

FPCJ Press Briefing

Provisional translation by FPCJ

How Have Temples Changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?

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Profile



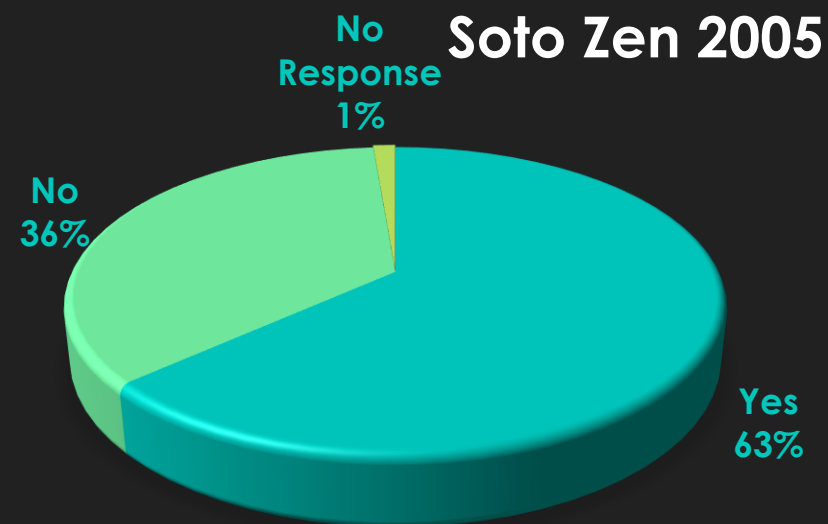
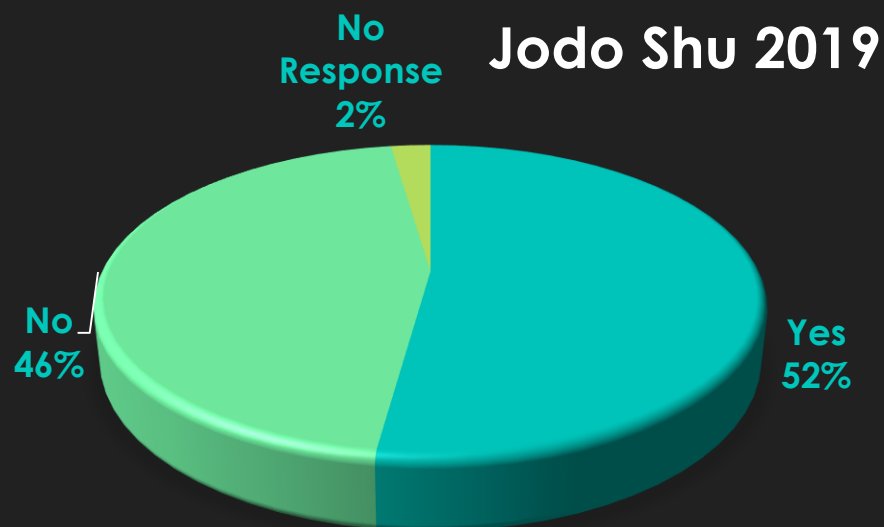
- Born into the family operating Shokakuji Temple (Jodo-shu) in Saga, Ukyo-ku, Kyoto
- After graduating university, worked as a newspaper journalist and magazine editor before going independent and writing on the topic of “modern society and Buddhism”
- Founded and became representative director of Yoi-Otera Research Institute in 2018
- Became the 33rd-generation head priest of Shokakuji Temple in January 2021
- Part-time lecturer at Tokyo University of Agriculture and Bukkyo University, member of the Japan Buddhist Federation Public Relations Committee (as an academic)
- Consultant for Toppan Printing, making connections between corporations and Buddhism
- Many books, such as *Vanishing Temples*, *Society Without Funerals* (both Nikkei BP), *Buddhism Massacre: Why the Meiji Restoration Destroyed Temples* (Bunshun Shinsho), and *Applying Learnings from Buddhism to Business* (PHP Institute)
- Latest book is *Temple Map of Japan: Famous Temples and Ancient Temples Across the 47 Prefectures* (Bunshun Shinsho)

Temples in Japan

- Number of temples—76,970 (2020)
- Number of sects—167
- Social infrastructure comparisons—*Koban* (Police boxes): 6,260; Post offices: 2,0141; Convenience stores: 55,924; Schools: 56,912; Dental offices: 68,148
- The framework of the Edo period *danka* system remains, and graveyard maintenance, funerals, and memorial services are the main sources of income for temples
- Some temples operate businesses such as building/parking lot management, sales of goods, restaurants, or accommodation services for income
- Around 50% of Buddhist priests also have a job at a company
- No research was done on temples' income or market size before

How Many Years Until Temples Vanish?

“Do you have a successor
to take over your temple?”



*There was no study by the sect in 2015
on whether temples had successors

How Many Temples Will Be Left in 2040?



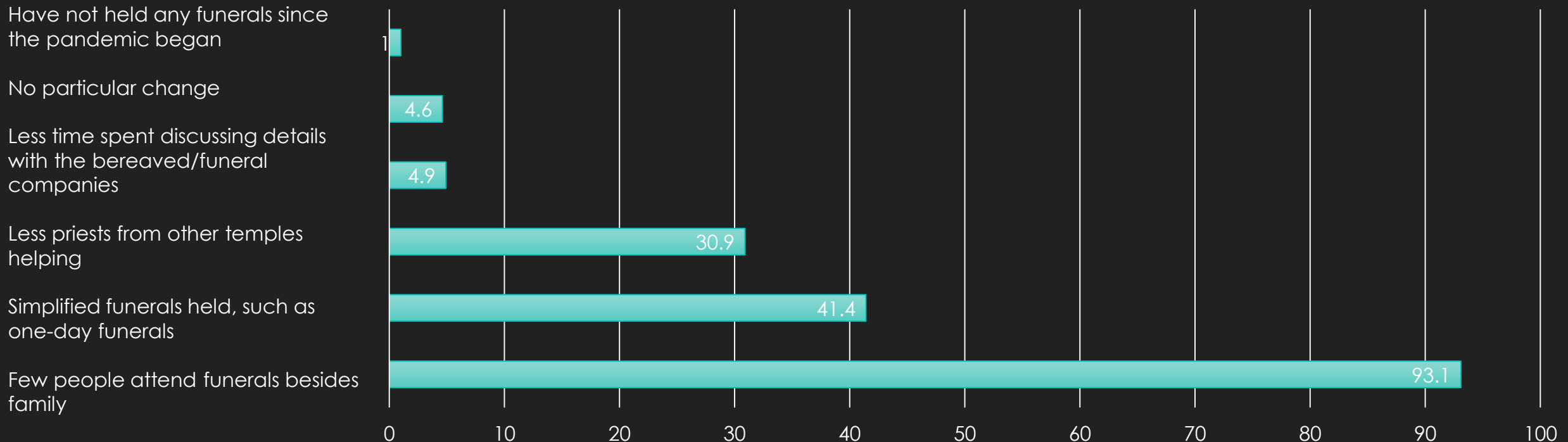
- Currently, there are 77,000 temples
- Approximately 60,000 of those have a resident priest (Between 15,000 and 17,000 vacant temples)
- If nothing is done, at this rate by 2040 only 50,000 or fewer temples will have resident priests
- Based on their locations, the sects with temples most likely to vanish are Koyasan Shingonshu, Soto Zen, and Jodo Shinshu Honganjiha
- Priests being assigned to multiple temples may grow to be a burden, leading to both temples vanishing
- Trends of simplification and diversification of funerals is also a blow (decreased income)
- Reorganization of sects is unavoidable

The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Temple Finances

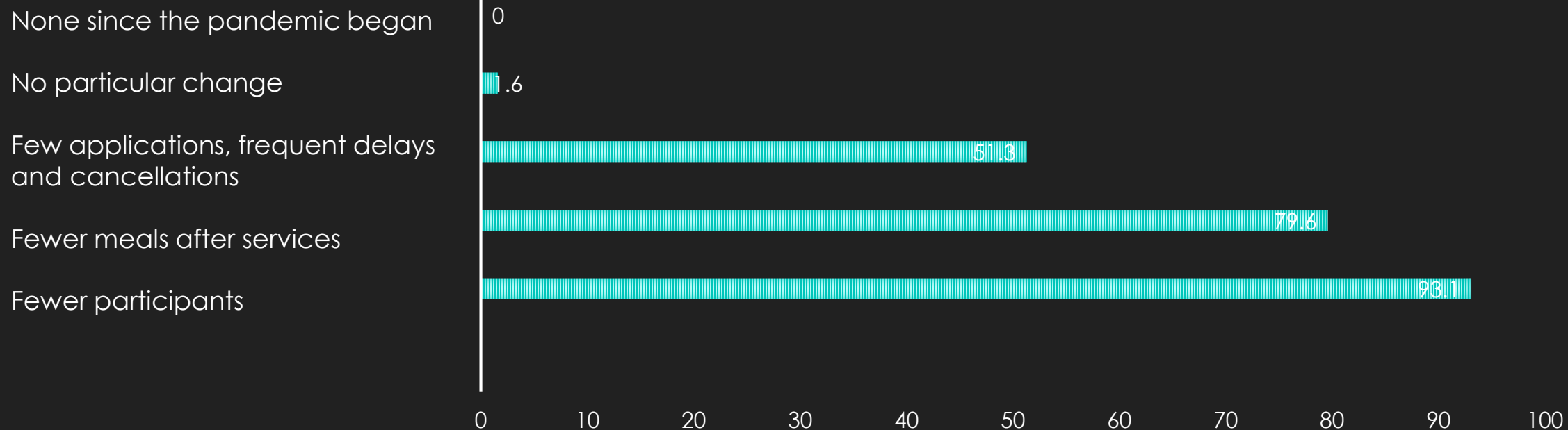
From Taisho University Regional Framework Research Institute Buddhist Social Responsibility Center's
second "study on the effects of COVID-19 on temples, and their responses"
January 30, 2021



How have funerals changed compared to before the pandemic? (multiple responses allowed)



How have death anniversary services changed compared to before the pandemic? (multiple responses allowed)

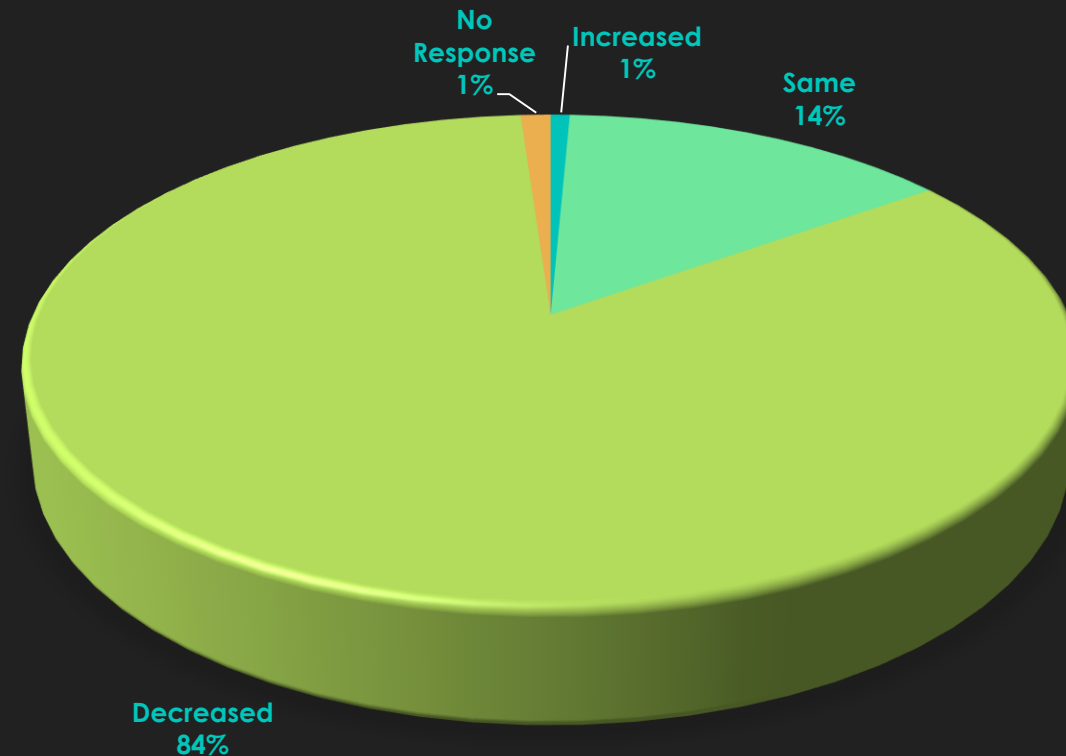


Income Definitely Declined in the Pandemic



Jodo-shu survey (*Shuhou* (sect newsletter), September issue)

Income from religious activities in March to June 2020 period, compared to 2019



For reference:

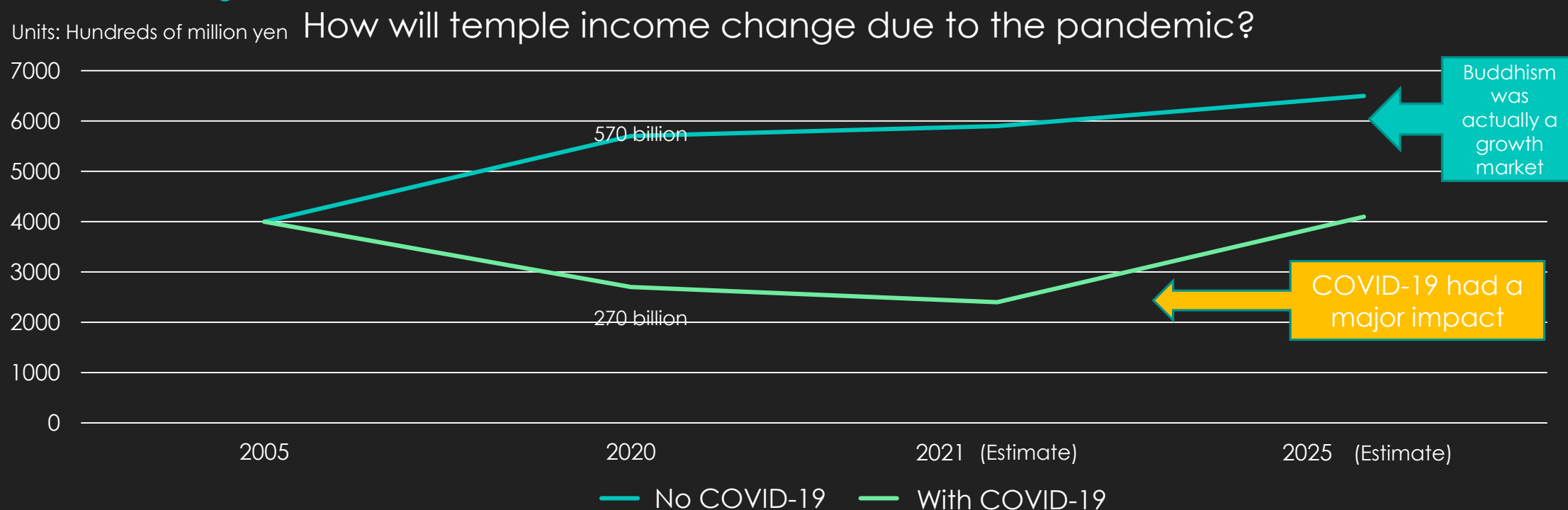
Average income for one temple from major sects is likely around 8 million yen for Jodo-shu, 7 million for Soto Zen, and 7.2 million for Jodo Shinshu Honganjiha. Many temples are thought to have operated at a loss in 2020.

(Estimates and analysis: Yoi-Otera Research Institute)

Temple Market Size (Gross Income)

Yoi-Otera Research Institute
April 2021 estimates

一般社団法人
良いお寺研究会



Temple finances were doing well before the pandemic. The reason is the growing number of deaths in Japan. Since 2007, the number of deaths has remained above the number of births. In 2005, about 1.08 million people died. Ten years later, in 2015, 1.3 million people died. It is estimated that 1.6 million people will die in 2030, and that there will be more deaths than births for decades afterwards.

With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the number of deaths from pneumonia other than COVID-19 and the flu, and the number of deaths in traffic accidents, etc. decreased, for a total of 1,384,544 deaths (down 9373 deaths, or 0.7%, from 2019). However, in the mid- to long-term Japanese society will continue to have a growing number of deaths.

What Will Happen to Temples Post-COVID-19?

- Sudden increase in one-day funerals
- Rapid progress in digital transformation for temples
- Cashless offerings
- New opportunities for temples in regional cities
- End of the boom in dismantling graves
- Growing inequality between “strong” and “weak” temples
- Increase in head priests with other jobs (for better or worse)
- Potential increase in people wanting to become Buddhist priests?
- Temples close to communities and those that value ceremonies will remain, temples that are just going through the motions will vanish

Temples as Places of Prayer

