is, as a wedding minister—for nearly three years. During this time, I performed hundreds of weddings and, although I do not possess any Christian faith, I am indebted to this experience for not only the access it afforded but also the insights into religion that only such an experience can have provide. Furthermore, given the religious expectations that non-religious Japanese possess, I eventually suffered a crisis of consciousness which led to my decision to quit performing wedding ceremonies. However, I should mention that only three of the individuals that I interviewed—two ministers and the owner of a company—were aware of my employment as a minister during the time of the interviews. The remaining interviewees knew me only as a graduate student researcher doing fieldwork in Japan.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter One consists of a summary of key statistical sources of evidence relevant to the study Christian wedding ceremonies and “non-religiousness” in contemporary Japan. This data demonstrates how Christian weddings moved from obscurity to the height of popularity in the early to mid-1990s and illustrates how Christian weddings have perennially retained their popularity. In addition, this chapter makes of use of another body of statistical evidence concerning the general

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 123.

trends in Japanese religious behavior. These figures illustrate quite clearly that both the sudden popularity of Christian weddings in the 1990s and their continued dominance into the present takes place against a backdrop of “non-religiousness.” The vast majority of Japanese are undisputedly “non-religious” and the tendency to maintain a “non-religious” identity appears to appeal to Japanese individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

Chapter Two consists of a review of the literature relevant to this study into the religious character of Christian weddings and “non-religiousness.” In the absence of a methodology capable of explaining “non-religiousness,” Christian weddings ceremonies have proved to be a mysterious phenomenon. Much of the preceding literature does little to explain why “non-religious” Japanese would be attracted a Christian ritual. The result is a systematic dismissal of any potential religiosity. However, this is not to say that the preceding research does not provide researchers with a series of clues for better understanding Christian weddings within the contemporary Japanese context. For example, Goldstein-Gidoni’s suggestion that professionals associated with producing weddings function as indispensable “repositories” of specialized knowledge and ability, can be fruitfully applied to religious character of Christian weddings. Despite the fact that Goldstein-Gidoni does not view religious traditions, locations and individuals as “repositories of religion” capable of affirming and legitimizing affective religious acts, this metaphor aptly expresses the vicarious nature of religion (“non-religion”) in Japan.

Chapter Three explores the largely unexplained and unaccounted for phenomenon of “non-religiousness” in detail. Using the data acquired in my in-depth interviews, I paint a clearer more textured picture of the content of “non-religiousness.” In this chapter, the voices of my Japanese informants demonstrate that “non-religiousness” is a religious outlook characterized by normative, non-exclusive, affective belief and that this religious outlook also depends on substantive forms of religion accepted vicariously. This chapter illustrates the complex and problematic image of “religion” in contemporary Japan as non-religious individuals seek out extraordinary or authentic forms of “religion” while seeking to avoid deviant or abnormal forms “religion.”

In Chapter Four, I discuss the manner in which Christian churches and later commercial institutions have successfully responded to the demand for Christian wedding ceremonies by appealing to the religious demands of a “non-religious” constituency. Commercial institutions are convenient points of contact and function as middle-men between those “non-religious” individuals and the “religious” representatives of the tradition. The “religious” resources of commercial institutions are viewed as safer

and more reliable than those institutions defined as “religious” by society at large. Also, the tendency for the majority of Japanese individuals to produce and maintain “non-religious” identities has a tremendous impact on the manner in which these same individuals determine the authenticity of the tradition upon which they rely. Most notably, the importance of visual cues often presents commercial institutions with a decided advantage over many traditional churches. With an economic foundation the scale of which few Christian churches could compete, the bridal industry uses a complex blend of architecture, design, music and even race to produce powerful visual and sensory connections with Christianity that are often perceived as not only religious but more authentically religious than more historic forms. In many respects, the Christian Churches have been drawn into the bridal industry blurring the boundary between the commercial and the religious.



## CHAPTER 2: JAPANESE RELIGIOSITY AND CHRISTIANITY BY THE NUMBERS

This chapter provides general information regarding both the current state and general trends of contemporary Japanese religiosity and of Christianity in Japan. First is a brief but critical look at Japanese religiosity through a variety of socio-metric indicators. I will present representative empirical data acquired through statistical inquiries to highlight certain patterns in Japan's changing religious landscape—most notably, the prevalence of “non-religiousness.” Because this serves as a background to a more specific investigation into Christian wedding ceremonies, the information presented here largely ignores the diversity of Japanese religiosity in favor of a focus on major trends. The exception to this will be a closer look at Christianity in Japan—one of the “foreign” but very prominent features of Japan's religious landscape. The second half of this chapter outlines some of the important details concerning Christianity in the same statistical manner as Japanese religiosity was treated in the first half and will follow with a presentation of the apparently conflicting data offered by wedding ceremonies.

### **Trends in Contemporary Japanese Religion:** **A General Outline of Japanese Religiosity**

As the sudden popularity of Christian weddings attest, it is abundantly clear that Japan's religious culture is experiencing unprecedented change and, because of its historical legacy and current religious geography, religiosity in Japan possesses characteristics that are both unique to its particular religious landscape and common to a number of landscapes which can be found around the world. This section serves to acquaint the reader with some of the data available concerning Japanese religiosity.

From a researcher's point of view, one of the more obvious and problematic aspects of Japanese religiosity seems to be a pervasive reluctance to identify substantially with an explicit faith/creed or institution—a stance most typically expressed in contemporary Japan as “non-religious.” Given the history of religion on the Japanese archipelago—particularly the often syncretic relationship of Buddhism and Shinto—one may argue that this noncommittal attitude toward religion is one with a long history. Some even attest that it is one of the essential features of a more or less

timeless Japanese religiosity.<sup>13</sup>

However, when one considers Japan's early modern and modern political climate, the facts paint a substantially different picture. Political forces—first under the Tokugawa shogunate and later under the “restored” Meiji emperor—institutionalized religious obligation and coercion affecting every individual in those societies. As a result, those individuals may have had few options for opting out of the mandatory religious practices of their time. However, within accepted Buddhist and Shinto parameters (those delineated and enforced by the law) individuals in these societies did have options for participation in religious events, practices, celebrations, etc. outside the state religious structures. In the contemporary arena, there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that the Japanese, who have traditionally experienced religion without the need to exclusively affiliate within the context of Buddhism and Shinto, are now shunning exclusive faith and affiliation altogether setting a new historical precedent.

In 1998, a transnational survey was carried out by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) which focused on religion and along with Japan included a number of other countries from around the world. For the most part, the Japanese displayed relatively low levels of substantive religiosity through a wide variety of surveyed indicators. Notably, the Japanese exhibited rather low levels of professed religious belief and only 32% of individuals surveyed claimed to possess some kind of religious faith.<sup>14</sup> The fall in religious faith seems to be part of a larger post-war trend which has since the 1950's led to a dramatic decrease in the percentage of individuals who claim to hold some kind of religious faith.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, an earlier survey conducted in 1981 by the Yoka Development Center as part of a broader initiative involving the European Value Systems Study Group shows that the Japanese—in addition to low expressed or committed faith—also have similarly low levels of religious affiliation with less than ten percent claiming membership in a specific religious organization.<sup>16</sup> Although most Japanese do possess some sort of nominal affiliation with Shinto (communal) and Buddhism (familial), when asked whether or not they are members of a particular religious organization, most Japanese say that they are not.

These 1981 findings are corroborated by two studies conducted by Kokugakuin

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<sup>13</sup> I will discuss these and other arguments in Chapter Two.

<sup>14</sup> Kenji Ishii, *Gendai nihonjin no shūkyō* (Tokyo: Shinyō, 2007), 182.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

University in 1999 and again in 2004.<sup>17</sup> When asked about regular or active participation in religious organizations or institutions, over seventy percent of those surveyed stated that they were not involved in such activities within the past three years, excluding events such as New Year's visits to shrines and temples (*hatsumode*) and *obon* and practices such as obtaining amulets.<sup>18</sup> Given these findings on faith and affiliation, it is apparent that a majority of Japanese appear to lack any strong commitment to either a particular creed or a particular institution outside of a set of annual and life-cycle events and personal practices.

What is more, the apparent lack of religious faith and affiliation exhibited by a large number of Japanese can no longer be explained entirely in terms of life-cycle. Previously, it was believed that as Japanese individuals aged they also became increasingly religious—i.e., grew to identify with and participate more cognitively in the activities of religious institutions. However, there is mounting evidence that indicates this relationship between life-cycle and deepening cognitive religious dispositions is no longer as pronounced as it once was. According to surveys conducted by the Yomiuri Newspaper in 1979 individuals in their seventies reported levels of religious belief nearing 70 percent but that same age bracket reported a mere 37 percent in 2005.<sup>19</sup>

An increasing number of Japanese are entering the later stages of life without necessarily experiencing the attraction of more substantive forms of religious faith or activity. As a consequence, the “non-religiousness” implied by the data given above cannot merely be rendered in terms of a life-cycle where more cognitive forms of faith and affiliation are certain to manifest and/or intensify at some later point in the lives of individuals. Although certain life-cycle trends may continue to exist there are, in fact, generational breaks in the patterns of religious attitude and participation. This means that to a certain extent Japanese religiosity must be understood in terms of age-cohorts wherein each generation interacts differently with the transforming religious landscape. In more recent generations, as the sociological data indicates, this interaction with the religious is now more likely to be one of “non-religiousness.”

The data discussed above also has broader implications for not only ways in which traditional religious knowledge and practices are/are not passed on but also for the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 60-1.

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the exclusion of personal practices such as the possession of amulets and participation in annual and life-cycle rituals in any investigation of Japanese religion amounts to nothing less than an exclusion of affective religious behavior and will have disastrous results and, at best, it would only present a distorted image of religiosity in Japan.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 10-1.

ways individuals undertake and understand religious behavior. The rapid economic development of the post-war era and drastic change in lifestyle has resulted in changes in the Japanese religious life as massive segments of the population left the agrarian countryside for life and opportunity in an urbanizing world. In the words of Ishii Kenji, the keyword for understanding contemporary Japanese religion is not “continuity” (*jizoku*) but rather “change” (*henyō*).<sup>20</sup>

### **Christianity and Christian Weddings by the Numbers**

Until recently, Christianity has had a rather tumultuous history in Japan. Since its introduction, Christianity’s image has been problematized by its relation to foreign cultures or political bodies. In fact, for much of its history in Japan, even after its reintroduction during the Meiji Period, Christianity and Japanese Christians have been eyed with suspicion, discriminated against and even persecuted. With the political and cultural changes in postwar Japan, Christians have been freed from many forms of oppression. Yet, despite the formation and expansion of transplanted churches, mission schools and the birth of indigenous movements, Japan’s Christian population remains an extremely small minority. According to a survey carried out annually by the Japanese government, Japan’s Christian population has been on the rise since 1948 and in 2006 there were officially 3,032,239 Christians in Japan but with corresponding growth in the Japanese population over that same time period that amounts to only roughly 2.4 percent of the Japanese population.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Christian religious organizations only account for 2.3 percent of Japan’s 182,468 religious juridical persons.<sup>22</sup>

Christian churches have not been able to attract members of Japan’s postwar population despite the fact that Christian churches and organizations were largely concentrated in metropolitan areas and were in a good position to experience the benefits of urbanization.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, joining a Christian church is not an attractive option for most postwar Japanese and even indigenous movements have had considerable trouble sustaining long-term growth.<sup>24</sup> This data along with the data on the low rate of

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<sup>20</sup> Kenji Ishii, *Nihonjin no ichinen to issho: Kawariyuku nihonjin no shinsei* (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2005), ii.

<sup>21</sup> As I will discuss later in Chapter Four, the steady rise in the number of Christians has more to do with immigration than with successful missions among the Japanese.

<sup>22</sup> Ishii, *Gendai nihonjin no shūkyō*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 70.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

baptisms and aging church population has led some researchers to suggest that an already marginal Christianity is scheduled for rapid decline in the years to come.<sup>25</sup>

This is not the entire story. For example, the Survey of Japanese Religious Consciousness carried out in 1981 by the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and published in 1984 shows that, while only two percent of Japanese identify themselves as Christian, twelve percent feel a certain empathy for Christianity. As for this broader empathy, Christianity appears to be more attractive to younger members of Japanese society. Out of the youngest age bracket surveyed, ages 16-19, 29.7 percent expressed a favorable attitude toward Christianity but this attitude gradually declines with age reaching a mere 4.5 percent for individuals in their sixties and 5.4 percent for those over seventy years of age. Also, Christianity held more appeal for those who claimed not to be believers in any religion than for those who claimed adherence to a particular faith and 14 percent of these “non-believers” expressed empathy toward Christianity—a percentage that nearly equals the interest displayed toward Shinto among that same social group.<sup>26</sup> Clearly there are indications that Christianity may have a much broader appeal than the membership of struggling churches initially suggests.

Arguably the most striking indication that Christianity has significantly penetrated Japanese society is the widespread popularity of Christian wedding ceremonies. In 1982, the Shinto wedding rite as the dominant form for wedding rituals in the years following World War Two, had replaced traditional communal wedding ceremonies and accounted for over ninety percent of wedding ceremonies. At this same time the Christian ceremony represented only about five percent of the total number of wedding ceremonies.<sup>27</sup> However, according to several different surveys,<sup>28</sup> by the mid-1990s, the Christian wedding had surpassed the Shinto wedding and has since 1999 continued to be the wedding ceremony of choice among roughly seventy percent of couples in Tokyo and the surrounding areas with similar trends in popularity in most other regions throughout the country. The majority of Japanese wed Christian and the

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<sup>25</sup> Zenkyū Saito, “Jūnengo nihon no kirisutokyō ha sonzai shiuru ka,” *Hanashiai*, (Tokyo: 2005). According to Saito who uses statistics for the United Church of Christ in Japan (Japanese largest federation of Protestant Churches), on average churches only possess roughly thirty-five regularly attending members and perform on one or two baptisms a year. Consequently, Saito believes that as death claims more and more of Japan’s aging Christian membership the organization of which Japanese Christianity is composed may not survive the impending population decline of Japanese society.

<sup>26</sup> Data on the NHK survey can be found in Mullins (1998), 192.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Fisch, “The Rise of the Chapel Wedding in Japan: Simulation and Performance,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 28, no.1-2 (2001): 58.

<sup>28</sup> Kenji Ishii, *Kekkonshiki: Shiawase wo tsukuru gishiki* (Tokyo: NHK, 2005), 31.

majority of those individuals are “non-religious.”

Dwarfing even indicators of “empathy” among younger Japanese, the result of this explosion in Christian weddings demonstrates how the affective religious behavior of Japan’s “non-religious” population has brought Christian weddings ceremonies into the mainstream of Japanese life. It is still the case that the majority of all Japanese are, as Ian Reader has stated, still “Born Shinto, Die Buddhist,” but now they “Wed Christian.”

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCHING CHRISTIAN WEDDINGS

The goal of this chapter is to address the ways Christian weddings in Japan are currently understood. It is necessary to place this argument within the context of current scholarship and, therefore, this chapter consists of a dialogue with the preceding literature and how Christian wedding ceremonies are or are not addressed. This literary review is both descriptive and critical in nature and serves as both point of departure for the subsequent chapters which will broaden the examination of issues raised here and acts as a *fil conducteur* which will tie various notions concerning religion back into the general argument. Consequently, the critique included here will help identify the issues pertinent to the discussions of religion and Christian weddings in Japan, facilitate the presentation of the data in the chapters to come, and assist in the creation of methodological and theoretical alternatives for analysis.

#### **Consumerism and the Importance of Expertise and Repositories of Tradition**

In 1997, Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni published one of the major English language works available on marriage in contemporary Japan. Her work sought to expand on available research in an effort to elucidate contemporary Japanese wedding ceremonies by placing the facilities, brides, businessmen and artisans involved in the production and consumption of wedding ceremonies into a wider cultural context or “market,” wherein, individuals purchase “Western” and/or “Japanese” images of themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Although Goldstein-Gidoni focuses rather more consistently on the Shinto wedding ceremony or, to be more precise, the bridal industry built around it, her explanation of how wedding ceremonies are consumed as cultural products does include a brief description of the average Japanese person’s understanding (or rather the lack thereof) of Shinto weddings. Additionally, Goldstein-Gidoni touches briefly upon both Japanese religiosity and the Christian version of the marriage nuptials and some of her explanations can contribute to an understanding of how Japanese religion functions in the context of marriage ceremonies and, consequently, in Japanese society at large.

Goldstein-Gidoni indicates that massive changes in the structure of the Japanese society and economy have eroded traditional communal groups and has had correspondingly detrimental consequences for the traditional life-cycles of those

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<sup>29</sup> Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, *Packaged Japanese: Weddings, Business and Brides* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

communities' members. In turn, this has also created a demand for new institutions and services in an urbanizing and globalizing population that has made a critical break with key aspects of its past.<sup>30</sup> In particular, Goldstein-Gidoni provides one of the few relatively detailed descriptions of the process by which wedding celebrations left people's homes and were eventually entrusted to halls, parlors, chapels and hotels.<sup>31</sup> A new socio-economic reality created demands for new services and new facilities altering contemporary Japan. More often than not, the corporate entities created in this process of change continue to provide the facilities and services necessary to conduct wedding ceremonies and receptions in today's Japan.

Although Goldstein-Gidoni qualifies her assertions, it is evident from her detailed illustrations that the bride and groom, along with their families, entrust the wedding hall staff specialists with the successful coordination and execution of their wedding day. Specialists such as the make-up artists, photographers and kimono-dressers are an elite group of individuals that function as "repositories of tradition." These specialists have the knowledge and technical skills absolutely indispensable for the selling, constructing, producing and memorializing the complete "package wedding"—a bundle of services and products necessary for preparation, execution and follow-up to marriage.

Oftentimes, these specialists bemoan the general lack of knowledge and historical understanding as well as the hapless indecisiveness of their customers. Despite occasionally displaying a level of absurdity in her descriptions (even calling a bride that entrusts her make-up to the appropriate artist an automaton who makes no attempt to control even her own body), Goldstein-Gidoni, quite correctly, states that the average person often imagines and demands a ceremony they are unable to provide for themselves. As such, these individuals are dependent on the "repositories" of tradition, knowledge and skill—i.e. the experts who produce the ceremony—in a relationship that characterizes much of Japanese society and cannot be underestimated.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Goldstein-Gidoni makes no effort to apply this "repository" model or, any form of it, to the Shinto and Christian wedding ceremonies she witnessed. She has no trouble pointing out that the average person lacks even the most basic knowledge of the Shinto ceremony or its ritual implements and concludes that religious ignorance is evidence that religion ultimately has little or nothing to do with marriage in Japan.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>31</sup> Also see Edwards (1989) and Ishii (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Goldstein-Gidoni, *Packaged Japaneseness*, 68 and 79.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 68



Apparently, it never even occurred to Goldstein-Gidoni that Shinto priests performing the ceremony might also be professionals whose expertise is vital for the production of the wedding—especially to those who do not possess the same expertise. Nor does it appear that Goldstein-Gidoni had any intention of probing into just why the average Japanese person, with no real understanding of religion, would want a religious wedding—a wedding that places their personal acts of belief in the context of a substantively religious tradition—in the first place.

An inability to acknowledge and, therefore, to address the religiosity of certain aspects of the wedding celebrations in Japan invites a series of problematic developments that persist throughout Goldstein-Gidoni's analysis. First, arguments are driven away from religious categories and into broader socio-cultural frameworks where any religiosity or visible religious elements are easier to ignore. This permits a re-categorization of disparate cultural elements under much larger, much less useful headings such as "Japanese" and "Western." This re-categorization allows Goldstein-Gidoni to claim that performing a Christian wedding is a cultural act no different than taking classes on conversational English and, similarly, performing a Shinto wedding is no different than enrolling in Japanese calligraphy lessons.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, in Goldstein-Gidoni's portrayal of wedding ceremonies, certain cultural and religious phenomena are treated as though they lack the requisite authenticity. Goldstein-Gidoni withholds the status of true authenticity for a number of items for the duration of her argument because they do not seem to measure up to a largely unspoken set of standards. For example, music played at Shinto ceremonies is not authentic because a recording is played through speakers during the ceremony and is not performed live by musicians. In a similar fashion, Christian weddings are not fully Christian because they are often conducted in hotels or chapels and they simply do not fulfill the criteria Goldstein-Gidoni assumes is necessary for an authentic Christian ceremony.<sup>35</sup> And she even contends that those weddings that occur in churches are little more than stunts fueled by Japanese who are eager to overspend on showy events and their religious content is clearly not worth any serious attention. Goldstein-Gidoni states flatly, "To young Japanese, churches symbolize Western modernity, and having their wedding ceremony in a church has nothing to do with religion," but, rather, "is related to the ongoing search for increasingly expensive and elegant venues for weddings."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 43 and footnote 14.

### Christian Weddings as Hyper-reality

In 2001, roughly six years after the Christian wedding surpassed the Shinto wedding in popularity, another account of Christian chapel weddings was given by Michael Fisch which strives to more directly confront the religious issues in wedding ceremonies and chapels throughout Japan. Fisch himself conducted what he refers to as nearly thirty “Christian-style” weddings over approximately four and a half months while working in the bridal industry as a chapel minister.<sup>37</sup> His experience provides a rather unique perspective on Christian wedding rites performed at chapels—especially when he claims to be Jewish and possesses no Christian faith or affiliation.

There are several positive points to Fisch’s overall argument. The first is simply that Fisch appreciates claims first made by Jan Swyngedouw and reiterated by Mark Mullins that Christianity has started to make a home for itself in the life-cycle of a large number of Japanese. This manifests in a variety of ways but, most notably, an increasing number of Japanese select the Christian ceremony at the time of their wedding. In other words, Fisch makes one of the first real attempts to understand why Japanese with no espoused faith in Christianity could/would desire a Christian wedding.

Also, Fisch provides one of the only descriptions of a company that is subcontracted by chapels to provide the musicians, choir members and ministers necessary to carry out the ceremony. Frequently, Christian ministers are supplied as needed, along with the indispensable musicians and vocalists, to chapels and hotels through companies and not, or at least not directly, by churches—making this a valuable account.

As for the wedding ceremonies themselves, Fisch concludes that Christian chapel weddings cannot be considered “fake.” As seen in Goldstein-Gidoni, there is the perception among scholars that Christian weddings—and especially their chapel renditions—do not meet some standard of authenticity. Rather than yielding to claims that the Christian chapel wedding is “fake” Christianity or religion, Fisch contests, borrowing post-modern theories concerning the media and technology from Jean Baudrillard, that Christian weddings are better understood as “simulations.” The difference is that, for example, someone faking an illness will not actually feel sick but that someone simulating an illness may actually develop and/or experience some of the symptoms of his/her simulated illness.

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<sup>37</sup> Fisch, “The Rise of the Chapel Wedding in Japan,” 59.

However, despite the presence of religious professionals, prayers, hymns, blessings, scriptures, symbols and space, Fisch professes the secular nature of the Christian weddings he performed for a variety of related reasons. First, Japanese wedding ceremonies are not part of the legal procedures necessary to validate the union of a couple. Fisch notes that entering into legal matrimony does not require the performance of a ceremony—religious or otherwise.<sup>38</sup>

Second, using statistical data similar to the data I have introduced in Chapter One, Fisch argues that the growth of Christian wedding ceremonies cannot be linked to a corresponding growth in church membership or claims of Christian faith. In Fisch's interpretation, "non-religiousness" is simply not religious.

Third, relatedly, Fisch claims, on the grounds that he himself lacks any Christian faith or religious training, to be an actor and not a true religious functionary. Fisch's absence of religious faith also plays a key role in his assessment of the religious/secular nature of the ceremony—if he, as a minister, has no faith then the ceremony must be secular (not religious). In conclusion, Fisch's simulated "Christianity" is not authentic Christianity because it is Christianity without Christian believers, Christian faith or Christian churches as represented by his brief undercover operation as a minister. However, as I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, it is not Fisch's faith but his ability to serve as a convincing link to the authority of the Christian tradition for affective believers which made his performances of Christian weddings religious. It is the couples to be married who ultimately determine the religiosity of the ceremony.

### **Christian Weddings as Scenery**

It appears some Japanese scholars of religion are just as likely as the Western scholars previously mentioned to experience difficulty in coming to terms with the

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<sup>38</sup> However, wedding ceremonies may serve as evidence for the intent to legally marry. Conducting a wedding ceremony will allow a couple to obtain mortgage loans and insurance as if they were already married. In other words, even in the eyes of banks, companies and government offices—not to mention family members and friends—wedding ceremonies possess a lot more social clout than Fisch implies by emphasizing their disconnect with the legal filing of marriage. This information concerning the potential legal merit of a marriage ceremony comes from interviews with Takako and Kojiro, who I introduce in Chapter Three. Takako refused to enter Kojiro's family registry but they still conducted a married ceremony. The certificate from this ceremony allowed them to take out a mortgage and acquire insurance as though they were a legally married couple.

sudden explosion of Christian wedding ceremonies and with the religious elements present in a ceremony that has gained popularity apart from the purely substantive indicators for religious behavior.

Arguments emphasizing the strangeness and peculiarity of the Japanese and their religious attitudes and behaviors such as those offered by Goldstein-Gidoni are best understood as a style of writing that purports the uniqueness of the Japanese and can be considered one form of “*Nihonjinron*,” theories of the Japanese or Japanese-ness. For example, Yamaori Tetsuo, provides a good example of *Nihonjinron* as applied to religion when he asserts that contemporary religious attitudes are part of an essentially timeless aspect of Japanese nature.<sup>39</sup> Although at times he suggests that the contemporary Japanese religious outlook is rather new, Shimada Hiromi also ultimately implies that a “non-religious” outlook is an essential and timeless part of the Japanese character and a critical ingredient in the recipe the Japanese have developed for creating the most beautiful and prosperous nation in the world. Shimada even goes so far as to say that this essential character of Japanese religion may even have the potential to save the world by ending discrimination, violence and war,<sup>40</sup> while Goldstein-Gidoni found these attitudes toward Christianity and the West to be “grotesque.”<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Shimada and Yamaori, in 1999 and again in 2004 through a second publishing, Nobutaka Inoue conducted a wide ranging examination of religion and youth in contemporary Japanese society which does not rely on the same arguments of Japanese-ness and includes a section on Christian weddings.<sup>42</sup> Inoue places Christian wedding ceremonies on par with other manifestations of the religious in Japanese society. Christian weddings should be understood alongside and in conjunction with other religious manifestations including historic forms associated with Shinto and Buddhism and newer organizations such as the New Religions (*shinshūkyō*).

In one particularly interesting comparison with Buddhist funerals, Inoue shows that the majority of young Japanese surveyed feel that there is nothing inappropriate about having a Christian minister preside at the wedding of a couple who are not officially believers of Christianity. Inoue compares this with trends in funeral practices where the majority of the same individuals surveyed also felt that it was not inappropriate having a Buddhist monk preside over the funeral even if the people

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<sup>39</sup> Tetsuo Yamaori, *Shinzuru shūkyō kanzuru shūkyō* (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Hiromi Shimada, *Mushūkyō koso nihonjin no shūkyō de aru* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Publishing, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Goldstein-Gidoni, *Packaged Japaneseness*, 141.

<sup>42</sup> Nobutaka Inoue, *Wakamono to gendai shūkyō: Ushinawareta zahyōjiku* (Tokyo: Chikuma, 2004).

involved were not officially believers. This comparison with Buddhist funerals is an important step in the right direction because it puts Christian weddings into the broader fabric of Japanese religious life and on par with other popular religious manifestations in which “non-religious” individuals participate.<sup>43</sup> However, what Inoue concludes through this comparison with Buddhist funerals is that it is possible to conceive that these acts—both Buddhist funerals and Christian weddings—“have almost nothing to do with religion.”<sup>44</sup>

In his argument, Inoue insists that Christianity and Christian weddings, alongside Shinto and Buddhism, have, as religions, largely lost their religious substance and exist more or less as “scenery” (*fūkei*)—i.e., not truly religious. Despite the presence of religious locations, structures and professionals in Japan, Inoue suggests that religion has been marginalized by the forces of modernity. Inoue argues that the increased and growing availability of information in contemporary Japanese society has limited the authority of religious institutions vis-à-vis other religious groups and other sources of information. As a consequence, religious institutions have been relativized to the point where individuals now have unprecedented access to religious information blurring the line between religious professionals and laypeople who now rival ministers, priests and monks in religious knowledge and sometimes authority.

Additionally, and paradoxically, Inoue insists that another key component in the transformation of certain religious phenomenon into mere scenery is pervasive ignorance. For example, the average Japanese may be aware that there are a wide variety of religious locations—shrines, temples, churches, etc.—and that different religious professionals can be found at these locations but, beyond this, Inoue claims that the average person has almost no idea what these professionals do on a daily, monthly or yearly basis. Stated differently, the average Japanese person no longer possesses the requisite institutional commitment to and/or faith in religion required to generate or retain fundamental religious knowledge and, in turn, no longer participates meaningfully in the religious entities around them, hence, reducing them to scenery. Inoue indicates that this transformation into scenery is particularly true for Christianity which entered Japan as a marginal, foreign religion which the Japanese still seem to know very little about.

Consequently, Inoue’s standard for what may pass as an authentic religion—a religion that exists in substance and not simply as scenery—is clearly and completely “substantive.” Authentic religious behavior is defined by high levels of cognitive

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 85-8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 86.

knowledge and a cognitive identity affirmed by observable, regular participation in a religious institution.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Christianity and Christian weddings, Inoue claims that these cultural products entered Japanese culture as fashion, as a form of scenery, and remain so because the number of committed Japanese believers—as expressed in the number of attested Christians who appear as members of religious institutions in surveys—has not changed appreciably. In other words, despite the appeal Christian weddings seem to have for many Japanese, Inoue states, “It is best to say that the truth of the matter is, for the most part, [Christianity] has been accepted as a type of fashion. This is true of mission schools. This is also true of weddings.”<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, Inoue’s treatment of the Christian wedding probably provides one of the more concise and lucid examples of the typical assumptions made by current researchers. In much the same vein as Goldstein-Gidoni and Fisch, Inoue claims that “non-religiousness” is evidence that Christian weddings are not religious.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 88-9

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 89

## CHAPTER 4: RELIGIOUS AUTHENTICITY, “NON-RELIGIOUSNESS” AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

In the previous chapter I presented three different approaches to the analysis of Christian wedding ceremonies. Each of these approaches makes significant contributions but each also resorted to a similar list of criteria when assessing the religious character (or, rather, the lack thereof) of Christian wedding ceremonies. The criteria consists of the following:

- 1) Frequent affirmations of “non-religiousness.”
- 2) Infrequent affiliation with a religious tradition (outside of specific events under question) or an absence of a strongly held cognitive religious identity or faith.
- 3) Pronounced visual and aesthetic elements.
- 4) Strongly commercial character of the information sources, services and industries surrounding and discrediting religious rituals.

Despite the insights of each argument introduced in Chapter Two, the methodology employed in each case involves, first, assumptions of either the complete or the relative inauthenticity of religious aspects of Christian weddings as they occur in Japan. Second, each of these models emphasizes the irrelevance of any observable manifestation of religious sincerity and, third, advances the argument through the use of more “pertinent” categories such as “fashion,” the “Western/Japanese” dichotomy, or claims of Japanese uniqueness in the form of oddity or superiority (*Nihonjin-ron*). None of these models truly addresses the phenomenon of “non-religiousness” the most prevalent religious identity in Japan or the presence of affective sincerity on the behalf of participating Japanese. Nor to do these models address the religious character of Christian wedding ceremonies—the dominant wedding ritual of contemporary Japan.

The term “non-religious” or *mushūkyō* as it appears in Japanese is written in three Sino-Japanese characters which, if taken literally mean, “without religion” or “no religion,” and, given this orthography, many researchers have been quick to employ this terminology as evidence of secularization—i.e. comprehensive and advancing deterioration of religiosity throughout society. However, statements of “non-religiousness” are clearly not commensurate with a comprehensive abandonment of religion. On the contrary, “non-religiousness” is a cognitive mechanism for describing an affective religious outlook that affirms normative religious behaviors in a

non-exclusive, “vicarious” way.

### **Interview Results: “Non-Religion” as Affective Belief**

My interview with, Yumi, a single, 26 year-old female office worker, began with a question for me, “Why do you want to interview me about Christian weddings? I am not a priest or anything. I am not even Christian. I am just a normal Japanese person—I am not religious (*mushūkyō*).” Along with Yumi, the reason I selected to interview the sixty-six different individuals I did was because each of these people had either directly experienced a Christian wedding ceremony in some capacity and/or they were at an age where they were considering marriage and their options for wedding ceremonies. More specifically, I interviewed twenty married individuals and twenty single individuals all between the ages of twenty and forty who have either attended the ceremony of a friend or relative, or are considering marriage. In addition, I also interviewed ten musicians, ten vocalists, five ministers and the owner of a bridal planning company which is subcontracted by venues to provide ministers, vocalists and musicians who conduct Christian wedding ceremonies. In the following, I will use my interview responses to highlight the significant aspects of “non-religiousness.”

Yumi was not the only respondent to deny possessing Christian faith. Other than one minister who claimed to be Christian, another minister who claimed to be Buddhist and one single male who claimed to be a member of the religious group Shinnyo-en, all of my interview respondents claimed to be “non-religious.” In fact, every “non-religious” Japanese interviewee I encountered stated plainly that they did not reject religion (*shūkyō wo hitei shinai*). Beyond this paradoxical acceptance of religion, each of the responses of my interviewees has a striking resemblance to one another and can be understood as a sample sufficient for generating a theory capable of explaining the major characteristics of “non-religiousness” and what role this religious attitude plays in the context of Christian marriages.

Despite her “non-religiousness,” Yumi enthusiastically discussed the wedding ceremonies to which she had been invited as a guest and readily attested to their religious character. Furthermore, during all of the Christian marriages Yumi had attended, those of over ten different couples, Yumi claimed to have been sincere in her prayers for the couple and to have prayed either directly to God (*kami-sama*) or to the priest (*shinpu-sama*), who then gathered the prayers made by her and the other people in attendance and passed them on to God, during the wedding ceremony. According to Yumi, these acts of belief would be meaningless or far less meaningful without the



appropriate Christian context. It is evident that Yumi's statements concerning her lack of Christian faith, much like similar statements made by a vast majority of my interviewees, are subject to a complex dynamism of context and perception and cannot simply be taken as evidence for religious indifference, disinterest or disconnection. Naturally, this will obviously have implications for just how reliable (or limited) statements of faith may be for assessing religious behavior in the Japanese context. In particular, the denials of a prescribed faith are rarely straightforward denials of religion or even religious activity.

As seen with Yumi and as with every other informant I interviewed, neither the denial nor the affirmation of faith in and of itself served as a reliable way to predict or analyze their behavior, attitudes and expectations.<sup>47</sup> Yumi said her prayers were not just for show (scenery) and that the sincerity of those prayers did not end when the wedding ceremony cameras stopped rolling (hyper-reality). Furthermore, although she confirmed that Christian weddings originated in the West, she did not feel that her participation or her prayers made her more "Western" and less "Japanese." Moreover, wedding ceremonies were not performed merely to flaunt one's economic prosperity.

Another remarkable example of how crucial it is for scholars to investigate statements beyond denial or affirmation of faith comes from an interview I conducted with a twenty-five year-old, unmarried civil servant named Yōhei who told me that he considered himself to be a member of the religion Shinnyo-en. Yōhei was one of the few interview respondents to claim a particular faith. He was originally invited to a Shinnyo-en gathering by his ex-girlfriend's parents but he confessed that he could not and still did not completely believe what he felt to be Shinnyo-en's "fishy" (*usankusai*) teachings. Nonetheless, Yōhei was impressed by the *sesshin* rituals and the sincerity of the practitioners. Following the break up with his girlfriend, Yōhei slowly began to end his visits to any Shinnyo-en location but he remembered fondly his time there and felt that Shinnyo-en members he encountered were sincere in their practice and were morally better people than those he had encountered at work, school, or the Nichiren temple to which his mother belonged. Even after the relationship with his ex-girlfriend and his

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<sup>47</sup> As with this entire thesis, my exploration refers more specifically to my Japanese informants, however; even with the five non-Japanese interviewees (the five chapel ministers) statements of faith or statements denying faith were hardly straightforward. For example, four of the individuals that employed as Christian ministers denied Christian faith (three were not religious, one was Buddhist). The remaining minister, who did possess Christian faith, frequently considered quitting their work as a minister because they felt like a fake because they had never received any official training from a religious institution or order.

visits to any Shinnyo-en place of worship ended, he continued to recite the mantras he had learned because he felt they helped him with his efforts to improve himself but said he would probably never completely believe the teachings.

Yōhei has also been a guest at several wedding ceremonies (the majority of which were Christian, one was Shinto) and at each of these ceremonies, Yōhei described these affairs as religious and prayed sincerely for the happiness of the couple. Moreover, these prayers were not directed to a divinity from the Buddhist pantheon but at the Christian God (and/or his proxy the minister) in cases of Christian marriage and the *kami* during the Shinto ceremony he attended. Faith, belief and action are clearly subject to dynamic complexities of place and time, and do not necessarily possess a clear or consistent relationship by which scholars would be able to use a simple statement of faith or its denial to make judgments on the religious nature of a particular action or thought. Yōhei's Shinnyo-en faith did not prevent him from praying sincerely to other divinities under other circumstances.

Despite their “non-religious” (or even “religious”) identities, all of interviewees claimed to have prayed sincerely at the weddings in which they attended. In such cases affective belief functions positively and facilitates the performance of religious acts, however; my interviews show it is possible that affective belief can function negatively and can be just as influential in the decision to not be religious within certain contexts.

Rumi, a twenty-nine year-old female sales representative for a pharmaceutical company, considered herself to be “non-religious.” She had attended several Christian and secular wedding ceremonies as a guest. She felt that the Christian ceremonies were religious and that the secular ceremonies were not. During the Christian ceremonies she frequently prayed with sincerity to both God and the minister in attendance who she believed would amass and deliver the collective prayers of all the people present at the event—expressing positive affective belief.

However, Rumi had recently spent a great deal of time considering marriage and the ceremony she hoped to one day have and she had decided that she would prefer to have a secular wedding ceremony. Rumi maintained that she believed that the religious Christian wedding was more powerful, more attractive and probably more effective at representing and ensuring an ideal marriage but she had always felt close to Buddhism and, although she could not remember the last time she had been to a temple or to what sect of Buddhism she belonged, she wanted to have a secular wedding because a Christian wedding was incompatible with her affective Buddhist inclinations. She did not have a problem praying sincerely at Christian weddings for others because the couple in question had selected the ceremony which they must have felt was best for them. But

she felt that at her own wedding she could not pretend to be sincerely Christian when she considered her feelings toward Buddhism. Her affective belief in Buddhism trumped her affective belief in Christianity illustrating the very real power of affective religious dispositions. Discussing this choice of wedding ceremonies did not change Rumi's position on her faith—she continued to assert that she was “not religious” and that she did not reject Christianity. This is evidence that affective belief in the form of sincerity cannot only account for the affective acceptance of religious acts and behavior independent of cognitive belief but can also explain the affective rejection of certain religious activities at the behest of another, stronger affective belief and independent of a cognitive rejection. Rumi's statements illustrate that individuals who decide on a secular wedding may very well have religious motivations for doing so.<sup>48</sup>

As can be seen with Yumi, Yōhei and Rumi, faith is but one dynamic component in religious activity and even religious identity. Yōhei did not consider it problematic to assert that he had faith in Shinnyo-en even though he was not convinced by some of the teachings. “Non-religious” Rumi did not reject Christianity cognitively or, in certain contexts, even affectively. However, in selecting a ceremony for her own wedding, her affective sincerity for Buddhism prompted her to forgo a Christian or Shinto marriage and decide on a secular ceremony. Whether the wedding was their own or that of a friend or family member, almost all interviewees<sup>49</sup> confessed that they prayed sincerely for their own happiness (in cases where it was his/her own wedding) or for the happiness of the couple whose wedding it was. Sometimes these prayers were made in an unfocused and undirected way—simply being made—and at other times they were entrusted directly to God or indirectly to the minister to pass along. Regardless of these variations, prayers were offered consistently and sincerely during a wedding ceremony these participants described as religious.

Furthermore, as Yumi, Yōhei, Rumi and my other interviewees believed, sincere prayers—especially, those occurring within the context of a legitimizing substantive tradition—were more likely to be of benefit (i.e., come true). Thus, the effects of the prayers were intended to last far beyond the boundaries of the ritual itself and were not

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<sup>48</sup> According to statistics gathered annually by the bridal industry giant Zexy, secular weddings remain a consistent alternative to “religious” marriage and typically accounts for ten to twenty percent of marriages each year.

<sup>49</sup> The one exception was a groom who stated that he was nervous and so concerned about making a mistake in one of the ritual movements that he used the moments devoted to prayer to mentally rehearse the actions he would have to conduct in order to safely complete the ceremony and, therefore, did not pray. However, he did pray at the other weddings he attended.

merely for show. Without fail, the single and married Japanese (both “non-religious” and “religious”) whom I interviewed displayed the tendency to be affective believers—to engage sincerely in religious activity even in the absence of cognitive affirmations of an ascribed faith.

### **“Non-religiousness”:**

#### **Cognitive Religious Strategies for Affective Religious Behavior**

Although almost all respondents knew that Christianity was largely separated into two categories—Protestant and Catholic—few respondents were able to confidently distinguish between them. Most respondents did not know the difference—beyond the nomenclature—between a Catholic priest (*shinpu*) and a Protestant minister (*bokushi*) and rules governing their behaviors. One respondent stated that she would not trust a Catholic priest (*shinpu*) who was not married and did not have a family of his own. Respondents also had almost no knowledge of Christian theology or Christian history. Here again, if one assumes that this knowledge is a crucial indicator of religious activity then one is forced to conclude, that at least for the Japanese in attendance, Christian marriages are not religious.

However, despite what would seem like a glaring absence of knowledge, each person knew that at a Christian wedding the couple in question received blessings from God, the presiding minister and the invited guests. They also believed that the Bible readings and messages were Christian and religious in nature. Furthermore, single and married Japanese interviewees alike did not find their own personal lack of specialized knowledge to be particularly problematic in establishing a link with Christianity in the context of marriage. They knew Christian weddings were wonderful events (*suteki na ibento*) that helped to ensure happy marriages (*shiawase na kekkonseikatsu*) and they felt that the technical details of both Christian theology and ritual were areas that one could trust to the presiding minister. Japanese interviewees felt they knew Christian weddings were religious in nature and their goal was to celebrate and ensure the happiness of the marrying couple. The attempt to dismiss religious behavior based on the criteria of faith rooted firmly in theological knowledge is certainly what Reader had in mind when he stated, “I had thought that we had got out of that particular 19th-century theological cul-de-sac and that discussions about religion had gone beyond the confines of doctrines, beliefs, and ecclesiastical structures into wider and, it should be

noted, more interesting realms.”<sup>50</sup> The following section is a discussion of those “more interesting realms” and illustrates some of the various ways a “non-religious” identity can and is mobilized.

### **“Non-religiousness” as Normalcy**

Takako and Kojiro both work in the information technology industry. They started dating in college and after several years finally decided to get wed and move in together. During my interviews with both of them, they admitted that wedding preparations brought out some differences in religious opinion of which they not previously been aware. Both Takako and Kojiro affirmed and reaffirmed that they, personally, were “non-religious” and that their wedding ceremony had done nothing to change that. However, their experience with selecting a ceremony made them doubt whether or not their spouse was as “non-religious” as he or she claimed to be.

Takako stated that she did not do anything religious and did not even like religion but, during our interview, she mentioned that she had always been very interested in Buddhism and that she enjoyed learning about the teachings of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. She even mentioned that she had toyed with the idea of taking up Zen meditation. Both her mother and father were distant offshoots of temple families. Her father’s family was originally associated with a Pure Land temple and her mother’s was associated with a Dainembutsu temple both of which were located in Osaka and, although she and her parents had never really taken part in a Buddhist ritual outside of family funerals, she felt that Buddhism held a special appeal for her over and above other religions. Consequently, when she and Kojiro began to discuss wedding plans, she suggested that, although it might be rare, it was best to have a Buddhist wedding ceremony.

Kojiro, for his part, also claimed that religion held no importance for him and that he was “non-religious” and “normal”—in much the same manner as his wife. However, he had spent much of his youth in United States and Europe and he said this had made images of churches and Christian culture particularly attractive. Additionally, his parents had been longtime church-goers and recently converted to Catholicism. Kojiro did admit he thought Christianity appealing but stated he had no desire to convert. Takako described the first New Year’s vacation she spent at Kojiro’s parents’ house as one of “culture shock”—she just could not believe that they would have

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<sup>50</sup> Ian Reader, “What Constitutes Religious Activity?” 376.

wine and cheese with their *osechi ryōri* (the traditional Japanese New Year's meal).

As discussions of the wedding ceremony and location progressed, it was apparent that Kojiro was just as committed to a Christian wedding ceremony as Takako was to a Buddhist ceremony. Marriage had become a forum for a debate over affective religious attitudes. Both Takako and Kojiro assured me during their interviews that their conflict never developed into an outright fight but, because they could not reach an immediate compromise, they decided that the first person to find an appropriate location for the wedding ceremony and reception would also be able to decide the religious character of the ceremony as well. Ultimately, Takako lost out and agreed to a ceremony at the Yamate Episcopal Church because the Zexy (a bridal industry information and planning company) customer service window was unable to provide her with a location for a Buddhist wedding that had all the facilities they needed for the wedding reception. Takako also mentioned she had no intention of entering Kojiro's family registry and giving up her family name—which was rare and a point of personal pride. As such, she was willing to compromise on the wedding ceremony with the condition that Kojiro would agree to have photographs taken of them in kimono as well.<sup>51</sup>

Kojiro was extremely pleased with the results because he felt that a wedding was a once-in-lifetime event and that it should be done properly—by which he meant in a recognized Christian church with an authentic history and actual minister who they met and talked to beforehand. Kojiro mentioned that he was happy that he made the extra effort to convince Takako to attend the preparatory lectures at the church because it ensured they received an authentic (*honkakuteki*) wedding.

Clearly, religion played a part in both their decision on a venue, ceremony and compromises on wedding photographs and the family registry. However, this is not the only lesson to be gleaned from interviews with individuals such as Takako and Kojiro. One of the most interesting and revealing aspects of my interviews with Takako and Kojiro was the way in which they doubted each other's claims to be “non-religious” but not their own claims to the same effect. Takako told me several times that Kojiro will say that he is not Christian but he really is and just simply would not admit it. She even referred to him as *kakurekirisitan*, one of the Christians who went into hiding during the Edo period following an official governmental proscription of Christianity, but she, on the other hand, was “normal” (*futsū*) and “non-religious” (*mushūkyō*) because after all most Japanese were still basically Buddhist.

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<sup>51</sup> As mentioned earlier, the marriage ceremony did allow them to file for insurance and get a loan together without actually entering their marriage in a particular family registry.

In almost the exact same manner, Kojiro asserted that he was “non-religious” and that his attitude toward marriage and religion was “normal” because almost everyone had a Christian wedding—it was “common sense” (*jōshiki*). However, it was obvious to him that his wife, contrary to her own statements, was really a Buddhist because there was no other way to explain why she would want a Buddhist ceremony despite the fact that he had never heard of anyone actually participating in a Buddhist wedding.<sup>52</sup>

Just as the marriage of Takako and Kojiro clearly demonstrates, “non-religious” statements cannot and should not simply be taken at face value—in fact, Takako and Kojiro did not do a good job of demonstrating to one another that their positions regarding weddings were consistent with their claims of “not having a religion.” Their cognitive statements were not consistent with their affective behavior but neither was prepared to admit that they were anything but “non-religious” and “normal” no matter how religious their “non-religiousness” seemed to be.

“Non-religiousness” exists as one half of a relationship between two categories of perception; the other half is the “religious.” Takako and Kojiro both claimed that their respective religious outlooks were “normal,” “common-sensical,” and “typical” vis-à-vis the atypical, i.e., “religious,” outlook of their partner. According to Takako, most Japanese received Buddhist funerals so aligning with Buddhism at the time of marriage was “normal” and, thus, Takako perceived herself as “non-religious.” Kojiro, on the other hand, felt given trends in weddings that a Christian wedding was “typical” and that he was “non-religious.” “Non-religiousness,” in terms of Takako and Kojiro’s functional meaning of the term, was not a rejection of religion but, rather, a rejection of the non-ordinary or atypical religious attitudes they perceived in one another. Stated inversely, “non-religiousness” was an affirmation of “normal” religious attitudes and behaviors (normal ways of conducting acts of belief within the context of a legitimizing substantive tradition). In each case where one of my respondents claimed to be “non-religious,” these same individuals consistently substituted the term “non-religious” with the terms “normal,” “typical,” (*ippanteki*) or “common-sensical” (*jōshikiteki*), and stated that these two positions were basically synonymous.

One area where my Japanese interviewees were explicit about the coinciding relationship between “non-religiousness” and normalcy was in the way they clarified

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<sup>52</sup> Buddhist marriage ceremonies are typically performed in the instance of marriage among Buddhist clergy and, according to Zexy, on average, only roughly one in every two hundred weddings is Buddhist each year. Also, for more on the history of Buddhist marriage in Japan, see Jaffe (2001).

their religious outlook as a negation of other potentially dangerous or deviant forms of religion. For example, during interviews with Maho and Taichi, a couple that wed Christian, both stated that they were “non-religious” but that this meant they accepted and supported traditional religions, the belief in spirits and shamanism. Both stated that they did not approve of religions that “caused other people problems” (*meiwaku wo kakeru shūkyō*)—e.g., Sokagakkai—with their exclusivity and incessant proselytizing. Also, Maho and Taichi both claimed to be very suspicious of religions that treated ordinary people as if they were gods, such as Aum Shinrikyo. Maho and Taichi felt that those kinds of religion should be avoided and they hoped to clarify that they did not possess a relationship with such religions by stating that they were “non-religious.”

Another respondent named Yuka stated that the normal Japanese person was “non-religious” and they did not have strong feelings about religion in same way that non-Japanese people did—especially, Christians, Jews and Muslims. Yuka felt that the “non-religious” way of interacting with religion—with sincerity but a lack of extreme or exclusive devotion—was one the reasons that Japan did not have religious wars, religious conflicts and religiously motivated acts of terror. When I pointed out to her that the Tokyo Subway Gas Attacks could be considered acts of religious terror, she responded by stating that those people were not normal and neither was their religion.

International and domestic acts of religious terror, in particular, events associated with the Tokyo Subway Gas Attacks and 9/11, appear to have had profound effects on the formation and articulation of religious sensibilities throughout Japanese culture. The same may also be stated for the widely televised scandals of religious organizations such as Sokagakkai. In the wake of these incidents, claims of adherence to or faith in a particular religion are frequently treated with suspicion. One of my interviewees, a married woman named Hiroko, claimed that she was shocked to find out that a coworker of hers was a member of Tenrikyo because she had always just assumed that her coworker was “non-religious” and a “normal person much like herself” (*watashi mitaini mushūkyō da to omotta, jibun no you ni futsū no hito da to omotta*). She concluded that she was glad she had never been that close to her coworker because she did not want to be associated with a person who was involved with “religion.” “Religion” is sometimes perceived as something that potentially divides people and results in social problems and, at its extreme, conflict and violence.

For scholars like Shimada Hiromi, the Japanese tendency to avoid religious groups and attitudes which are perceived as atypically religious—e.g., groups and attitudes that are associated with social problems or violence—is heralded as proof of a superior form of cultural unique to Japan. In Shimada’s case, as with my interview



respondents, the issue is not religion versus secularization but more properly understood as religious attitudes which appear to be “normal” (mostly typically those held by the majority of Japanese) versus attitudes that are perceived, often with the aid of mass media coverage, as atypically or abnormally intense. Intense, exclusive religious faith or devotion can and often is perceived as only one stage away from transforming into varying levels of anti-social and deviant behavior. My Japanese respondents frequently associated these attitudes with what was typical of “religion.”

As such, “non-religiousness” is a negation, not of religion, but of forms of religion that are typically considered dangerous to society or simply weird, foreign, or inappropriate given a specific context. However, religious acts that do not trigger this response are comfortably re-categorized as “culture,” “events,” “customs,” “traditions” or “common sense” and reformulated as normal or “non-religious” in everyday conversation.<sup>53</sup> In this context, “non-religion” means “safe religion,” or, put differently, “non-religion” means the widely performed religious customs, events, celebrations and practices, and their corresponding attitudes and levels of devotion, which are perceived as generally acceptable and appropriate while those behaviors and groups deemed to be dangerous, foreign, or atypical are frequently associated with the word “religion.”

### **“Non-religiousness” as Non-exclusiveness**

“Non-religiousness” can and does serve as a term which designates perceived normalcy vis-à-vis perceived deviance on continuum anywhere from the milder sense of atypical variation to outright moral condemnation. However, because “non-religiousness” is a contextually bound and dynamic strategy for expressing perceptions, statements concerning “non-religiousness” can express a range of feelings and attitudes. Consequently, “non-religious” has a multivalent, situationally determined character which can express other attitudes, sensibilities and dispositions which may or may not be directly related to the effort to highlight perceived normalcy. For example, Masa, a single male working for an insurance company, stated that he was “non-religious” because he wanted to be able to participate and enjoy a wide-range of

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<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting that even the Japanese government makes this distinction regarding foreign and domestic religion. When the Ministry of Justice provides visas for individuals sponsored by religious corporations for overseas this is a “religious activities” (*shūkyō katsudō*) visa but when the sponsoring institution is a religious corporation from within Japan the status of residence is considered “cultural studies” (*bunka katsudō*) even if the content of the activities (prayer, religious rituals, proselytization, etc.) is identical.

Buddhist, Shinto and Christian religious activities. He said that if he was “religious” he would be compelled to devote himself to one of these religions to the exclusion of all the others. At times, “non-religious” is a response given by many Japanese to articulate an incompatibility between their religious sensibilities and values and the exclusivity and intensity implied by the term “religion” as it is used in contemporary Japanese culture.

Another example of this tendency to employ “non-religiousness” in opposition to exclusive commitment (and the obligations that might attend such a commitment) comes from a twenty-seven year-old operatic vocalist named Eriko. Eriko works on weekends and holidays as a professional vocalist dispatched to chapels, hotels and churches in order to sing hymns or other pieces of music for Christian weddings as a member of the choir. In addition to performing in Christian wedding ceremonies, Eriko, along with her mother, regularly sings in the choir at her family’s Buddhist temple. In her interview, she said that it was not problematic for her to engage in both these activities sincerely because she was “non-religious” by which she meant she was not obligated by any one religious commitment in such a fashion that it would prevent her from participating in any other if she so desired.

At the time of my interview with her, Eriko was searching for a marriage partner (*konkatsu*). Regardless of the fact that she had not yet found a partner she wished to marry, Eriko had decided that she wanted to perform all the wedding ceremonies that were popularly available in Japan. If she could convince her parents to cover the expenses, she wanted to have a Shinto wedding, Christian wedding, Buddhist wedding and secular wedding. Other than the secular wedding she believed that all of these wedding ceremonies were (and should be) religious and because she was “non-religious” she felt that she had more options than a “religious” person who would be bound by an exclusive faith.

Masa and Eriko were not the only respondents to feel that being “religious” meant maintaining an exclusive relationship with only one religion. In fact, nearly every Japanese interviewee responded by stating that if an individual was “religious” then he or she would possess a relationship with a particular religion to the exclusion of others.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to much of Japan’s modern and early modern history, contemporary Japan boasts a remarkably free religious market where individuals experience unprecedented levels of religious freedom and, thanks in part to the forces of globalization and an explosion of “new religions,” an equally remarkable wealth of potential religious options. Consequently, historical institutions and new religions alike

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<sup>54</sup> The exception to this was Yōhei who felt that his faith did not necessary prevent him from engaging in other religious activities.

find themselves in relatively weak positions and are less able to strictly discipline the religious behavior of the majority of individuals in society. In the case of Christian weddings, commercial institutions also compete directly with religious institutions to offer their services without the burden of affiliation or faith—a topic I will revisit in the next chapter. As a consequence of significant religious freedom and an abundance of available venues, services and professionals, the number of people in society who feel impelled to retain an exclusive relationship with a particular religion is, perhaps, at an all-time low.

Even so, religious behavior is still largely *perceived* as exclusive, intense and cognitive. “Non-religious” becomes a convenient way to express a set of religious sensibilities dominated by personal choice and freedom of access wherein “non-religious” individuals, unlike their “religious” counterparts, are free to enjoy the religious services and ideas of different groups and traditions without the same regard to affiliation or commitment. Use of the term “non-religious” to negate exclusive religious identity or practice can also be used positively to assert an ecumenically correct attitude that invites and makes use of various religions and practices. Or it can be used to explain religious behaviors which engage a variety of religions but which are not entirely appropriate (*ikagen*) because they lack the requisite exclusivity to be “religious.” In addition to being normative, “non-religiousness” represents, not an abandonment of religion but, rather, a religious outlook wherein exclusive identification and obligation is avoided and selection and consumption is characteristic.

The irony of “non-religiousness” in this context is that “non-religious” attitudes may actually facilitate more, rather than less, religious behavior. After all, Masa and Eriko felt that being “non-religious” made it easier to engage in all the forms of religious activity they found appealing. As for Christian weddings, this attitude of relative personal freedom is quite possibly one of the main reasons many Japanese consider Christian weddings a viable option. Despite its often problematic image as a “foreign” religion, the rise of “non-religious” sensibilities plays a crucial role in actualizing the religious potential of Christianity within Japanese society. Because in certain contexts “non-religiousness” exists in opposition to exclusiveness or obligation, marrying Japanese couples may no longer feel impelled to refrain from religious rites perceived as alien to Japanese culture. “Non-religious” attitudes function as part of a complex formula which allows major segments of the Japanese population to affectively accept the Christian tradition and wed Christian.

### **“Religiousness” as Beneficial Specialization and “Vicarious Religion”**

Nobuko, a single woman in her twenties who performs and edits music for a living, participated in her family’s Buddhists funerals and the frequent trips her family made to their temple on special occasions such as *ennichi*. Despite these activities, Nobuko maintained that she was “non-religious because she did not have any specialized knowledge such as that possessed by Buddhist clerics” (*souryo no you ni, watashi ha senmonteki na chishiki to ka nai shi, mushūkyō desu*). Nobuko went on to state that members of the Buddhist clergy knew how to perform the rituals, recite and read the sutras, and that they knew more about the gods and the Buddhas than other, “ordinary” people. Nobuko felt that the extraordinary devotion, knowledge and faith of the Buddhist clerics she encountered made them “religious” and highlighted the fact that she was “non-religious.”

In addition to expressing normalcy over and against atypical or deviant behavior or acting as a negation of an exclusive religious identity, statements of “non-religiousness” also serve as a negation of specialization. At each of the Buddhist events Nobuko attended, she had prayed with sincerity and believed that these prayers were beneficial. However, when comparing her activity to the chanting and rituals of the clergy and imagining the devoted lifestyle that they lead, she felt that their activity was the “real thing” (*honmon*)—meaning (more) “religious” (*shūkyō*)—and more effective in the process of getting prayers answered. Furthermore, Nobuko was thankful that these clergy were available because, without their knowledge and expertise, she would not know what to do on her own at these special occasions. In much the same way that Nobuko entrusted her prayers at Buddhist occasions to the Buddhist clergy, she said that she hoped to have a Christian wedding and she also hoped that a minister with a life devoted to God and the study of the Bible would perform her wedding ceremony.

Nobuko’s use of the term “non-religious” does express perceived normalcy but, when compared to the argument that Takako and Kojiro had before wedding, the relationship has been inverted. “Religion” is not weird (or deviant) religious behavior but, rather, a superior form of religious behavior. In cases such as these, “non-religious” individuals are normal but only in the sense that they are “regular” or “ordinary” and do not possess any extraordinary religious identity, knowledge or affiliation. Ordinary (“non-religious”) people making prayers and vows before each other, such as those made at secular weddings, are not guaranteed to end in failure but, with the vast majority of my respondents, religious weddings conducted by religious officials are believed to be more effective in obtaining a happy marriage and avoiding divorce simply because they

validate those same acts of belief by occurring within the context of a substantive tradition. The behaviors of individuals such as Buddhist and Shinto priests and Christian ministers were extraordinarily “religious” in this positive, beneficial or morally upstanding way. This means that “religious” people are not, out of necessity, outlandish or deviant but may be people in possession of special social assets which are good, beneficial and, in many cases, uniquely attractive.

For example, devout Christian ministers and the ceremonies they conduct help to secure happier futures for marrying couples. “Non-religious” individuals are far less likely to demand that religious professionals disrobe than they are to demand that religious professionals adhere to a vague but strict set of “religious” characteristics necessary for an authentically Christian wedding.

In the case of Japanese Christian weddings, “non-religious” individuals are dependent on the “repositories of religion”—i.e. the “religious” people and locations that make the enactment of a religious ritual possible and successful. My Japanese informants expressed an opinion of surprising unanimity—authentic religious rituals should be performed by credible religious professionals who embody traditions by preserving faith and a particular lifestyle on the behalf of other members of society (or are at least perceived to do so). This was especially important at certain events in the life of individuals and communities where my interviewees felt “non-religious” individuals ought to call on “religious” professionals.

This tendency toward vicariousness especially appears to be the case regarding religious professionals such as Buddhist and Shinto clerics and Christian ministers. These “religious” people are much like Goldstein-Gidoni’s “repositories of tradition” who possess special skills and knowledge that people need and desire. In much the same way as couples are dependent on photographers, wedding planners, fashion designers, it is often the case that “non-religious” members of the population are dependent on their “religious” counterparts as specialists because of a lack of an extraordinary connection with a religious tradition capable of legitimizing certain forms of belief that are poorly validated or guaranteed by other means. As such, contrary to Inoue Nobutaka’s assumptions, ignorance does not necessarily imply a net loss of religiosity but, rather, illustrates how, along with other aspects of life in contemporary societies, people are more likely to entrust experts with the details if and when they believe that those experts are necessary and trustworthy.

Vicariousness in the Japanese setting also appears to include a clause for open access in the relationship between “non-religious” and “religious” people. For example, providing rituals for individuals, regardless of the background or affiliation of said

individuals, may even be considered one of the responsibilities of a religious professional. In the European context, Grace Davie suggests that religious institutions are much like public utilities which should be made readily available for anyone who desires to make use of them. In a similar vein, Ishii Kenji describes access to Christian weddings as something akin to the access people expect to have to hospitals and medical treatment.<sup>55</sup> In my interview case studies, all informants believed religious professionals, as part of their religious identity, were supposed to make their services available to anyone regardless of the petitioner's faith or affiliation. Religious professionals, including Christian ministers and priests, were supposed strive to ask God to bless the marriage of anyone who requested it. Ironically, the historic institutions of Christianity (as well as those of Buddhism and Shinto) are confronted with an environment where they now find that their *raison d'être* is to fulfill the needs and desires of an often highly individualized and affective form of belief.

Given the open-access character of religion in Japan, petitions for and participation in religious rituals are often predicated by choice, minimal levels of commitment, and expedience but are still taken seriously. There are expectations for sincerely religious behavior—directly and vicariously—and, if demands for rituals or services, even by individuals with little or no personally asserted faith, were met with rejection, this would undoubtedly be offensive and likely somewhat hard to accept. Any priest or minister unwilling to grant a wedding to a couple just because of the couple's lack of religious faith was viewed as unreasonably strict and rather tight-fisted with a tradition that exists to serve humanity. Or worse, that priest or minister was ultimately not truly “religious” because, unlike God, he was not willing to bless anyone.

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<sup>55</sup> Ishii, *Kekkonshiki*, 190.

## CHAPTER 5: CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

Chapter Three was an introduction to the religious attitudes most relevant to Christian weddings and Japanese religiosity. In this chapter, the conversation returns to what remains of the list compiled and presented at the beginning of Chapter Three which outlines the arguments in support of religious decline and irrelevance—namely, the presence in Christian weddings of high level of sensory pageantry and the profoundly commercial nature of the networks and processes involved in mediating and performing Christian marriages in Japan.

Given the fact that neither commercial activity nor aesthetic emphasis are, in themselves, in direct opposition to religious behavior, it may appear that it is enough to state that commercialization and sensory appeal are simply not relevant to the discussion at hand. However, in the instance of Christian marriage ceremonies, the intensification of commercial services and attention given to appearance and performance reveal much about the nature of religion in Japan's high modernity and the manner in which religious traditions become the contested property of both the historic churches and commercial enterprises. This chapter is an exploration of the response to “non-religiousness” as witnessed in the world of Christian wedding ceremonies.

Beginning with the officially recognized Christian Churches—both Catholic and Protestant—I will discuss the ways in which these institutions respond to “non-religiousness.” On one the hand, these institutions have taken steps to relieve the cognitive burdens of obtaining a Christian marriage and, thus, facilitated its broader acceptance in the “non-religious” context that characterizes the Japanese climate as a whole. On the other hand, a climate exists where religious authenticity is a prize that not only religious institutions but commercial institutions now struggle over, I will discuss how religious groups attempt to reassert the identification between themselves and their tradition while incorporating commercial strategies that enhance the convenience of establishing belief within their institutions.

Subsequently, the investigation gradually shifts to highlight the manner in which commercial institutions succeeded in responding to customer demand and, ultimately, obtained dominance in the market of Christian nuptials. Commercial institutions possess the secular facilities necessary for optimizing efficiency and convenience. Simultaneously commercial venues provide environments and experiences with which most churches simply cannot compete. Often commercial

institutions provide atmospheres that have a more convincing relationship with the Christian tradition. Furthermore, the manner in which commercial and religious institutions collaborate and compete to meet the customer expectations blurs the lines of distinction between commercial and religious institutions in such a way that few Japanese appear to be able to distinguish between the venues offered by bridal industry corporations and those offered by churches. This, however, does not lead to the irrelevance of religion but a recasting of Christianity in a manner which appeals to a “non-religious” constituency who depend on that ceremony as a religious reference for their private acts of belief.

### **A Church Opened by God:**

#### **Church Directives and Catholic Weddings for Non-Christians**

As one would expect, there are churches throughout Japan which do not offer wedding ceremonies and, specifically, do not offer them to non-members. One such group of churches is the Orthodox Church which considers the act of marriage one of its seven sacraments (*kimitsu*)—only one of which, baptism, is open to non-members. All other sacraments, including marriage, are available only to members of the Orthodox Church.<sup>56</sup>

Unexpectedly the Japanese Catholic Church is not among the churches sealed off to all but formal believers. Although the Catholic Church claims that it was the Protestant Churches and the bridal industry which popularized Christian weddings in Japan<sup>57</sup>, the Catholic Church was a forerunner of the Christian wedding industry and one of the Christian institutions to respond aggressively to Japanese individuals pursuing Christian weddings. This early and rather unprecedented stance assisted in popularizing Christian weddings prior to the relatively late bridal industry response. Although there is undoubtedly a commercial dimension to the opening the Catholic Church (all religious corporations must deal with financial realities), the strategies employed by the Catholic Church should be considered a direct response to a religious outlook regarding weddings which tends to avoid cognitive-heavy faith claims or religious affiliations—“non-religiousness.”

On March 1, 1975, the Vatican granted the Japanese Catholic Church special permission to conduct wedding ceremonies for non-Catholic couples. Naturally, these ceremonies had previously been available to baptized members of the Catholic Church

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<sup>56</sup> “The Orthodox Church in Japan” <http://www.orthodoxjapan.jp/tebiki/inori01.html>

<sup>57</sup> “Japan Catholic News” <http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/eng/jcn/jul2006.htm>



and their spouses to be, regardless of their spouse's faith. However, this new exemption gave priests the authority to conduct wedding ceremonies—given certain restrictions and requirements—for un-baptized, non-Christian couples as well. This rather unprecedented opening of the Catholic Church's doors occurred long before the nation-wide explosion of Christian ceremonies which, beginning during the years of the “bubble economy” in the 1980s, witnessed a growth that ultimately dethroned the Shinto rite by the mid-1990s. Officially, Catholic weddings have been available to non-Christian couples in Japan for at least the past thirty-five years.<sup>58</sup>

With the growing popularity of Christian weddings the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference (*senkyōshikyōiinkai*) met on January 1, 1990 to discuss and clarify the Church's position on making the sacrament of marriage available even to non-believers. The discussion led to a debate over the capacity of wedding ceremonies to reach members of Japanese society who would otherwise fall outside the current missionary efforts and never associate with the Church but included some concerns over the issue of church commercialization.<sup>59</sup>

The position of this 1990 council was collected, organized and published in 1992 as a fourteen page directive, “Wedding Ceremonies of Non-Christian Couples in the Catholic Church of Japan” (*nihon no katorikku kyōkai ni okeru hikirisutosha dōshi no kekkon ni tsuite*) outlining the Church's position on Christian weddings for non-Christians. This booklet demonstrates that the Catholic clergy, at this early point in the popularity of the Christian nuptials, were already handling a large number of Christian weddings. Despite a few statements expressing concerns that a focus on weddings could distract the church from its true mission—that is, caring for and providing for their cognitively affiliated community of believers—the Catholic Church overwhelmingly justified and embraced the opportunity to present wedding ceremonies to non-Christians.

To “create a church open to all people,” the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee outlined a position asserting that Christian weddings for non-Christians is consistent with the mission of the Church as established by the First National Assembly on the Promotion and Evangelization of the Gospel (*dai ikkai fukuin senkyō suishin zenkoku kaigi*) and the Second National Assembly on the Promotion and Evangelization

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<sup>58</sup> Igarashi, *Kekkon kyōkai no tanjō*, 188. In his study of “Wedding Churches,” Igarashi Taro discovered that St. Paul's Church in Karuizawa has been offering Catholic wedding ceremonies to non-Christians as early as the 1960's. According to the resident priest, Carlo Martinez, these wedding were part of an effort to introduce Catholicism to the Japanese.

<sup>59</sup> Ishii, *Kekkonshiki*, 46-7.

of the Gospel (*dai nikai fukuin senkyō suishin zenkoku kaigi*) which emphasized domestic issues under the theme of “the home” (*katei*).<sup>60</sup> Christian weddings present the Church a rare opportunity to enter the lives and homes of non-Christians in a manner deemed appropriate and coherent with the Church’s various missions.

In addition to the claim that providing Christian weddings to non-Christians is consistent with the institutional and programmatic agenda of the Church, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee set out the Church’s theological rationale for opening their doors to non-Christians. The Committee was aware that, although a small number of individuals may have some knowledge of Christianity and Christian weddings, the vast majority of individuals seeking a Christian wedding probably have little or no proper understanding.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the Committee was realistic about the condition of faith in contemporary Japanese society and recognized that the apparent diversity of religious action among a large number of Japanese—e.g., Christmas celebrations, New Year’s visits to shrines, Buddhist funerals, etc.—may even serve as evidence that “although the Japanese are religious, they lack faith.”<sup>62</sup> In this respect, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee demonstrates a familiarity with crucial aspects of modern Japanese religiosity.

Citing the Acts of the Apostles, Gospel of Luke and the Second Edict of Pope John Paul II, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee suggests that the increasing number of non-believers seeking Christian weddings is the result of nothing less than an act of God himself who desires to meet these individuals and bring them blessings. Even if their reasons for desiring a Christian wedding are not entirely clear, their choice to do so can and should be understood as a search for the truth in which God has led them to “knock on the Church’s doors.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, it is the Church’s responsibility, as God’s intermediary on earth, to acknowledge the value of the “religious feelings” these non-Christian Japanese couples possess and to respond aggressively to demonstrate that God has blessed their union in the same way that he blessed the union of man and woman as portrayed in Genesis. The Committee clarifies that there is no requirement which states that a priest must perform wedding ceremonies for non-Christians but it is a chance to fulfill the true mission of the Church by praying for the happiness and prosperity of all through God’s blessings. Moreover, it is the Catholic Church’s belief

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<sup>60</sup> Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee, *Nihon no katorikku kyōkai ni okeru hikirisutosha dōshi no kekkon ni tsuite* (Tokyo: Catholic Bishop’s Conference, 1992), 5.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 7.

that Christian weddings may serve as a catalyst to transform unfocused “religious feelings” into exclusive Christian faith, as part of God’s master plan.

The Catholic wedding ceremony performed for non-Christian couples is by no means a watered-down version. The text used to conduct the ceremony is “Rite for the Celebration of Marriage” (*kekkonshiki*), which is the official Japanese translation of the Latin text for marriage, *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium*, and is the same version used for Catholic and mixed Catholic/non-Christian couples.<sup>64</sup> This manual contains two possible programs for the ceremony—Rite for the Celebration of Marriage within Mass and Rite for the Celebration of Marriage Outside of Mass. The latter is typically used for the wedding of Catholic and non-Catholic mixed couples as well as non-Christian couples.<sup>65</sup> According to Toshimitsu Miyakoshi, secretary of the Japanese Catholic Committee for the Liturgy, Catholics are believed to be the normal participants in Church ceremonies and no separate marriage rite was designed for non-Christians, rather; it was intended that the Rite for Celebration of Marriage Outside of Mass be adapted for non-Christians on a case by case basis at the discretion of the priest.<sup>66</sup> Non-Christians who marry in the Catholic Church receive the same blessing for their unions as do many Catholics.

In fulfilling its mission, the 1992 directive states that the Church shall only grant wedding ceremonies to those that meet all of the requirements for preparation (legal and religious). Individual churches are given some freedom in establishing requisite preparation but generally a three to six month period of visits to the church on a weekly or twice weekly basis is recommended.<sup>67</sup> This period of preparation is considered essential to obtain the couple’s consent and to assist them in developing what the Catholic Church believes to be a basic knowledge concerning the relationship between and responsibilities of husband and wife, and the mystery life. This period of attendance provides the couple an opportunity to experience the church atmosphere, prayer and, ultimately, an opportunity to desire God’s blessings from their own hearts.

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<sup>64</sup> The Japanese and Latin versions are identical aside from the addition of the prayer of St. Francis which was thought suitable for Japan.

<sup>65</sup> “Church Weddings for Non-Christians Provide Opportunity for Couples to Reflect on Marriage,” *Japan Catholic News*, July 2, 2006.  
<http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/eng/jcn/jul2006.htm>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Despite the recommendation of a three to six month period of visits and participation, it appears that there is a great deal of disparity among individual churches. For example, the Yamate Catholic Church—the oldest Catholic Church in Japan—only requires participation in three lectures before approving a couple’s desire to have a Catholic Wedding Ceremony (<http://www.yamate44.jp/wedding.html>).

Subsequent to the publishing of the 1992 "Wedding Ceremonies of Non-Christian Couples in Japan," it appears the Japanese Catholic Church has taken steps to implement the programs to meet the demand for Christian wedding ceremonies by non-Christians. For example, seven Hiroshima churches united in the participation of the World Peace Memorial Cathedral Marriage Committee which holds pre-marriage seminars at Noboricho Church. In 2005, this committee held a seminar almost every month for a total of eleven times and celebrated the marriage of 45 couples.<sup>68</sup>

Noboricho Church began these pre-marriage seminars in 2000 and, currently with the help of seventeen couples from the congregation, continues to prepare non-Christians to wed in the Catholic Church. One of the couples that assist in conducting the seminars described the experience as bringing "to people the true meaning of the Catholic wedding ceremony."<sup>69</sup> The assisting couples prepare handouts for the participants, aid discussions of each of the seminars' themes, and help to fill gaps in the priest's knowledge, as he has no experience with married life.

Some of the participating non-Christian couples do express uneasiness with the process and question the purpose of the seminars.<sup>70</sup> Coordinator couples attempt to overcome this tension and reach the participants by striving "to establish a deep relationship with them" and one coordinating couple even attempts to place the pre-wedding seminar new comers at ease by telling them that "the purpose of the seminar is not to baptize people."<sup>71</sup> This is an interesting tactic which seems at odds with the missionizing program put forth in the 1992 directive of the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee. As is the case with the opening of the Church itself, this tactic for reassurance demonstrates nothing less than a direct appeal to "non-religious" couples.

### **The Decline of Catholic Weddings**

As the number of Christian weddings ballooned, the Catholic Church already had the facilities, staff (especially, religious professionals) and tradition necessary to handle the new demand and was a step ahead of the bridal industry which remained predominantly Shinto. It was the Christian Churches and not the bridal industry that

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<sup>68</sup> "Church Weddings for Non-Christians Provide Opportunity for Couples to Reflect on Marriage," <http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/eng/jcn/jul2006.htm>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

was able to first respond to the demand for Christian weddings and the early years of Christian wedding popularity form the peak years for Catholic ceremonies. By reducing the demands for cognitive faith and strict affiliation, the Catholic Church moved from the margins to the mainstream of a Japanese religious culture by offering weddings to those in pursuit of them.

As the bridal industry aggressively responded to meet the demand for Christian weddings with facilities and staff of its own, the number of Catholic weddings began to drop sharply. The number Catholic couple weddings was 1085 in 1973 and only 291 in 2004. Similarly, the number of weddings among couples composed of one Catholic and one non-Christian was 3299 in 1973 and only 1643 in 2004. Most dramatically, weddings among non-Christian couples dropped from 9,829 in 1993 to 2141 in 2004. By 2007, these numbers dropped still further with Catholic weddings totaling a mere 2899 ceremonies of which non-Christian couples formed only 1066 unions while Catholic and non-Christian marriages totaled 1389.<sup>72</sup> This a ninety percent decrease in the number of Catholic weddings in just fifteen years.

It should be noted that the decline in the number of Catholic weddings coincides with the overall popularity of the Christian wedding. While the popularity of the Christian ceremony increased the number of Catholic weddings decreased. As discussed in Chapter One, the Christian wedding remains the preferred wedding ceremony for a strong majority of Japanese couples and, as discussed in Chapter Three, my informants continue to prefer the unique blend of religious authenticity, sincerity and happiness the Christian ceremony offers. Catholic churches were quick to react to the demand for Christian wedding ceremonies but slow to adapt to the intensifying competition from both Protestant Churches and the bridal industry, which, in the eyes of my “non-religious” informants, provides roughly the same traditionally Christian wedding without the same time consuming preparation and cognitive burdens (seminars, etc.). Commercial institutions and many Protestant churches offer weddings without requiring couples do anything but show up for the ceremony. This has made the Catholic ceremony, which formally benefitted from an advantage in facilities and human resources, unique in its requirements and inconvenience.

The forces of modernity and differentiation, which shattered the unity between belief, community and identity creating “non-religiousness,” have also played a critical role in the Church’s decision to reformat and re-strategize to offer weddings to the general population. Although not a complete failure, the Catholic Church is now only

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<sup>72</sup> Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Japan, *Statistics of the Catholic Church* (Tokyo: Catholic Bishop’s Conference, 2007).

one of a wide number of options for a Christian wedding ceremony and has failed to remain competitive in the light of other options.

### Easy Access:

#### Protestants Churches and Weddings

The Catholic Church of Japan is not the only officially recognized Christian institution to open its doors to those seeking marriage ceremonies. Protestant Churches have also taken similar and sometimes even more drastic steps to grant ceremonial access to non-Christians. Protestant organizations and ministers have fewer reservations about conducting marriage rites for non-Christians and less hesitation about engaging in partnerships with the bridal industry. Protestant ministers have not only opened their church doors to non-Christian wedding ceremonies but also set out to bring their tradition to hotels, chapels and restaurants throughout the country. The diffusion of Protestant liturgies and the ready exchange of personnel between Protestant Churches and bridal industry companies means that Christian wedding ceremonies in Japan are largely Protestant.

As with the Catholic Church, the United Church of Christ in Japan (*nihon kirisuto kyōdan*), the largest confederation of Protestant Churches in Japan publishes guides for ministers and churches to make use of in proselytizing, running churches and performing ceremonies. The instructions for wedding ceremonies espoused by the United Church of Christ are included in their ritual handbook *Liturgical Handbook* (*shikibun*). The *Liturgical Handbook* lists six points for the composition of its sample wedding ceremony along with an explanation.<sup>73</sup> The last of these points states that *Liturgical*

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<sup>73</sup> Liturgical Handbook lists the following six points: 1) To offer up guidelines for marriage which include a simple explanation of the meaning of marriage as it occurs within the Church and its liturgical proceedings, and provide a liturgical text based on those guidelines. 2) To ensure that the marriage ceremonies are a simple affair which follows the basic structure of a church service. 3) To incorporate the successes obtained through the recent worldwide liturgical reform movement—including, changes to the liturgical structure of the marriage ceremony, the use of terminology, the involvement of the congregation and the structure of the vows, etc. 4) To present a number of bible passages so as to facilitate the diverse selection of bible readings for use in marriage ceremonies. These passages should be places that discuss the meaning of marriage and should not preach the one-sided oppression of either men or women but should illuminate the reconciliation of the gospel in Jesus Christ and explicate the blessings and responsibility obtained through marriage vows. 5) To ensure that the proceedings of the ceremony are not rigidly established and beyond change but follow the guidelines with relative flexibility allowing ministers to incorporate the wishes of party to be married. 6) To ensure that the guidelines and explanation contained herein are capable of serving

*Handbook* and its explanations and guidelines delineated therein regarding wedding ceremonies were designed to serve as a text not only for the presiding minister but also for the congregation and the couple.<sup>74</sup> This manual provides a relatively comprehensive explanation of the Protestant position vis-à-vis marriage ceremonies and is comparable to the 1992 directive issued by the Catholic Church.

Unlike the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the Protestant Churches do not consider marriage to be one of the holy sacraments. However, according *Liturgical Handbook*, the decision to marry is an important moment in one's life and marks a new point of departure. It is the Church's position that wedding is not simply a process whereby individuals publicize their private affections or heighten the awareness of familial connections. Rather, marriage and wedding ceremonies "should be treasured as a time to realize God's plan and guidance, to deepen one's faith, and for prayer."<sup>75</sup> As with the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, wedding are the public proclamation of the formation of a new house through God's blessing. At its basis, weddings consists of vows made by husband and wife based on and in response to the blessings of Jesus Christ and the death of Jesus on the cross and the creation of a new relationship between God and man serves as the foundation for the relationship embodied in marriage. As such, the vows made between man and woman, who are "equal before God," reflect the spirit of the promise made by God and written in the Bible. *Liturgical Handbook* states the relationship between husband and wife should be one modeled on the precedent of Christ and the Church—a proclamation and promise rooted in a relationship of mutual dedication and limitless love.<sup>76</sup>

*Liturgical Handbook* reminds ministers that for many of those in attendance at a wedding ceremony, this may be their first experience of a Christian service and the first chance to experience the gospel. Consequently, *Liturgical Handbook* recommends that bible passages concerning the Old Testament laws describing the duties between husband and wife be avoided. Rather, the *Liturgical Handbook* suggests passages from the gospel which discuss marriage as set of responsibilities to bring blessings to loyal and sincere couples.<sup>77</sup> Sample wedding ceremonies enclosed in *Liturgical Handbook* make use of verses taken from the book of Genesis concerning the creation and union of man and woman, and from Corinthians regarding love.

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the needs of not only for use by ministers who perform marriages also church members and the marrying parties as a text for learning about [Christian marriage].

<sup>74</sup> Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan, *Shikibun* (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan, 2007), 89.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 89

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 95

In addition to avoiding certain portions of the bible, *Liturgical Handbook* states that preaching should be kept to a minimum to ensure the overall simplicity of the ceremony. These brief messages should focus on a short but important list of items: the value of individual people's personalities, the mystery of man and woman's creation, the equality of the sexes, and the victory and transcendence found in unconditional all-forgiving love.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, a focus on these topics will help to emphasize the message that the new household created in marriage will be filled with the blessings of God and serve as a vessel for God's glory.

The guidance offered by *Liturgical Handbook* regarding weddings concludes by stating that wedding ceremonies should be properly rooted in and consistent with the aims of Church. However, at this point, *Liturgical Handbook* also insists explicitly that it is possible to conduct Christian weddings for couples or individuals that do not possess a clear Christian faith. The Church, who receives the petition from and grants approval to these non-believers, should strive to bring their marriage under the prayers and blessings of the Church. In cases where Christian weddings are performed in facilities other than a church—i.e., hotel, chapel, restaurant, etc.—it is essential that the minister adhere to the contents of *Liturgical Handbook* and endeavor to protect and maintain the quality and faith expressed in the Christian wedding ceremony. Although the couple, guests and other participants may not possess faith, *Liturgical Handbook* considers their sincere participation in the ceremony's vow and prayers a necessity for the proper performance of the ritual. In other words, Protestant churches also recognize the religiosity of the "non-religious" and tailor their weddings to match their needs.

### **Christian Wedding No Questions Asked: Christian Bridal Mission**

Ishii Kenji suggests that attempts to provide non-believers with Christian wedding ceremonies have existed since the 1950s<sup>79</sup> and, in the decades that followed, relationships between Protestant clergy and the commercial institutions of the bridal industry began to develop rapidly. One of the most successful examples of religious and commercial partnership is the Christian Bridal Mission (*buraidaru senkyōdan*) which was originally founded in 1980 and incorporated as a religious juridical person in 1986.<sup>80</sup> In the beginning, the Christian Bridal Mission was composed of a group of twenty-three Protestant ministers who worked in cooperation with fifty-seven different bridal venues.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>79</sup> Ishii, *Kekkonshiki*, 49-50

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 49-50



After formalizing a relationship with a particular venue, the Christian Bridal Mission dispatches a minister to handle any and all requests for a Christian marriage—no questions asked.

In the 1980s, when Christian weddings were still a rare alternative to the Shinto ceremony, hotels and chapels had not yet created the appropriate spaces within their facilities for conducting Christian weddings.<sup>81</sup> In effect, if one wanted a Christian wedding, one would have to approach a church and complete whatever preliminary requirements existed before being granted a Christian wedding service. However, Honda Sadao, the founder of the Christian Bridal Mission, felt that churches and their requirements prevented non-believers from gaining exposure to Christianity and, in a 1984 interview stated, “For regular people it is a pain and they stop going half way through and it just results in them avoiding [Christianity]. On this once in a lifetime day, I did not want to refuse people in the same manner as a church.”<sup>82</sup>

In this way, the first Christian organization devoted exclusively to the production of weddings was born and from its humble beginnings has, with the explosion of the popularity of Christian weddings, grown to national proportions. In sharp contrast to its early local affiliations in the Kanto region, by 1990, the Christian Bridal Mission had two hundred and sixty partner hotels and performed an annual fifteen thousand weddings. For the sake of comparison, in 1984, the Christian Bridal Mission performed a mere eight hundred weddings. A similar story can be told for the number of members and, in 1990, what was originally a group of twenty-three ministers was now an organization with over four hundred members—of which nearly one hundred are ministers with an additional three hundred coordinating choir members.<sup>83</sup>

However, as discussed in Chapter One, the Christian ceremony became the wedding of choice in the mid-1990s and a glance at the Christian Bridal Mission website shows that the trend toward growth by no means ceased in 1990. At present, the Christian Bridal Mission is an organization with over twenty years of experience and a network of over three thousand trained professionals (one thousand of which are ministers). According to their website, these professionals “provide backup on a nationwide scale” that stretches from Hokkaidō to Okinawa.

Additionally, the Christian Bridal Mission is a non-denominational Evangelical Protestant Church that provides “twenty-four hour around the clock [wedding] service

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 49-50

<sup>82</sup> Ishii, *Kekkonshiki*, 50. Taken from a Yomuri Shinbun interview that was published on October 10, 1984.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 50. Taken from a Kirisuto Shinbun report which appeared on March 3, 1990.

any day of the year,” boasts “a system capable of responding immediately to any situation,” and offers flexible, experienced “service with a heart.”<sup>84</sup> The Christian Bridal Mission claims that as an institution that specializes in Christian weddings it offers the chance to incorporate originality while simultaneously ensuring the authentic, orthodox character of its wedding ceremonies—a notably attractive blend for an modern “non-religious” constituency. Perhaps anticipating customer concerns about rumors of “fake ministers,” the Christian Bridal Mission includes a segment on their webpage informing readers that they receive their non-Japanese ministers through a cooperative missionary effort with Youth With a Mission—the world’s largest missionary organization.<sup>85</sup>

The Christian Bridal Mission’s advertisement of services and use of terminology in a form that might typically be considered commercial is obvious. However, the success of the Christian Bridal Mission is not simply a product of commercialization but rather of the successful marketing of a religious product that is in high demand. The Christian Bridal Mission reduces pre- and post-ceremonial cognitive demands placed on customers to a minimum and makes concessions to the customers’ aesthetic requests while simultaneously reassuring them of the quality of the authenticity and orthodoxy of their wedding services. This winning competition is likely also very popular with hotels, chapels, “wedding churches” (*kekkonkyōkai*) and guest houses, which are the Christian Bridal Missions primary customers, because it matches the flexibility offered by these commercial venues while at the same time providing quality assurance in the form of a guarantee of religious authenticity.

### **The Commercial Success of Christian Weddings**

In addition to the birth of new Protestant organizations, in a religious climate where the active majority is “non-religious” the mechanisms for establishing a convincing reference to Christianity take on a decidedly sensual character. Visual cues—such as race, architectural style, musical talent, etc.—have become the primary way to not only generate a connection with the Christian tradition but for customers to verify that such a connection does indeed exist. The bridal industry has responded to this tendency to rely

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<sup>84</sup> “Christian Bridal Mission” [http://www.bridalmission.co.jp/about\\_cbm.html](http://www.bridalmission.co.jp/about_cbm.html)

<sup>85</sup> Despite the claims of its website, one of the “fake ministers” I interviewed belonged to the Christian Bridal Mission and received wedding work immediately after his admission into the organization and before completing any training—I will return to issue of “fake ministers” again below.

on sensory experience in almost every conceivable manner with the result that, along with Protestant churches and ministers devoted to wedding ceremonies, commercial institutions play a crucial role in the success and continued popularity of the Christian wedding.

**Chapels and “Wedding Churches” (*Kekkonshiki Kyokai*):**  
**The Architecture of Contemporary Japanese Christianity**

As my informant interviews with bridal industry insiders attest, authentic religious locations and professionals are in high demand but often short supply and, in this section, I will discuss this problem and the bridal industry solutions to it. Even with a shortage in supply, the startling truth is that the bridal industry is better equipped to meet consumer demands for religious authenticity than are churches. Conventionally, hotels, chapels and guest houses are outfitted with facilities to maximize convenience. However, this is not the bridal industry’s only advantage over most churches.

According to a 2003-2004 survey conducted by Kekkon Pia, when asked about what aspect of the wedding they felt was most important, the top response of couples was location (*kaijō*) followed by ceremonial style (*kyōshiki no sutairu*), indicating the importance of sensory experience.<sup>86</sup> Taking into account the decisive popularity of the Christian wedding ceremony, it is reasonable to assume that at least in part this means the majority of individuals want a Christian ceremony at a Christian location. The industry response to this demand has manifested in a number of ways—the most visible of which includes the production of at least 1228 locations nationally for the performance of Christian weddings by 2006.<sup>87</sup> Nearly half of these locations are free-standing “wedding churches” (*kekkonshiki kyōkai*) which are designed to rival and surpass the aesthetic beauty and, consequently, the perceived religious authenticity of churches operated as religious organizations—something at which they consistently succeed.

For instance, Igarashi Tarō’s book length study into the rapid appearance of “wedding churches,” free-standing commercially owned chapels, reveals they rival or surpass most churches in architectural splendor. The vast majority of wedding churches are built in one of two Western architectural styles—classical and gothic. Gothic architecture along with the use of stained glass, pulpits and pipe organs are common

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<sup>86</sup> Igarashi, *Kekkonshiki kyōkai no tanjō*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 49. This number is limited to locations which are registered with Zexy.

fixtures in both wedding churches and hotel chapels.<sup>88</sup> Wedding churches are also typically designed to boast a large-scale vaulted-arch ceiling, extended virgin road, steeples, a rose window, and flying buttress. Some wedding churches are not just copies of gothic cathedrals but are actually (re-)built from the ground up using traditional materials and, even in some cases, materials taken from gothic churches that were torn down in Europe, imported and reconstructed in Japan.<sup>89</sup> The bridal industry is building gothic-style churches at scales and in numbers that Catholic and Protestant Churches in Japan could probably never afford or justify.

Igarashi, an architect by training, states that the bridal industry has been the source of an unprecedented revival of gothic and classic architecture in contemporary Japan that cannot be witnessed elsewhere in the contemporary world.<sup>90</sup> The quest for marital happiness has become embedded in the physical landscape of Japan in much the same way as it has become embedded in the religious landscape as a life-cycle ritual. Gothic and classical wedding churches dot the cityscape and, in some cases, wedding chapels have even replaced the Shinto shrines that were once located on the top of department buildings.<sup>91</sup> Igarashi states, “in Japan, fake churches do more to pursue authenticity causing an inversion of roles [with real churches] and this is because image is so important for wedding churches.”<sup>92</sup>

Visual cues are one way by which my Japanese respondents felt they were able to verify the religious authenticity of a location or person. For example, Yōhei had heard rumors concerning the existence of non-Japanese posing as ministers—i.e., “fake ministers”—and was concerned whether or not such a minister would be performing his sister’s marriage ceremony because his sister was so determined to have a perfect marriage and he would hate to see it ruined. Despite his initial suspicions, he was put at ease by the fact that the hotel chapel had stained glass, an organ and that the choir and the Caucasian minister seemed to know exactly what they were doing and appeared to be quite proficient in the execution of the ceremony. The environment and the professionals appeared to be Christian so he concluded that they must indeed be Christian and in his reassurance also felt grateful for their assistance.

Many Japanese appear to know relatively little about Christianity but, as part of a “non-religious” religious outlook, they are willing to rely on the knowledge and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 102. The Nagoya Parco department store is one such location.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 54-5.

expertise of professionals they perceive as sufficiently knowledgeable and skilled. Another result of this vicarious relationship with professionals is that many Japanese lack the religious knowledge by which to assess credibility of a location or minister and are frequently without a system by which they can directly determine the religiosity of the person involved. As a result, many Japanese entrust the selection of a minister to a commercial institution they feel they can hold accountable. Other Japanese, such as Yōhei, are convinced by appearance and perception alone.

In fact, appearance and successful performance were the instruments of judgment most frequently employed by my interview respondents. This meant that interviewees seeking a Christian wedding ceremony often demanded that the church has items like stained glass, a cross, and the bible. Places which had this combination of accoutrements were considered to be authentic Christian spaces.

In addition to décor, other tactics are employed to enhance the religious authenticity and, therefore, marketability of wedding churches. Wedding churches, hotels and chapels alike readily use Western names and they also refer to themselves as “churches” (*kyōkai*) or “cathedrals” (*daiseidō*). Many of my informants believed that the English word for “*kyōkai*” (church) was “chapel.” Their beliefs may not be entirely misguided. Wedding churches are recognized as churches and sometimes establish official relationships with churches from around the world. The gothic churches of Ai Group, a bridal industry giant, are affiliated with the World Wide Fellowship which also includes such churches as Saint Paul’s in London, Westminster Abbey and Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Saint Paul’s Park PRIMROSE claims to have received permission to use the name “Saint Paul’s” directly from the Anglican Church and it also claims that its cathedral was blessed by the Pope. According to the pamphlet they disseminate, Saint Paul’s Park is a “cathedral with a proper pedigree.”<sup>94</sup>

Wedding churches sometimes even go so far as to procure actual Christian relics. One instance of this is documented on Westminster’s Park’s homepage in its statement concerning its altar: “As for the stones of the altar, they contain the clothing of seventh century saint, St. Hubertus, who kindly watches over the couple and their happy future.”<sup>95</sup> In another particularly striking case, Gran Plus Saint Valentine Church has apparently received relics of the actual Saint Valentine from Saint Valentine Church in Italy which it keeps on display.

In addition to the ubiquitous use of crosses, altars, and the bible as well as other

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<sup>93</sup> Igarashi, *Kekkonshiki kyōkai no tanjō*, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>95</sup> Ai Group, “Uesutominsutaa paaku veruje,” <http://www.verger-yahata.com/>

Christian décor, some chapels even possess their own full-time resident ministers. One such wedding church is the Abbey la Tour Church which possesses its own resident minister who participates in the community choir and even conducts Sunday church services at the commercially owned and operated chapel where weddings occur.<sup>96</sup> Other wedding churches such as the Saint Mary Church in Azabu possess resident ministers who conduct lectures on the Bible, marriage seminars and Christmas mass.<sup>97</sup>

Wedding churches and, to a lesser but convincing extent, hotels make powerful visual and conceptual overtures that customers will accept as cues of authenticity and, consequently, ensure the affective religious success of their officially commercial spaces. Wedding churches appear to be well aware of the coordinating hierarchies of religiousness and happiness. This obvious blurring in the lines between commercial and religious entities is part of a larger effort to lend religious credence to churches that are part of commercial ventures making them more attractive venues to a “non-religious” consumer base.

### **Seeking an Authentic Minister: Religion and Ethnicity in Japanese Christian Weddings**

In addition to location, similar visual and conceptual assessments also play a crucial role in the judgment of other aspects of Christian weddings. Most Japanese interviewees employed similar appearance-based mechanisms for determining the authenticity of the presiding religious professional.

The clear preference for a Caucasian minister or priest was based on the fact that these same interviewees believed that all Caucasians were Christian and that this was an original and, therefore, purer form of Christianity than that possessed by Japanese Christians. One married couple, Yumiko and Kojiro, were disappointed in the appearance of the minister who performed their wedding service—although the minister was Caucasian, he did not have blonde hair and blue eyes. Similarly, Yumiko and Kojiro also complained of the minister’s Japanese accent, which was crisp and nearly native. Because of these unfortunate attributes this couple felt that, even without any other information, the minister who presided at their marriage might even be a fake—in particular, Kojiro felt that the minister would have been more believable had he possessed a stronger English accent when he spoke Japanese. Ethnicity and accent were ways to judge whether an individual was authentically Christian or not.

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<sup>96</sup> Wedding Central Park, “Abbey la Tour Church,” <http://www.w-cp.com/index.html>

<sup>97</sup> Mary Company, “Azabu seinto mearii kyōkai,” <http://www.azabu-mary.com>

Another set of preferred attributes was age and experience. The majority of interviewees expressed greater comfort with a minister that was middle-aged or older because they were certain his age would translate into deeper faith and expertise—a deeper relationship with the Christian tradition. In the same manner and for the same reasons, competence in ritual performance was considered absolutely essential—ministers who performed the ritual smoothly and elegantly were more likely to be appreciated. My interviews reveal that ethnicity, ritual skill and, to a lesser extent, age formed a largely reliable set of criteria for determining the authenticity of the minister or priest under question even without further investigation.<sup>98</sup>

The Japanese demand for authentic religious professionals has developed into a market for ministers all across Japan as chapels, hotels and guest houses attempt to staff their marriage ceremonies. The demand for authenticity and the visual mechanisms for accessing it have created a significant and often problematic demand for Caucasian ministers who are frequently believed to be more “truly” Christian. Although, no set of comprehensive or reliable statistics exists, it appears the number of Caucasian ministers who reside in Japan does by no means meet the demand for them and this has led wedding planners and chapels to take matters into their own hands.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to building churches that are decorated, named and affiliated in such a way as to suggest the very heights of Christian authenticity, chapels, hotels and wedding planners have taken to hiring Caucasians who satisfy the visual and aesthetic criteria of Japanese consumers—simply by being warm, thoughtful, Caucasian and proficient in conducting the wedding ceremony—without necessarily satisfying their other criteria for sincere religious behavior—faith, theological mastery, and knowledge of the Christian religious tradition. The only Christian criteria these Caucasian ministers are expected to meet is the successful performance of the nuptials themselves.

Michael Fisch, introduced in Chapter Two, pretended to be a minister and performed a number of Christian weddings and is a good example of one of these ministers for hire. As a Jewish man with little or no religious training and no Christian faith, he was still able to perform Christian weddings. Michael Fisch may have decided to enter into the ministry to conduct research but, according to my interviews with five

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<sup>98</sup> The reliance on appearances and other visual cues is not particular to the Japanese alone. For example, Joseph, one of my informant ministers, performed marriages for Chinese, Korean, and American couples on several occasions without exposure. In fact, following the ceremony, he was thanked in person by the bride, groom and parents and was perceived and treated as a legitimate minister in each of these cases as well.

<sup>99</sup> Although they lack any sort credibility, rumors that ninety percent of ministers are fake prevalent.

Caucasian chapel ministers, the typical motivation for taking up this career path was money and not religion. Only one of the five minister respondents had Christian faith and all five said they originally took this job because the fiscal remuneration—typically, 10,000-15000 yen a wedding—was considerable. One minister, named Samuel, stated that, in addition to payment, performing the ceremonies had the added benefit of “allowing him to spit in the face of Christianity”—by which he meant that despite his loathing of Christianity he was able to perform one of its rituals as a religious authority, a prospect he found delightful as it was deviant. Another minister who was not a member of my respondents but who maintains a blog online described himself in much the same way as several of my interviewees: “a shameless, godless, money-grubbing wedding minister at a Japanese wedding chapel.”<sup>100</sup>

The propensity for such ministers to discuss their clandestine infiltration of chapels and hotels and the sometimes cavalier hiring practices of such “fake” ministers through newspaper or online advertisements which state that no experience is necessary have at times created concerns about the authenticity of Caucasian ministers among the Christian community and the Japanese themselves. One result of this suspicion of Caucasian ministers takes the form an inversion in the relationship between ethnicity and authenticity. If fake ministers are more likely to be Caucasian, some Japanese couples select a Japanese minister because Japanese-ness implies a more reliable relationship with Christianity. For example, Maho and Taichi, who were introduced in Chapter Three, were one of the exceptions among those I interviewed in that they were wary of the authenticity of Caucasian ministers. Eventually, they decided to have a Japanese minister with whom they were acquainted perform their wedding because, even though they felt Caucasians were typically more Christian, they were afraid that if it were a Caucasian minister he might be nothing more than an English teacher “playing dress-up” (*kosupure*) and looking for a lucrative part-time job.

The relationship between sensory cues and authenticity described here has two important implications. First, in contrast to arguments of Goldstein-Gidoni and Fisch, Christianity does not completely correspond or exist in entire subservience to a larger “Western” paradigm. If it did, logically, all “Western” (i.e., Caucasian) ministers would be preferential to their Japanese counterparts no matter their absence of faith or purely economic motivations. However, as the occasional inversion of ethnic identity and authenticity suggests, ministers are present to establish a link with the Christian tradition and not simply as a hallmark of “Western-ness.”

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<sup>100</sup> Soccerphile, “Love for Sale,” *Japan Visitor Blog*, September 7, 2005. <http://japanvisitor.blogspot.com/2005/09/love-for-sale.html>



In the absence of faith and despite rather questionable motivations for entering the role of a minister, all of my minister respondents strove to perform their weddings for which they were commissioned with flawless perfection. Some of these ministers did not understand why the Japanese were attracted to the Christian ceremony. Michael, for example, admitted that he would probably never fully understand why Japanese couples wanted Christian weddings and, during his interview, he stated repeatedly that without some sort of faith the religious overtones should create a lot of discomfort for the couple as they are asked to make their vows before God and pray to Jesus. Regardless of his stated inability to comprehend the Japanese attitude toward Christian marriage, he took every possible step to conceal any part of his identity that might call him into question. He always showed up on time, performed each ceremony without mistake, introduced himself to the couple as the minister who would perform the ceremony and even obtained a minister license.

Similarly, Samuel, who was mentioned earlier, said that he felt that it was his role to make the ceremony real because the Japanese were relying on him as a source of religious authority and knowledge. Samuel stated that he tried to avoid any and all deviant thoughts and exude kindness while he was a minister and later joined the Christian Bridal Mission as an official minister where he not only conducts weddings but bridal seminars where he introduces new couples to the bible and the teachings of Jesus.

All the ministers I interviewed took steps to be more persuasive ministers and it appears they succeeded. No interviewee was questioned about his or her authority by any Japanese customer. More amazingly, one minister, named Joseph, who lived only a couple of stations from a chapel where he frequently performed weddings often ran into individuals for whom he had performed a wedding. He stated that people always thanked him for his blessings and he always remarked that it was an honor to bless such a happy couple. Joseph was even invited to attend community gatherings where his identity was never questioned and he was always referred to as a minister and frequently asked to discuss and explain religion to laypeople.

Even with the ministers taking steps individually and making an effort to appear as authentic ministers (i.e., ministers with an actual link to the Christian tradition), ministers and their bridal industry coworkers were not about to leave things open for speculation. The bridal industry has responded to the issue of fake ministers with two strategies that effectively secure the status of chapel ministers as Christian ministers. The first of these strategies is concealment—ministers are consistently

presented as authentic ministers both in and outside ritual contexts.<sup>101</sup> Joseph is a notable example of this and stated that, although he was not Christian, he would conceal that fact under all possible circumstances. Furthermore, according to interviews with members of the choir, musical performers and the owner of a wedding company who supplied ministers to chapels—every individual was prepared to tell the customer that the minister was indeed Christian and bona fide even in cases when they knew this was a lie. The reason that these individuals were prepared to conceal any lapse in faith or knowledge was the fact that the religiosity was essential to the service and that no one would want to be married by someone who was just acting the part. These respondents were certain that the exposure of a fake minister would ruin the wedding, upset the customer and likely result in the chapel cutting ties and ending the contract with not only the minister under question but his company as well.

The second strategy employed by the bridal industry is an independent system of training and certification by which wedding planners issue credentials directly to individuals they intend to hire as ministers. For example, Joanna was hired by a wedding planner to serve as a minister in their wedding ceremonies. Prior to being hired, Joanna had little or no knowledge of the ritual and how it was to be conducted. She was given a script to practice and once she learned the script and could perform it without flaw for her employer she received credentials as a minister. Through certification, the bridal industry can remove any question about the authenticity of its ministers. All of my informant ministers acquired some form of wedding credentials either through their bridal company or over the internet which they supplied to hotels and chapels prior to performing services. These credentials appear to be successful in not only handling questions and concerns from potential customers but also succeed in convincing chapel and hotel staff of the authenticity of the minister.

The situation for bridal wedding planners is very complicated. I encountered one bridal planner who stated that it never ceased to amaze him how concerned “non-religious” Japanese were about the religious authenticity of Christian ministers. Furthermore, he stated that, his most dependable and profitable ministers were probably best categorized as “fakes” and that he frequently devoted large amounts of time and effort to establishing relationships with chapels and wedding halls in such a way so that

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<sup>101</sup> Church based ministers are also given the same protection. Some Christian ministers are associated with Christian churches that are better understood as new religions and possess values and lead life-styles that mainstream Japan would find hard to accept. Wedding planners also work to protect these ministers from potential exposure in much the same way as uncertified Caucasian ministers.

he could use these personal relationships to better defend the “fake” ministers, which formed the backbone of his company’s wedding business, from the allegations of Protestant minister organizations. Companies such as this one are required, if they are to remain the main supplier of Christian weddings, to protect their ministers from potentially damning exposure while simultaneously utilizing the employment of these very same “fake” ministers to create an especially viable visual rendition of the Christian tradition that their customers have come to prefer and associate with authenticity.

## CHAPTER 6: DYNAMIC RELIGION IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Christian weddings are one way to gain a better grasp of “non-religiousness” (*mushūkyō*) in contemporary Japanese society actually entails. “Non-religiousness” is the affective acceptance and performance of religious activities and typically includes a cognitive disavowal of a potentially dangerous or abnormal “religious” identity. In addition to this negation of deviance, “non-religiousness” may more generally function to indicate an absence of an extraordinary religious knowledge, faith and affiliation. Furthermore, “non-religious” Japanese are likely to develop “vicarious” relationships with the “religious” in order to meet their needs. “Non-religiousness” is normal, non-exclusive religious belief and helps to explain the wealth of diversity in the Japanese religious market and the recent acceptance of new religious rituals such as Christian weddings. “Non-religious” customers of religion are free to enjoy numerous religious forms from various religious traditions so long as they are consistent with their affective beliefs. “Non-religiousness” is the password that grants entry to the “common religion” (Reader and Tanabe) of contemporary Japan.

Contextualizing and exploring “non-religiousness” as the mainstream religious outlook of contemporary Japan provides researchers with another vantage point from which to understand contemporary Japanese weddings and religion. Under this paradigm, Japanese weddings have arguably become more and not less religious. Japanese weddings demonstrate the continued (if transformed) need for religious belief. In pre-modernity, decisions about who will wed were communal, familial and social along very different dimensions than they are in contemporary societies. As a result of the extensive differentiation that marks modernity, the burden of finding and securing a partner and maintaining a happy and successful marriage often falls squarely on the shoulders of the two individuals who are to marry. With the transfer of responsibility for marital success from the community to the family and then to the individual, there has been a corresponding growth in the number of wedding ceremonies that rely directly on religious professionals and religious traditions. As my interviews attest, this is no mere coincidence of timing and fashion—in an uncertain world religious weddings allow individuals to stack the decks of perception in their favor by acquiring religious assurances for their sincere desire to experience prosperity and happiness in the future.

The functional and substantive modalities of religious belief often work in tandem to fulfill the religious needs of individuals. In the case of Christian weddings, the environments, rituals and personnel must all be satisfactorily “religious” to generate

a viable connection with Christianity—even in cases where the participating individuals claim to be “non-religious.” If and when such a connection is successfully produced, acts of belief reference a tradition in such a manner so as to enhance sincerity and establish effectuality. In predominantly “non-religious” Japan, the methods for determining the authenticity of particular “religious” acts, persons or places relies heavily on visual and other sensory cues. This reliance creates a sometimes volatile market where aesthetics and atmosphere can determine which tradition is most appropriate at a given time. Regardless of this inherent dynamism, “religious” competency not only retains its value in contemporary Japan, its scarcity ensures that the demand for it will often create lucrative opportunities for those who are able to meet people’s needs.

At the moment, a Christian wedding remains the tradition of choice for the majority of Japanese couples but the fluidity of belief in a “non-religious” world undergoing unprecedented change means that current dominance of the Christian marriage ceremony is hardly one of complete security. The potential for Protestant groups and institutions to infringe upon the bridal industry with stricter forms of “orthodoxy” could result in heightened levels of alienation and estrangement among “non-religious” customers and entrepreneurs who are less comfortable when it comes to forming “religious” identities. The authority often granted to the historic religious institutions in determining proper religious behavior—i.e., the rules and regulations for associating with the tradition under their charge—can, if taken to a level that invites cognitive discomfort, leave potential affective believers wary and unwilling to legitimize their individual acts of belief in what would be experienced as an oppressive form of substantive religion. The success of bridal industry vis-à-vis the Christian Churches of Japan in capturing the lion’s share of the marriage market is in part the result of a successful system for relieving cognitive burdens while simultaneously responding to religious petitions.

Similarly, there are other accepted and viable religious options outside of those associated with Christianity. It is entirely possible that a re-vamped and re-fashioned Shinto or, even, Buddhist marriage ceremony—given that these religions are largely accepted as more properly “Japanese”—could appeal more directly to the values held by marrying individuals throughout society. The result of such a transformation could have deep implications for which traditions are entrusted with generating certainty in an uncertain world of married life. However, as long as the structure of the human existence contains an element of incertitude, the attraction of religion will remain a part of contemporary society.

The world is just as tenaciously uncertain as it has always been and,

consequently, the need to believe is just as integral to the modern experience as it has been in any past period. The transformation into a modern society exposes human beings to new forms of incertitude and gives birth to new and recasts old groups and organizations, people and ideas, behaviors and actions designed implicitly or explicitly to reduce the amount of (perceived) uncertainty. In the Japanese case, religious belief remains a particularly potent and uniquely attractive option even for the “non-religious.” The ability to reference and encode one’s own personal acts of belief within the context of a tradition presents human beings with powerful tools for coping with uncertainty and “non-religiousness” ensures that these affective religious acts can be undertaken with the highest level of cognitive comfort and societal acceptance.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (CHRISTIAN WEDDING INDIVIDUALS)

When did you getting married? (When are you getting married?) Did you perform a wedding ceremony as well? (Will you perform a ceremony as well?) Why or why not? What sort of ceremony did you have? (What sort of ceremony do you want?)

What motivated you to select the ceremony you did?

What is your religious background? Do you belong to a religion? Do you consider yourself Christian?

How do you feel about religion?

How do you feel about Christianity? Have you ever gone to a church or studied the bible?

Do you feel that the Christian wedding ceremony is religious? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

Where did you decide to hold your wedding ceremony? (Where would you like to hold your wedding ceremony?) Why?

In your opinion what is the difference between a marriage ceremony that is conducted in a church and one that is conducted in a chapel?

Did a minister perform your wedding? (Will a minister perform your wedding?) What sort of person was he or she? (What sort of person would you like him or her to be?)

Do you feel a minister and choir are essential parts of a wedding ceremony? Why or why not?

In your opinion, what is an ideal minister like? During a wedding? In his/her private life?

Do you think that ministers should be religious?

In your opinion, what is an ideal choir member/church musician like? During a wedding? In his/her private life?

Do you think that members of the choir should be religious?

If possible, please describe what you think the average day is like during the life of a typical minister?

How would you feel if a wedding planner/chapel had not provided you a religiously trained and certified minister to perform your wedding?

Did you pray during your wedding service? (Will you pray during your service?) If so, for what and to whom?

How did you feel about having a minister officiate during your wedding? Did you think that it added something to the event to have a religious professional officiate as opposed to an emcee? Why or why not?

Was the minister at your wedding Caucasian or Japanese? (Will the minister at your wedding be Caucasian or Japanese) Did it matter to you? (Does it matter to you?) If so, why?

What kind of wedding ceremony did your parents conduct?

Did you parents or anyone else object to your Christian wedding in any way? If so, in what ways and why?

Have you attended any other weddings as a guest? If so, please describe. In your opinion, were any of these weddings religious? Did you pray at any these events? If so, which ones, what for and to whom?



**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (SINGLE INDIVIDUALS/GUESTS)**

Would you like to get married? If so, do you also wish to have a wedding ceremony? If so, what kind of ceremony would you like to have?

What is your religious background? Do you belong to a religious group or have a particular faith? Do you consider yourself Christian?

How do you feel about religion?

Do you feel that the Christian wedding ceremony is religious? How does it compare to other wedding options?

How do you feel about Christianity? Have you ever gone to a church or studied the bible?

Have you attended a wedding before? What kind of wedding was it? Where was the wedding(s) you attended held? In what capacity did you attend a wedding?

In your opinion, is there a difference between a marriage ceremony that is conducted in a church and one that is conducted in a chapel?

Was it a Christian wedding? Did a minister perform the wedding? What sort of person was he or she?

Do you feel a minister and choir are essential parts of a wedding ceremony? Why or why not?

In your opinion, what is an ideal minister like? During a wedding? In his/her private life?

Do you think that ministers should be religious?

In your opinion, what is an ideal choir member/church musician like? During a wedding? In his/her private life?

Do you think that members of the choir should be religious?

Please describe what you think the average day is like during the life of a typical minister?

How would you feel if a wedding planner/chapel had not provided a religiously trained and certified minister to perform your wedding or the wedding you attended?

Did you pray during your wedding service? If so, for what and to whom?

How did you feel about having a minister officiate during the wedding? How do ministers compare to other officiants such as an emcee?

Was the minister at the wedding Caucasian or Japanese? Did it matter to you? Is there a difference? If so, what?

What kind of wedding ceremony did your parents conduct?

Have you attended any other weddings as a guest? If so, please describe. In your opinion, were any of these weddings religious? Did you pray at any these events? If so, which ones, what for and to whom?

Do you consider Christian wedding ceremonies to be religious? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

What do you think of individuals that claim not to be Christian seeking Christian weddings?

Why do you think Christian weddings are popular? How do they compare to other options?

Why do you think that Japanese couples often elect to have their weddings performed by Caucasian ministers?

Do you feel that chapel weddings and church weddings are in any way different? If so, how?

What motivates Japanese to have a wedding ceremony performed on their behalf?

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (MINISTER)

What is your religious background? Do you consider yourself religious? Are you officially associated with a religious group?

What sort of credentials do you possess as a minister?

Do you perform wedding ceremonies?

Do you consider Christian wedding ceremonies to be religious? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

What do you think of individuals that claim not to be Christian seeking Christian weddings?

Have you ever performed a wedding for someone you suspected/knew might not be Christian? If so, how did you feel about it?

Do you consider weddings a means by which to evangelize to non-Christians? If so, do you think it is effective?

Have you have been asked about your personal faith by a bride, bridegroom or any other person seeking/participating in a wedding? How did you respond?

Do you make attempts to confirm the Christianity of the couples and/or families of the individuals you marry? Did it matter?

Why do you think that Japanese couples often elect to have their weddings performed by Caucasian ministers?

How do you define religion? Do you think Christian weddings are religious?

Do you feel that the Japanese expect ministers to behave or think in certain ways both in and out of ritual contexts? If so, please describe.

Do you feel that chapel weddings and church weddings are in any way different? If so, how?

Have you attended any other weddings as a guest? If so, please describe. In your opinion, were any of these weddings religious?

**APPENDIX D:  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (WEDDING COMPANY OWNER)**

Please describe your business and its staff.

What is your religious background? Do you belong to any religions? Does any member of your family?

What motivates Japanese to have a wedding ceremony performed on their behalf?

Why do you think Christian weddings are popular?

Do you consider Christian wedding ceremonies you organize to be religious in any capacity? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

Please describe the ministers you employ. In your opinion, what kind of person makes the best kind of minister and why? What kind of minister do you think your customers prefer and why?

Do you consider religious affiliation/belief to be an important quality for the ministers you hire?

In your opinion, is there a difference between a marriage ceremony that is conducted in a church and one that is conducted in a chapel?

What other expectations do you think your customers have? What other comments/concerns do you have?

Have you attended a wedding before? What kind of wedding was it? Where was the wedding(s) you attended held? In what capacity did you attend a wedding?

**APPENDIX E:**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (VOCALIST/MUSICAN)**

What is your religious background? Do you belong to a religious group or have a particular faith? Do you consider yourself Christian?

How do you feel about religion?

Do you feel that the Christian wedding ceremony is religious? How does it compare to other wedding options?

How do you feel about Christianity? Have you ever gone to a church or studied the bible?

In what capacity do you participate in weddings?

In your opinion, is there a difference between a marriage ceremony that is conducted in a church and one that is conducted in a chapel?

Do you feel a minister and choir are essential parts of a wedding ceremony? Why or why not?

In your opinion, what is an ideal minister like? During a wedding? In his/her private life?

Do you think that ministers should be religious?

In your opinion, what is an ideal choir member/church musician like? During a wedding? In his/her private life?

Do you think that members of the choir should be religious?

Please describe what you think the average day is like during the life of a typical minister?

How would you feel if a wedding planner/chapel had not provided a religiously trained and certified minister to perform your wedding or the wedding you participated in?

Do you pray during your wedding services? If so, for what and to whom?

How did you feel about having a minister officiate during the wedding? How do ministers compare to other officiants such as an emcee?

Do you work with ministers who Caucasian or Japanese or both? Is there a difference? If so, what?

Have you attended any other weddings as a guest? If so, please describe. In your opinion, were any of these weddings religious? Did you pray at any these events? If so, which ones, what for and to whom?

Do you consider Christian wedding ceremonies to be religious? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

What do you think of individuals who claim not to be Christian seeking Christian weddings?

Why do you think Christian weddings are popular? How do they compare to other options?

Why do you think that Japanese couples often elect to have their weddings performed by Caucasian ministers?

Do you feel that chapel weddings and church weddings are in any way different? If so, how?

What motivates Japanese to have a wedding ceremony performed on their behalf?

Have you attended a wedding before? What kind of wedding was it? Where was the wedding(s) you attended held? In what capacity did you attend a wedding?



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