

Provisional Translation by the Foreign Press Center Japan

VANISHING TEMPLES— THE LOSS OF REGIONAL AREAS AND RELIGION

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Temples and Attrition in Regional Areas

■ "Temples That May Disappear," based on former Minister of Internal Affairs Hiroya Masuda's "Cities That May Disappear" ■

- In May 2014, private research institute the Japan Policy Council (Chairman: former Minister of Internal Affairs Hiroya Masuda) released a list of 896 municipalities that may disappear in the future, shocking their residents and others involved with the communities. The institute noted that if the population flow to major cities continues, and the number of young women further declines, then 49.8% of municipalities in Japan may disappear by 2040.
- In Akita Prefecture, all municipalities except for Ogata are in the "may disappear" category, and many municipalities in Aomori Prefecture (87.5%) and Shimane Prefecture (84.2%) may also disappear in the future.
- There are many religious corporations located in these cities that may disappear. Dr. Kenji Ishii, head of the Faculty of Shinto Studies at Kokugakuin University, has noted that "It is not possible for only the temples and shrines to survive if the cities disappear."
- Dr. Ishii calculated an estimate of how many religious corporations were in cities that may disappear (on next page). He found that of 176,670 religious corporations, 62,971 (35.6%) are located in cities that may disappear.
- Looking at the ratio by sect of traditional Buddhist temples included in this number gives the following results: Koyasan Shingon-shu 45.5%, Soto-shu 42.1 %, Tendai-shu 35.8 %, Rinzai-shu Myoshinji-ha 34.7 %, Nichiren-shu 34.3 %, Jodo Shin-shu Honganji-ha 32 %, Shin-shu Otani-ha 28.5 %, Jodo-shu 25.2%. The ratio for shrines in the Association of Shinto Shrines is 41%.

Temples That May Disappear by Sect

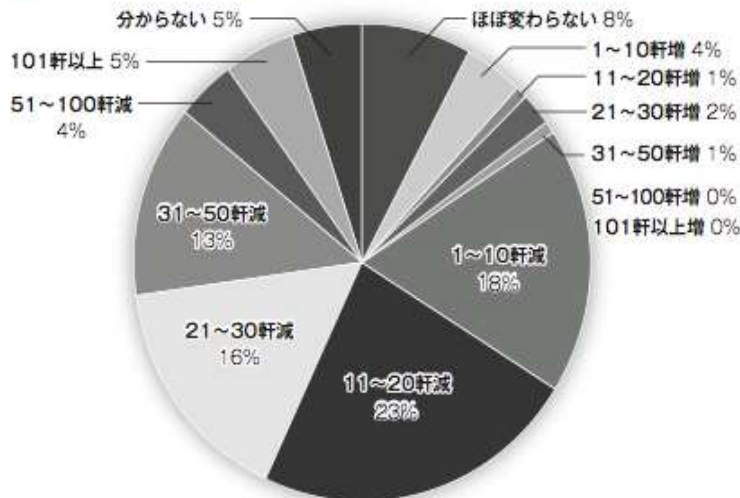
「消滅可能性寺院」の宗派別割合

	消滅可能性都市に存在する宗教法人数	全宗教法人数	「消滅可能性寺院」の割合%
宗教法人数	62971	176670	35.6
天台宗	1062	2970	35.8
高野山真言宗	1613	3546	45.5
真言宗智山派	1053	2704	38.9
真言宗豊山派	577	2366	24.4
浄土宗	1718	6829	25.2
浄土真宗本願寺派	3273	10231	32.0
真宗大谷派	2464	8641	28.5
時宗	101	393	25.7
臨済宗妙心寺派	1139	3282	34.7
曹洞宗	5922	14062	42.1
黄檗宗	98	433	22.6
日蓮宗	1681	4903	34.3
日蓮正宗	186	580	32.1
仏教 その他	3889	14771	26.3
神社本庁	31184	76030	41.0

Studies by Different Religious Organizations

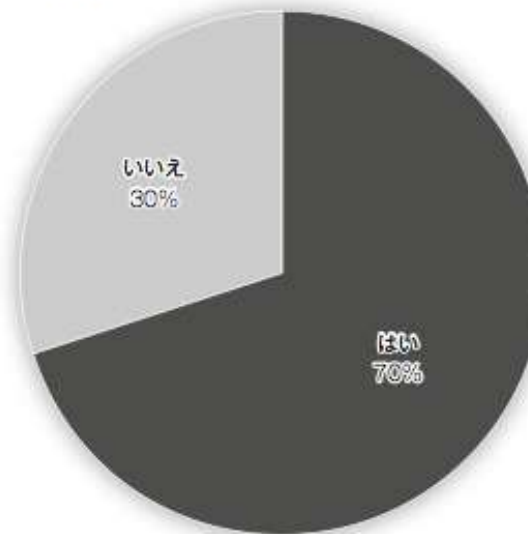
[Jodo-shu] The Jodo-shu established a Committee on Problems Facing Temples in 2004 to study the operation of temples in depopulated areas and priests running multiple temples. This report was a survey specifically of temples in depopulated areas, and was published in the June 2014 issue of *Shuho*. This sect has a relatively high number of temples in metropolitan areas, but the difficulty of operating temples in depopulated areas can still be seen.

⑪今後の20年間で、貴寺院の檀家の増減はどのくらいであると予測されますか



解説：向こう20年間の檀家数の増減の未来予想である。増加予測8%に対し、減少予測は79%。回答者は「これまでの20年」よりも、「これからの20年」の方がより深刻になると予想している。減少予想件数で見ても、21軒以上の減少予想が38%にも上る。

⑫貴寺院を後継する予定の人はいますか



解説：後継者の決まっていない寺院が3割に上っている。これを檀家数で分けて考えてみると、檀家301軒以上では後継者予定者がいない割合は13%。一方で檀家100軒以下では43%となる。つまり、檀家数100軒以下になると、急激に後継者が「いない」割合が増加する。このまま後継が見つからなければ、兼務寺院か、解散などの道を取らざるを得なくなる。

Examples of Vanishing Temples

Temples in Depopulated Areas: Case ①

- In Aizubange, Fukushima, there are 13 temples all operated by one temple (Jodo-shu)
- Since there is still one temple per village, as the population declines in the villages more of those temples become vacant
- The number of temples without a resident priest has been increasing since the Meiji period, and in recent years another three temples became vacant
- Some temples operating other temples have themselves become vacant, leading to doubly indirect management of the temples they operated
- In some cases, the income of the main temple is decreasing and they can only continue operating thanks to the other temples they manage
- Buddhist statues are being stolen from vacant temples

Temples in Depopulated Areas: Case ②

- Three years ago, a young lay priest (*zaike*) became the resident priest of Myorenji Temple on Ukujima, an island in the Goto Islands, Nagasaki
- A former resident priest said “No one will come to this island,” and fled back to Honshu
- The parishioners (*danka*) fixed up the kitchen building (*kuri*) in order to welcome the new priest
- The island used to prosper with whaling and abalone fishing. The wealthy parishioners supported 11 temples
- However, with the decline of the whaling and fishing industries, issues common to remote islands accelerated the temples’ decline. Now, four temples are vacant



Temples in Depopulated Areas: Case ③

- The Iwami area of Shimane prospered due to a silver mine, and there were so many temples they were called the “100 Temples of Iwami” in the Edo period.
- The merging of temples cannot be carried out fast enough to match the pace of depopulation.
- Vacant temples have been turned into community centers in villages where the population is mostly seniors.
- Temples not included on maps or car navigation systems. A temple where the head priest (in name only) lives in Kyoto, and brings his disciples once a year for a strange gathering.
- Local parish leaders saying “There are less parishioners with each funeral.”
- The Jodo-shu holds services in Tokyo for the Iwami parish.



Temples in Depopulated Areas: Case ④

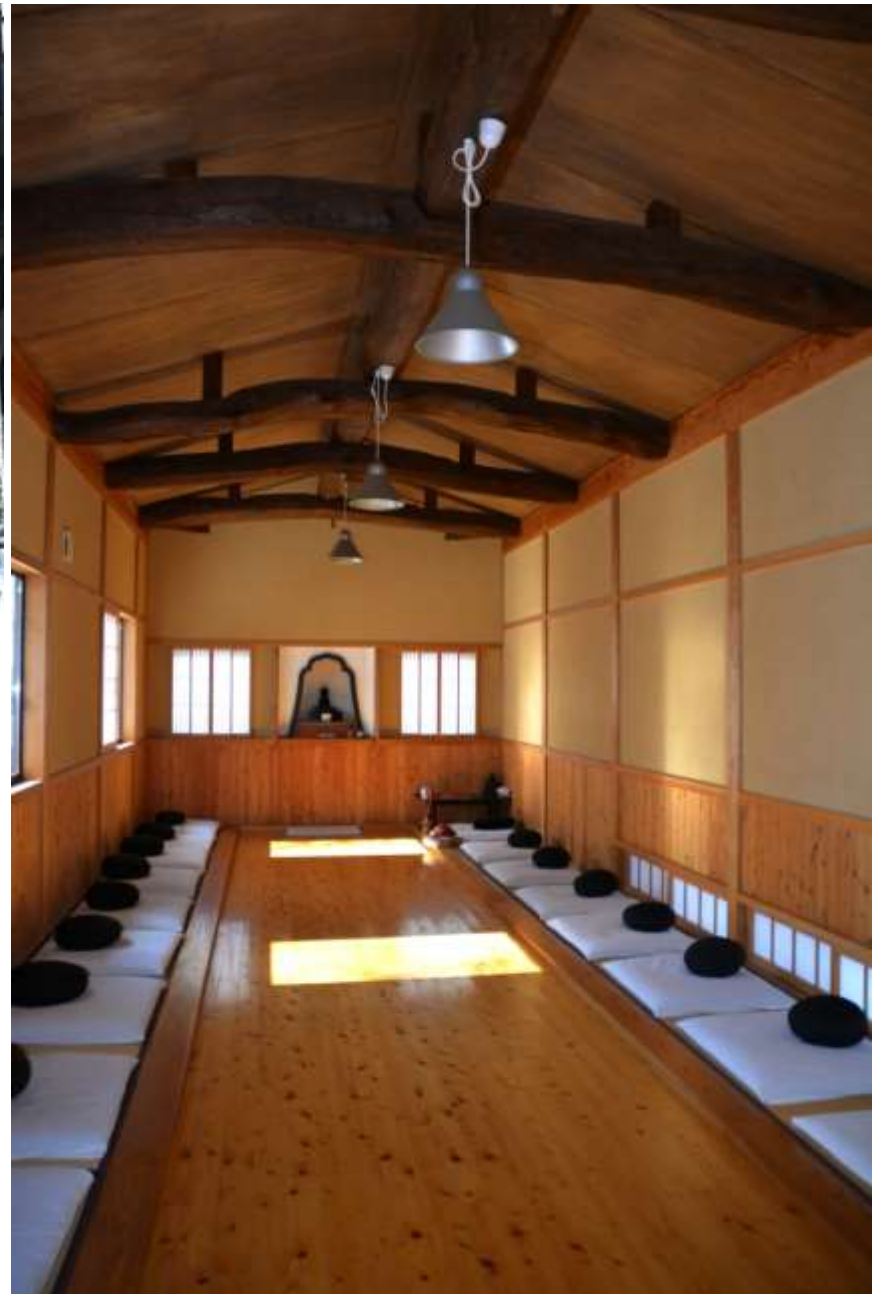
- In Rikuzentakata, Iwate, during the March 11, 2011 tsunami 301 people in 220 households that were parishioners of Jodo-shu temples lost their lives.
- Since the Buddhist names given to the dead (*kaimyo*) followed a specific set of rules, some overlapped.
- The offering for funerals was uniformly 5000 yen. → Even four years after the disaster, 5000 yen offerings became standard in the area.
- With the parishioners and temples both struggling, it is difficult to return the average of offerings to what it was before the disaster.
- Normal houses can receive aid from the government, but religious facilities cannot due to the separation of church and state.
- As they help bring communities together, temples should be the focal points for reconstruction, but in reality more and more temples are vanishing.



Efforts by Head Priests

Efforts by Head Priests ①

- Fumihiro Shibata of the Rinzai-shu Myoshinji-ha is the former president of Yokogawa Electric Corporation's American corporation.
- When he was younger, he attended a Zen meditation group and became interested in Buddhism.
- After retirement, he trained and became a Buddhist priest, then took over a vacant temple in Nagano.
- The temple only has one family of parishioners, but it is also used for corporate training exercises.
- Former business people have an easier time taking over vacant temples, as they have retirement benefits and pensions→ having fewer parishioners might also make things easier.
- Having personally experienced how difficult it is for seniors to become priests, he helped develop a training school for seniors.



Efforts by Head Priests ②

- Young priests establishing temples with the system for opening temples in Tokyo
- Proselytizing to the young generation that doesn't have Buddhist altars at home as the population of Tokyo suburbs continues to increase
- At first they were viewed as a suspicious religion, but their funeral services were well received, and they gained many parishioners
- Without trying to engage in profitable activities, they maintain their stance as priests
- As a result they have won people over and increased the number of parishioners. → Is it really true that Tokyo residents are becoming less interested in temples and religion?

時代	西暦	元号	仏教事項	時代背景
	1631	寛永8	新寺建立禁止	
	1635	寛永12	寺社奉行の設置	
	1637	寛永14		島原の乱
	1666	寛文6	日蓮宗不受不能派禁教	
	1671	寛文11	宗門人別改帳、寺檀制度の整備によって幕府の宗教制度確立	
明治	1868	慶応4	神仏判然令、廃仏毀釈始まる	明治維新
	1872	明治5	僧侶に「肉食妻帯蓄髪勝手たるべし」の太政官布告、寺院の女人禁制撤廃	
	1873	明治6	尼僧にも肉食妻帯蓄髪が許可	キリスト教解禁
	1894	明治27		日清戦争勃発
	1904	明治37	各仏教教団、満州、朝鮮半島、台湾などで布教活動を強化	日露戦争勃発
大正	1914	大正3		第一次世界大戦勃発
昭和	1931	昭和6		満州事変
	1937	昭和12		日中戦争勃発
	1941	昭和16	各宗、戦艦機などの献上が相次ぐ	真珠湾攻撃
	1945	昭和20	宗教法人令公布	終戦
	1947	昭和22	農地改革による寺社農地の解放が始まる	
	1951	昭和26	宗教法人法公布	
	1961	昭和36		所得倍増計画を発表
	1973	昭和48		オイルショック
	1989	平成1		昭和天皇崩御
平成	1990	平成2	真宗大谷派が戦争責任認める	バブル崩壊
	1990年代		民間葬祭場の増加	
	2000~		家族葬、直葬の増加	

出所：「日本史年表・地図」（吉川弘文館）、「日本仏教史年表」（雄山閣）を基に筆者作成