

Immanent and Transcendent Parameters of Faith Among Japanese Junior College Women: An Initial Inquiry Based on Fowler's Theory of Faith Development

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Fowler's Understanding of Faith

Before presenting the specific details of the present study, it is essential to discuss what we do and do not mean when we use the term faith. Following the theoretical assumptions concerning human development of Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg, James Fowler has attempted to construct a developmental theory of faith. Fowler's understanding of faith is largely indebted to the insights of William Cantwell Smith, H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. In keeping with Niebuhr, Fowler claims that faith is a human universal. Since we deal with faith in a Japanese context in this paper, it is important to briefly introduce the major sources for Fowler's view of this complex phenomenon and how it may be applied cross-culturally.

Echoing Smith, Fowler sees faith as distinct from, even previous to, belief. In this view, faith may find expression in specific religious beliefs, but springs from a more basic, universal human concern.

Belief, in religious contexts at least, arises out of the effort to translate experiences of and relation to transcendence into concepts or propositions. Belief may be one of the ways faith expresses itself. But one does not have faith in a proposition or concept. Faith, rather, is *the relation of trust in and loyalty to the transcendent* about which concepts or propositions- beliefs -are fashioned.¹

Fowler discovered a similar distinction between belief and faith in Tillich's concept of the "ultimate concern". Everywhere, human beings find themselves fundamentally and inextricably related to universal existential concerns such as finding the wherewithal to get out

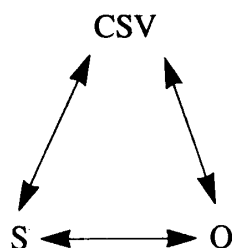
1 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p.11.

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of bed, go about one's daily work, and make the effort to relate to those around us. Our "ultimate concern" may be seen as that which motivates us to go on, to continue to be. This may or may not involve beliefs vis a vis some transcendent otherness. "Faith is not always religious in the cultural or institutional sense."²

...ultimate concern may center finally in our own ego or its extensions- work, prestige and recognition, power and influence, wealth. One's ultimate concern may be invested in family, university, nation, or church. Love, sex and a loved partner might be the passionate center of one's ultimate concern. Ultimate concern is a much more powerful matter than claimed belief in a creed or a set of doctrinal positions. Faith as a state of being ultimately concerned may or may not find its expression in institutional or cultic religious forms. Faith so understood is very serious business. It involves how we make our life wagers. It shapes the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties.³

Finally, in Niebuhr, Fowler found a view of faith as a fundamentally relational phenomenon. That is, faith finds its roots, expression, reinforcement, and growth in the context of the communities to which we belong. Fowler pictures this relational aspect of faith in the following diagram:



In communities, a self (S) is bound to others (O) by shared trust and loyalty. But our ties to others are mediated, formed, and deepened by our shared or common trusts in and loyalties to centers of supra-ordinate value (CVS).⁴

In the present paper, we will examine the parameters of faith among Japanese junior

2 Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986), p.16.

3 Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.4

4 Dykstra and Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler*, p.17.

college women based on the above three senses of faith as trust, faith as ultimate concern, and faith as relational. Because of Fowler's distinction between belief as a particular phenomenon and faith as a universal phenomenon, we can feel relatively secure that, in seeking out those centers of ultimate value or concern which give coherence and meaning to the lives of the twenty young women who were interviewed for this study, we are not hollering into an empty well. In hoping to locate the specific loci of faith among these young Japanese women, we are not claiming that Fowler's theory is completely free from cultural bias; an issue we will address in the conclusion of this paper. But, in his far-reaching definition of faith, Fowler has drawn the circle wide enough to include monotheists, polytheists, and animists because, in this understanding, faith is as basic to human life as eating, breathing and sleeping.⁵

Method

People seem to exhibit faith in relation to what we have chosen to call visible (*immanent*) and invisible (*transcendent*) centers of value, or some combination of the two. Immanent centers may include friends, families, co-workers, neighbors, political parties or other group affiliations (including religious groups), nations, etc. By transcendent centers, we mean deity, abstract principles, ethical teachings, etc. In seeking out those centers of meaning, we are led to ask questions. What motivates or gives purpose to our lives? How much authority do we invest in social entities? What relationships are the most significant to us?

In Japanese society, there exists an often discussed tendency to prioritize group consensus over individual choice. The individual who can flow along with the group is often more highly regarded than one who maintains strong personal convictions. That is, loyalty to one's family, peers, and co-workers is considered a virtue while personal devotion to some abstract principle is often viewed with suspicion, especially in the case when such devotion disturbs group harmony (*chowa*).

Open-Ended Pre-Test

We hypothesized that, as a result of this group-over-individual ethos, immanent centers of value are likely to be more important and clearly defined than transcendent centers in the lives of young Japanese women. We wondered if perhaps this "preference for the immanent" may

⁵ This is not to ignore the many criticisms of Fowler's definition of faith made by Nelson, Dykstra, Loder, Ford-Grabowsky, Osmer, Broughton, Avery and others. We will discuss some of the relevant issues raised by these critics later in this paper.

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be reflected in the way that they think about God; perhaps the most obvious concept that people associate with transcendence.

Further, it has been reported that Japanese tend to be vague when using language to express their understanding of abstract, transcendent concepts.⁶ By way of contrast, language expressive of emotional nuances in "immanent" relationships is rich, extensive and quite precise among Japanese.⁷

In order to test these hypotheses, the author conducted an open-ended pre-test of 50 female Japanese "mission school"⁸ junior college students. The following question was asked:

"When you hear the words *kami* (god or God), what image comes to mind? (Please do not limit your answer to the Christian God)"

Since the great majority (96%) of these young women come from families which belong to Pure Land Sect Buddhism, one might expect to find at least some similarity in students' responses to the open-ended question. However, out of 50 students, there were a total of 35 varying, contradictory, and sometimes opposite descriptions of deity, as follows:

| | | |
|--------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| living | someone in an old legend | far away |
| dead | controls the world | close |
| empty | doesn't control the world | Christ is a western God |
| fair | not human | my friend |
| unfair | like humans | leader |

6 Nakamura Hajime, *Toyojin no shii hoho 3*. Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples, (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1962)

7 I believe that this is nowhere more clearly evidenced than in the rich treasure trove of onomatopoeic expressions one encounters in Japanese. Linguists may struggle with attempts at classifying words like *koso koso*, *gera gera*, *suka suka*, *doro doro*, but there can be no doubt that these "code" words, which so often go unlearned by foreigners studying Japanese, are deeply expressive of the nuances of human emotion and relationships.

A wonderful discussion of the richness of the Japanese language in expressing both emotion and volitional concepts is given in Takeo Doi's explication of the word *ki* and its manifold permutations in *Amae no Kozo*; The Anatomy of Dependence (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978), pp.95-100.

8 There are over 100 "mission schools" in Japan which were, by and large, founded by foreign missionaries beginning in the Meiji Period (1868-1923). The vast majority of the students at these schools are not Christian, yet there is a varying degree of commitment within the schools themselves to adhere to the principles and traditions of Christianity. Since these students attend a mission school, there was some fear on the part of the author that they may give "expected" answers; hence the note about not limiting their descriptions to the Christian God.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| omnipotent | unapproachable | great |
| absolute | merciful | fearful |
| good luck charm | has a father's heart | support |
| benevolent | only in our imagination | teacher |
| omniscient | our ancestors | someone I can relate to |
| without form | human creation | |
| defender | everyone has their own | |
| will exist as long as people believe | | |

Rather than attempt to examine this list in further detail, we have chosen to simply present it here as initial evidence that these young women seem to be far from unanimous in their understanding of the meaning of the word God (god).⁹ This lack of unified descriptions of the transcendent may be an indication that perhaps we should search among more immanent centers of value to discover the parameters of these students' faith.

Interviews

As we have already stated, our main goal was to search out some of the specific immanent and/or transcendent dimensions of faith among junior college women. We did not try to strictly assign Fowler's faith stages. Therefore, we devised an abbreviated version of Fowler's Faith Development Interview. We tried to cover all of the main concerns of Fowler's interview, albeit in an abbreviated form. Twenty interviews, lasting about one hour each, were conducted (in Japanese) over a ten day period according to the guidelines described in *Stages of Faith* (Appendix A). From the above 50 students who answered the pre-test, 20 students (2 eighteen year olds, 12 nineteen year olds, 6 twenty year olds) volunteered to undergo the interview. Out of the twenty students, 18 came from Pure Land Sect Buddhist families, one from a Christian home, and one, an exchange student from Taiwan, had converted to Christianity as a high school student. The taped interviews were transcribed into Japanese and translated into English, yielding 100 pages of typed and handwritten manuscript.

The following is a list of the questions we used with the numbers corresponding to Fowler's research interview as described in *Stages of Faith*, pp. 310-312. Since the

⁹ The Japanese word *kami* can be translated God or god, or gods in English. There is another word, *hotoke sama*, used by Buddhists to describe venerated ancestors which has no exact English equivalent. Based on our interviews, it is clear that the students do not clearly differentiate between *kami* and *hotoke sama*, thus the dissimilarities of their descriptions become even further complicated.

interviewer had access to the students' biographical data, there was no need to ask those kinds of questions (Fowler I ,1.)

1. Thinking about yourself at present: What gives your life meaning? What makes life worth living for you? (Fowler I , 4.)
2. At present, what relationships seem most important for your life? (Fowler II , 1.)
3. Are there other persons who at earlier times or in the present have been significant in the shaping of your outlook on life? (Fowler II , 3.)
4. What experiences have affirmed your sense of meaning in life? What experiences have shaken or disturbed you sense of meaning? (Fowler II , 7.)
5. Can you describe the beliefs and values or attitudes that are most important in guiding your own life? (Fowler III , 1.)
6. What is the purpose of human life? (Fowler III , 2.)
7. Do you feel that some approaches to life are more "true" or right than others? Are there some beliefs or values that all or most people ought to hold and act on? (Fowler III , 3.)
8. What relationships or groups are most important as support for your values and beliefs? (Fowler III , 5.)
9. Is there a "plan" for human lives? Are we- individually or as a species -determined or affected in our lives by power beyond human control? (Fowler III , 8.)
10. When you think about the future, what makes you feel most anxious or uneasy? (Fowler III , 10.)
11. What does death mean to you? What becomes of us when we die? (Fowler III , 11.)
12. Why do some persons and groups suffer more than others? (Fowler III , 12.)
13. What feeling do you have when you think about God (god)? (Fowler IV , 2.)
14. Do you consider yourself a religious person? (Fowler IV , 3.)
15. If you pray, what do you feel is going on when you pray? (Fowler IV , 4.)
16. Do you feel that your religious outlook is "true"? In what sense? (Fowler IV , 5.)

It would be naive to assume that Fowler's interview format is without serious problems. As Nelson and Aleshire have pointed out, "Fowler's subject of inquiry- belief, values, and faith- includes some of the most difficult human phenomena to operationalize and investigate."¹⁰ In the present study, this was further complicated by the fact that most of the students interviewed stated that they were not accustomed to speaking about such issues as the meaning of life, death, religion, etc.

¹⁰ Dykstra and Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler*, p.184.

However, after a detailed examination, the twenty manuscripted interviews seem to yield some possible horizons for viewing faith, or more appropriately, *faithing*¹¹, as a way of organizing and giving meaning to the life experiences of these young women. Also, since Fowler has been criticized by Broughton for the "marked ethnic and religious bias of the sample"¹² used in developing his theory, the findings of our interviews may be useful in responding to such claims of bias. In the future, it may be interesting to compare the responses of these mainly Buddhist Japanese students with those of a similar age group from Fowler's original sample.

Discussion

*Mawari*¹³ and Self

When asked to respond to questions concerning their relationships with those around them, the meaning and purpose of life, and what is most important to them, many students articulated a kind of conflict between being able to express oneself as an individual while still respecting the group. This self/other conflict is well known among adolescents everywhere, but seems particularly acute in Japanese culture. This struggle between self and surroundings may provide some clue as to how to begin to speak about faith in a Japanese context. Fowler has spoken in rather poetic terms about how faith seeks to sort out such dynamic tensions.

In contrast to the bipolar orderliness shaped by the pull of magnets, we are impinged upon, pulled at and moved from many directions. Part of what we mean when we say that humankind- *Home poeta* -lives by meaning is that from the beginning of our lives we are faced with the challenge of finding or composing some kind of order, unity and coherence in the force fields of our lives. We might say that faith is our way of discerning and committing ourselves to centers of value and power that exert ordering force in our lives.¹⁴

11 In regard to Fowler's discussion of the active nature of faith, it may be worth while mentioning here that, unlike English, the Japanese language contains a verb form, *shinko o suru* (faithing), for the noun *shinko* (faith).

12 Dykstra and Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler*, p.92.

13 The word *mawari* has no exact English equivalent. It is commonly used to refer to one's surroundings, especially the people one comes into contact with on a regular basis. Since the twenty students interviewed for this study all live together in a college dormitory, they often used the word *mawari* in reference to other dormitory students. However, the word has a broader, more abstract meaning which comes close to the English "They" often used in generalities, as in "They just wouldn't approve of such behavior in Peoria."

14 Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, pp.24-25.

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One student, Miss K, expressed a tension between her simultaneous desire for and fear of self-expression as follows:

Miss K: Living without lies, being true to myself is important. I respect people who have a clear sense of their own opinion. Still, when I have something I want to say, I can not say it in front of others because I'm shy. I guess I don't like being in those kinds of situations, and I think that people who can express their own opinions are incredible, and surely different from me.

Miss D, a rather outgoing person with a good sense of humor, had been traumatized by an experience she had as an elementary school student. It seems that she had been singled out as "unique" because of her manner of speech. She broaches that sensitive subject by speaking about the problems in being an individual in Japan's group-culture.

Miss D: I am always concerned about what others think of me. I'm always trying to be a "good girl". I don't want others to think that I'm bad... I guess I'm defensive. I would really like to live as an individual, but Japanese people have an island mentality and if you try to do something different, you'll be scorned by those around you. So even when it's not required, I end up trying to conform to the group. When Japanese don't go along with everyone else, they are seen as strange. That's why people don't develop their own individuality... There is a strong tendency for Japanese teachers to treat unique students poorly... I often heard of such cases when I was in elementary and junior high school.

Interviewer: Are you saying that the word "unique" has a negative connotation?

Miss D: Actually, it should mean something good, but... *She starts to share her own experience. Notice the value she places on her perceptions of what others think.* For example, there seems to be something strange about the way that I speak... People laugh at what I say, even when it's a conversation with no particular restrictions on the subject matter and I see no need for anyone to laugh, people laugh at me, so I think, "Oh, I'd better try to fit in more closely with the way others think," and I decide against trying to stand out as an individual. Even when I am trying to be the same as others, I am often told "You're a little strange." I've learned that it's wrong to speak my mind.

Another student, Miss H, had an experience which is very much like that of Miss D's, but her way of responding was somewhat different.

Miss H: I'm often told that I'm different.¹⁵ My way of thinking, etc. is different. It's been painful ever since elementary school... Just hearing you're different all the time. It was especially hard at first, but my close friends seem to understand me, unlike those who were "luke warm" towards me, and that helps... Then again, there are times when I feel empty and alone...

Unlike Miss D who had "learned that it's wrong to speak her own mind", Miss H seems to have found some friends among whom she can feel accepted. In both cases however, it is the individual's perception of those around her (*mawari*) which seems to act as the standard for self-evaluation. The responses of both students appear to fit into what Fowler describes as stage three, Synthetic Conventional faith, a "conformist stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent perspective."¹⁶

A third student, Miss T, who had grown up in a Christian home, also had a painful experience in elementary school. Her way of resolving that experience is quite different from Miss D and Miss H, being strongly influenced by her religious beliefs. Here, we can see the struggle between her faith and personal experience.

Interviewer: Does God speak to human beings?

Miss T: Yes. I think so. Not through some actual words, but when a person has some trial, some difficulty in their life... through that experience, something is born, some solution arises. In that way, God speaks to us.

Interviewer: Have you had some experience like that in your own life?

Miss T: When I was a 5th grader in elementary school, I was teased by other children and

¹⁵ In this case, the word used for different is *kawatteiru*. It has a generally negative connotation close to the English *strange* or *weird*.

¹⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, pp.172-173.

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ended up being isolated from the rest of the class.¹⁷ I guess I experienced what is called suffering and sadness. But because of that experience, I have come to understand the sorrows and struggles of my friends. I think that God spoke to me through that experience.

Whereas Miss D and Miss H's respective experiences had led them to be careful about what they said or to seek solace from understanding peers, Miss T's suffering had been transformed into empathy for others. However, this ability to empathize has not seemed to resolve Miss T's feeling of not being accepted by her peers.

Miss T: I feel like I'm always being left behind by my friends in many things. I feel like the slow one. This gives me a lot of anxiety.

Freed by her belief in God to evaluate her own suffering from a new perspective, she still found herself very much under bondage to her perception of her peers.

Now, let's consider one student's response to a question about who has exerted the most influence on her way of thinking. Notice the frequency with which she uses the word *mawari*.

Interviewer: Who has influenced you most?

Miss A: All of the people around me (*mawari*). Before I get ready to do something on my own, I always think first, "What do those around me (*mawari*) think?" I only want to act after first considering those around me (*mawari*).

Similarly, another student, Miss S, described the way that she is affected by her *mawari* as follows:

Miss S: Lately, it's been very hard for me to tell others how I'm feeling. When I was in high school, it wasn't so hard, but lately I've been unable to express myself because I've started to think first about what the other person might think if I say such and such. I really long for someone to understand me, but it's become more difficult to say how I feel... It's been especially hard since coming to Kanazawa (from neighboring Fukui Prefecture). I feel that I'm losing touch with who I am... I guess it's because I'm changing. I'm so easily influenced

17 This separation from the group is extremely painful for Japanese people who derive much of their sense of identity from a feeling of belonging or fitting in.

by what other people are doing. Even if I think, "This is the way it is," I'm easily talked out of it.

Miss S's sense of losing touch with herself may indicate that she is in the middle of a stage transition, perhaps from stage two to stage three, in which she feels like she's lost her former moorings and has not yet located new ones in her new surroundings. She is living away from home for the first time in her life, and she speaks nostalgically of her high school days as a time when she didn't experience this terrible inability to speak her own mind. In Fowler's description of the Mythic-Literal stage, the ability to narrate one's own story is emphasized. The reported loss of this ability to speak her own mind has become a source of great anxiety for Miss S. Fowler speaks of the "emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective taking" in this stage two-three transition, and this is clearly evident in her intense, almost paralyzing concern about how those around her may interpret what she says.

The well known Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi contrasts two phenomena he calls *jibun ga aru* (sense of self) and *jibun ga nai* (loss of self) in a way that may shed some light on the conflicts these students seem to be facing.

If the individual is submersed completely in the group, he has no *jibun*. But even where he is not completely submersed in the group- though he may be aware of himself as part of the group and may even, on occasion, recognize with discomfort the existence of a self whose interests do not coincide with those of the group- he does not necessarily have a *jibun* (self). If he suppresses the discomfort not because of physical compulsion from the group but because his own desire to belong to the group is stronger than the suffering or if- which comes ultimately to the same thing- his blind loyalty to the group leads him to keep quiet concerning his differences with the group, then again he must be described as *jibun ga nai*... An individual is said to have a *jibun* when he can maintain an independent self that is never negated by membership of the group. What is important here is that the real essence of the conflict situation just described lies within the individual himself.¹⁸

The fact that both Miss A and Miss S are first year students trying to make new friends, and had not quite completed one semester at the time of the interview, may have some bearing on the conflicts they expressed concerning their emerging self identities vis a vis their new *mawari*.

18 Tekeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971), p.134.

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The issue of meaning is central to any discussion of faith, and in our discussion thus far of the relationship between the individual and her *mawari*, we have seen the tremendous power which these students seem to invest in the perceived opinions and judgments of those around them. The *mawari* functions as a meaning-making center of supra ordinate power in the lives of these young women. It acts as a kind of personified arbiter of an individual's ultimate worth, serving a kind of god-like function in many of these students' lives. This was very clear in the following exchange with Miss O.

Interviewer: How do you think about your life, your own reason for being?

Miss O: I'm glad I was given life... And if I live in such a way that makes those around me (*mawari*) grateful for me, I will feel that being born was a good thing.

In the *mawari*, Miss O has a very immanent standard for determining whether her life has meaning or not.

Another student, Miss A, was asked how she decided whether some action was good or not good. Her response again underlines the enormous power invested in the *mawari*.

Miss A: If those around me (*mawari*) say that something is bad, then I will think it's bad, but if they say the same thing is good, I'll think so too because I'm so easily influenced by others.

Miss A's answer exhibits a total absence of any kind of "absolute" standard for deciding which way to think.

Another student, Miss M, shared her frustration in always trying to align her thinking with those around her, to fit in, to be accepted.

Miss M: I find myself only thinking about the other person, so even if I have something to say, I don't say it. I believe that it's better to have a clear sense of your own opinion and to be able to say it, but I find myself trying to adjust my own ideas to those around me. This keeps me from being able to express myself and I don't think that's such a good thing.

In the *mawari*, we see a powerful dynamic which functions as a kind of external super-ego for individual identity, behavior and self-evaluation. In the language of faith development

theory, the *mawari* is perhaps the single most important center of supra-ordinate value in the lives of these young Japanese women. The *mawari* seems to be their ultimate concern.

Most of these students expressed a tension between wanting to be an individual while being careful not to offend others. Clearly, this is evidence of a transition from simple to mutual perspective taking (Selman); one aspect of a stage two-three change. One's actions are deemed good or bad by what significant others are perceived to consider to be good and bad. One's value as a human being is judged ultimately by whether or not others express appreciation. Still, beneath the weight of the often oppressive *mawari*, there is an ever emerging self, struggling to affirm its independence.

Religion and God

It is not our intent to attempt to characterize the religious sentiments of Japanese people in general. Rather, we simply seek to consider some of the responses made vis a vis religion by the twenty young women interviewed for this study. In so doing, we hope to understand the relative importance these students ascribe to their religion and the affect that their religious beliefs have on their personal lives and faith.

As has already been mentioned, 90% of the students interviewed answered that their religion was Pure Land Sect Buddhism; the dominant religion in the Hokuriku region of Japan. However, when questioned more closely, all but one of those students stated that Buddhism is their family's religion but not necessarily their own. That is, identification with the Pure Land Sect of Buddhism is seen by most of these students more as a natural consequence of family membership than a result of some personal conviction.¹⁹ Without exception, all of the Buddhist students expressed almost no understanding of the doctrinal content of their family religion.

The following exchange or a very similar one was repeated over and over when the question of religious belief came up:

Interviewer: What is your religion?

Miss A: Pure Land Sect Buddhism.

¹⁹ According to a much-quoted survey of 2,692 people conducted by NHK in 1984 (Masaya Aono, gen editor) called *Gendai Nihonjin no shukyou ishiki* (The Religious Consciousness of Modern Japanese), around 79% of young women in the same age group as the interviewees of this present study claimed to have no personal faith.

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Interviewer: Do you believe the doctrines of that religion?

Miss A: Not really...

Interviewer: How much do you know about the content of that religion?

Miss A: Not much... Once a year we go to the family grave during the Festival for the Dead. And at New Year we visit the temple, but generally there's no relation to my life. The people in my family aren't that religious either...

Interviewer: Still, you said that your religion is Pure Land Sect?

Miss A: In other countries, people have a clear cut faith like Christianity or Islam, but, in Japan, Buddhism is not really taken that seriously. I think it's a little strange...

Another student, Miss T, spoke of the feeling of being dragged into family customs.

Miss T: Buddhism just seems like a custom. When it's time for the Festival for the Dead, we say, "Ah, the Festival of the Dead has come." It's not really my own, rather it's something I feel like I'm dragged into.

She went on to express a hesitation about speaking about God in front of others.

Miss T: I don't think that I can really explain what I believe to others. If someone asked me about my beliefs and I told them what I thought about God, they might say, "What's wrong with her?" So I wouldn't be able to speak my mind freely.

Notice again how much weight is given to the perceived or imagined opinions of others. She feels trapped between this tension between wanting to have a clear sense of her own beliefs while remaining concerned about what others think of her. Again, the group seems to impinge upon her sense of self. She appears to be experiencing Doi's above-described *jibun ga nai* (loss of self).

Interviewer: Are you the kind of person who frets about what others think?

Miss T: Yes, I am significantly influenced by those around me. In some sense that's a good thing, but always being that way is bad I think.

Interviewer: Why?

Miss T: You begin to lose a sense of what you really believe. You kind of lose track of what you think and start saying, "Is this my idea or someone else's?" I'm often troubled, or have a feeling of being lost...

The consensus among these students was that their family's faith had little or nothing to do with their personal beliefs and daily lives. However, this lack of knowledge of doctrine or zealous participation in the cultus of Pure Land Sect Buddhism does not necessarily mean that these students are not at all concerned about religious issues.²⁰

At this point in our discussion of religion in the lives of these students, it is important to mention that, at the time of their interview, they were attending a mission school with a Christian foundation. Daily chapel attendance is expected, though not mandatory, and all students must take religion classes. In light of their "immersion" in a previously unknown religious atmosphere, many of the students responded that, even though they identified themselves as Buddhist because of their family's temple affiliation, the religion which they actually felt closest to was Christianity.²¹ Let's consider the following exchanges.

Interviewer: Are your values changing?

Miss B: My values change according to the time and situation. I tend to depend upon the things that are closest to me. Presently, I find Christianity easiest to believe, so when I'm suffering or have a fight with my friends, I lean on Christ.

Miss Y discussed having a similar experience.

20 *ibid.* Around 34% of this same age group responded that God (or gods) probably or surely existed; about 69% said they believed that some spiritual world beyond death probably or surely existed; about 68% said they believed that supernatural power is probably or surely real; about 47% said they believed that UFO's are probably or surely real, etc.

21 *ibid.* When asked which religion they felt the closest to around 17% of young women in this age group said Christianity. This may largely be a result of the influence of the many mission schools.

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Miss Y: I can not really explain in detail, but God is... I'm not a Christian, but since entering this junior college, I've become accustomed to listening to God's word during chapel. That is, at different times when I have been going through some struggle, and I've listened to what various teachers say during chapel, I think, "Ah, God's word is getting through to me." Also, when I've had unsolvable problems, I've often prayed. I believe in God's existence.

Miss O said that before coming to the mission school, she had never once discussed religion.

Miss O: Now I have a lot of contact with Christianity at school, so recently I've been thinking about Christianity.

On some level, these students have been clearly affected by the religion of the mission school. We have already noted the primary influence of the *mawari*, or present surroundings, in these students' lives. Perhaps, since none of these students spoke of a desire to convert to Christianity, we may conjecture that their sense of closeness with Christianity is as much a result of being presently identified with a Christian school as the possession of some personal belief.

Another major issue which surfaced during the interviews was the question of how human beings are affected by some power (gods, god, or God) which lies beyond human control. Fowler's Mythic-Literal stage is characterized by a "an immanent justice based on reciprocity."²² Here, God is viewed as a kind of cosmic policeman, rewarding the good and punishing the bad, as in the following exchange.

Interviewer: Does God speak to human beings?

Miss I: When I do something bad and then something bad happens to me, it's because of God's anger. When I do something good, God does something good to me or praises me in some way.

For many of these students, this retributive view of the divine also applies to what happens after death.

Interviewer: What becomes of us when we die?

²² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.149.

Miss K: There's a heaven and a hell, and good people go to heaven, while bad people fall into hell... That is what I have been taught since childhood, and I still believe it.

Interviewer: Who makes the judgment about where a person goes?

Miss K: God... Good people live in such a way that they are appreciated by others. Not because they did things their own way, but because those around them appreciated them... that makes them good. Whereas, bad people do nothing but cause trouble for those around them, living in a self-centered way. Such people are bad.

Miss K's description of what makes someone ultimately good or bad places the total burden of judgment on whether or not the person was appreciated by others (*mawari*). Though Miss K stated that God does the judging, I think it fair to say that her standard for judgment is very much this-world centered. The jury, as it were, consists of the significant people who surround one. There is a total absence of any concept of having offended or disobeyed heaven. Even the Christian exchange student from Taiwan based her view of right and wrong on the evaluation of others.

Miss S: If we do something and someone finds out and we don't feel ashamed of what we've done, then it's a good thing. But if we do something, someone finds out, and we feel ashamed, then it's a bad thing.

The following exchange with Miss T clearly shows how one can have a very uncertain view of God as transcendent and still have a clear picture of how God operates on an immanent, human level.

Interviewer: Can you explain what you think about God?

Miss T: No, I can't. I don't have a clear sense of what I think about God.

Interviewer: Can God speak to human beings?

Miss T: Yes (very quickly and confidently). *This response is especially interesting in light of her inability to respond to the last question.*

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Interviewer: How does God speak to us?

Miss T: Something always happens after you do something bad. I guess you'd call it punishment. That is God speaking.

Interviewer: What if you do something good?

Miss T: Um... When I do something good...I don't have much sense of that... It's more when I do something bad, I feel reprov'd for it.

Interviewer: What exactly do you mean when you say something bad?

Miss T: To shirk one's responsibilities... When you have something you should do, but you escape.

Again, responsibility is ultimately a relational matter. In effect, she says, "As a member of my *mawari*, I have an assigned role to play and failure to carry out my duty will result in some inner feeling of shame or reproof." Miss T's seeming paradox between not being able to explain her *beliefs* about God while being confident (*trusting in*) about how God judges human irresponsibility is resolved when we realize that her ultimate concern is not some abstract, transcendent deity, but the immanent authority she has vested in those around her. In Fowler's terms, the locus of authority among these students clearly rests in the "consensus of valued groups"(stage 3).

When asked why some people suffer more than others, Miss S answered in terms of a clearly retributive conception of justice.

Miss S: I guess it's because that person did something which was bad. My mother is always saying that if you do something bad now, it will come back to you or your children, so she always tells me, "Do good deeds."

Interviewer: What about children who are starving or people who are persecuted by their governments?

Miss S: I think they are pitiful. It's not because they did something bad... I don't know why

they suffer. Of course, I think that their parents are bad too, but the world itself is bad.

Here we can almost feel the tension in Miss S's mind as she tries to interpret inexplicable suffering in terms of what she had been taught by her mother.

As we have seen, organized religion is not a major part of these young women's lives at this age. There is a somewhat vague sense of identification with family beliefs which have little or nothing to do with them. On a deeper level, what seems to be a matter of ultimate concern is their perception of *mawari* evaluation of personal behavior. They are apparently dependent upon what Parks calls the "tyranny of the they."²³ God is not viewed as some transcendent figure to whom one must answer. Rather, God is "humanized", acting under the auspices of immanent group agency. It is to those groups that one must give account.

Death

We have chosen to treat death as a separate subject from religion, though there will inevitably be some overlap. When we came to the questions involving death like "What does death mean to you?" and "What becomes of us when we die?", students responded with a high degree of similarity. Let's begin by looking at a sample of their responses to these questions.

Miss K: Now I am alive but I have no idea what will happen tomorrow, and since I'm not sure what will become of me, I am anxious about it.

Miss M: Death is scary. This existence called me is gone, and since I wouldn't be able to meet my parents and friends, I would feel very sad about that, and scared.

The thought of being separated from loved ones is a major source of anxiety for Miss M.

Miss B: When I was young, I asked my Buddhist grandmother about heaven and hell, and she said that people who pray and give offerings in front of the *butsudan*²⁴ daily go to *gokuraku* (heaven) and those who don't believe go to *jigoku* (hell). Now, when I'm asked what happens after death, I don't want to think about it because it's scary.

23 Sharon Parks, "Faith Development and Imagination in the Context of Higher Education "(Th. D. diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1980).

24 The *butsudan* is a Buddhist altar commemorating ancestors found in many Japanese homes. According to one's sect of Buddhism, regular rituals involving prayer and food offerings are made in front of the altar.

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Miss H: I still don't have any idea what happens after death, and I'm anxious about the thought of my present existence disappearing.

Miss S: I'm scared (very serious voice). I guess it's because I don't know what will happen to me when I die. Also, being separated from everyone...

Like Miss M, Miss S is frightened by the thought of being cut off, being ultimately alone. This same kind of fear was present in Miss H's responses to questions about death and what happens after death, but she shared a story which seemed to give her some sense of solace.

Miss H: We die alone, right? That being the case, I start to wonder what would happen to me by myself. If my soul were to take off for some unknown destination while everyone else's soul and body remained here on earth, I would be scared thinking about where I was heading by myself... There would be many things to think about and it would be scary.

Interviewer: You just used the word "soul". Do you believe that the soul continues to live on after death?

Miss H: I guess I do... If I died, it would be good to have someone, perhaps a friend, to go along with me. There is an old Japanese legend which says that when you die, if you wait for awhile, another person will come and join you. Then, when three of you have gathered, you all go to hell together, and after a while, you will be able to return to the earth. This story has given me strength since I was a child, thinking about what would happen to me if I died. No matter what the situation was, I'd have a friend or someone with me.

As we mentioned previously, being isolated from one's group is perhaps the most painful experience for a Japanese person.²⁵ Hence, it is not surprising that death, the ultimate unknown, is understood primarily in terms of separation. The legend Miss H shared provided a way of coping with that anxiety.

Miss U, who had recently spent two months in the hospital due to a blood circulation problem, said she had done a lot of serious thinking about life and death during that time. She had developed some rather unique ways of thinking about what happens beyond death.

²⁵ It is worth mentioning that parental and teacher discipline of children often involves a deliberate separation of a child from others.

Interviewer: What becomes of us when we die?

Miss U: In order to prepare for being born again (reincarnated), we go to an "other world" which is not like this one at all and begin the preparation. God then decides in what form we will return. For people who have done bad things, they go to that "other world", and they have a chance to reflect on the bad things which they did. They have to spend a longer time there. Then, when their hearts are cleansed, they are born again into this world. After all, a bad heart is largely due to the influence of the way a person lives and the affect of those around her (*mawari*).

Interviewer: Is that place heaven?

Miss U: I want it to be heaven. If it's not heaven, then it's close to heaven. After you go to that "other world" and get your heart cleaned, then I think you're ready to go to heaven. That "other world" is the most beautiful, clean natural place with lots of trees. There's a crystal clear spring, everything is pure. You're able to live an easy-going life there, to have time to think about what has happened to you until then, and finally, you're able to get into heaven.

Fifteen out of twenty students said they were afraid of dying, while only five students said that they were not afraid.²⁶ First, let's look at what Miss T had to say concerning death. She is the only interviewee who had grown up in a Christian home.

Interviewer: What happens to us after death?

Miss T: Our soul... Our real self... I'm not sure how best to express it... But, if we are connected to God, then I believe that we go to heaven.

Interviewer: Is dying scary?

Miss T: Now I have no particular fear of death. I guess it's because I'd simply be returning to the place where God is.

²⁶ Those five students included the following; Miss U, who had recently been hospitalized; the two Christian students; Miss Y, who had a Christian aunt who had influenced her thinking; and Miss S, who had spent a lot of time speaking with Mormon missionaries.

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At first glance, Miss T's response seems to be very different from those who expressed anxiety concerning death. However, notice how she images death as a place "where God is", or in other words, a place where she is not alone. Putting questions of relative truth aside, Miss T's beliefs function in much the same way as Miss H's legend and Miss U's image of the "other world". In all three cases, the need for belonging or regaining wholeness, is supplied by the story which for them, has become an object of trust, or faith.

Miss Y comes from a non-Christian home, yet she seems to have been strongly influenced by her aunt who is a Christian. Also, some time ago her father suffered some sickness which left him confined to a wheelchair. This experience had profoundly impacted her whole family. For example, she said that, although he is not yet a Christian, her father had read through the Bible many times due to Miss Y's aunt's influence. Her response to the question of death is very similar to Miss T's.

Miss Y: Death is not so scary. If God is there with me, then I'll guess it was my time, my fate.

Again, the belief that God will be present with her may be the key to understanding her relative lack of fear of death. The other three students who said they didn't fear death said that it was a natural, inescapable part of life.

Clearly, those students who had developed some way of picturing death "without separation" seemed more able to deal with the thought of being ultimately cut off from those who are close. If the *mawari* is indeed the powerful focal point for meaning-making which it appears to be in these young women's lives, it is no surprise that death, viewed as *the absence of mawari*, would be a great source of anxiety.

Conclusion

Japan is well known as a nation which often emphasizes the priority of community over the prerogatives of the individual. Through the instrumentality of family and school, this priority has been reinforced over and over in the lives of these young women. Public education, under the authority of the Ministry of Education, stresses good citizenship, group cohesiveness and conformity, often at the expense of individualistic creative enterprise and experimentation. This "collective consciousness" is largely the result of Japan's long feudal history in which a culturally conservative ethos dominated both public and private spheres of life. Even in the twilight years of the 20th century, "maintaining the status quo" is a basic tenet of Japanese thinking. Personal and social change, or development, is not viewed with

the same "veneration" as in the West.

Fowler's theory attempts to seek out the universals of human faith. He has scored a real tour de force by attempting to liberate faith from its often narrow religious contexts, expanding its meaning to encompass the endless ways people make meaning out of the myriad of human experiences. Such an expanded definition for faith provides a valuable framework for examining how people across cultures make sense of their lives.

However, when we consider the philosophical underpinnings of developmental theory, we run into some serious obstacles when attempting to apply Fowler's theory, as a whole, to the Japanese context. Broughton has spoken of the existence of "a kind of possessive individualism to faith development theory."²⁷ The very roots of Fowler's view of the individual and how individuality unfolds within one's greater social/cultural milieu seems very much a product of western ideas about individual freedom and autonomy.

Faith development theory has attempted to identify faith with the general integration and purposeful directedness of the self. The intention behind this formulation is ecumenical and cross-cultural in nature. However, in trying to transcend cultures in their specific traditions, the theory has succeeded only in dispensing with them. It has failed to recognize the socio-historical constitution of those traditions and has failed to appreciate the significance to the individual of appropriating interpretively a specific tradition of special meaning in relation to his or her special biography. The theorist's desire for universality has eventuated in an intolerance of specificity.²⁸

In Japan, such a "specificity" is the concept of *mawari*. We have seen that thinking and acting in harmony with the perceptions of the people one is presently surrounded by is more important than any kind of individualistic insistence on trying to sort out the world from A-Z. Surely, we would agree with Fowler that such conformist tendencies are often present in adolescents, regardless of social/cultural background. But, in Japanese culture, this tendency toward group ascendancy is not confined to adolescent peer pressure. Individualism is not a virtue at any stage in life.

We believe that Fowler's theory provides a map for development within a Japanese context up to stage three. In the present paper, we have occasionally mentioned how certain of the interviewees' comments seemed to reflect stage two and three tendencies. But, when we get beyond stage three, we run into serious problems. Fowler's descriptions of stage four help to

²⁷ Dykstra and Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler*, p.95.

²⁸ *ibid.* p.107.

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elucidate the divergence.

...It is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes... The self, previously sustained in its identity and faith compositions by an interpersonal circle of significant others, now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles or meanings to others. To sustain that new identity it composes a meaning frame conscious of its own boundaries and inner connections and aware of itself as a "world view."²⁹

Such a "You Can't Go Home Again"³⁰ kind of journey is not at all unusual in a western world where young people facing the realities of adulthood often find themselves alienated from traditional centers of identity. However, this transition of the self-contradictory society is very difficult to imagine within the Japanese world. From our research among 18-20 year olds, we have seen how the prevailing trend is to fit in, get along, even mold oneself to conform with significant others in one's life.³¹ In Japan, a stage four "rebel" would be setting herself up for certain ostracism by "taking a stand" based on the convictions of her newly discovered world view. Thus, in contrast to Fowler's self-against-society dialectic, the question which needs to be asked is how Japanese develop a sense of self while still maintaining a fundamental identity as one among significant others.

The problem of trying to adapt the developmental mode of Fowler's theory to the Japanese context is even further complicated when the issue of theology is enjoined. Avery has said that Fowler attempts "to stand in two distinct disciplines, in social scientific research and in practical theology."³² The former discipline is at least ostensibly restrained by a descriptive impetus while the latter can never completely avoid normative claims based on the content of a particular theological tradition. Again, Broughton elucidates this contradiction beautifully.

29 Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.182.

30 Title of a Thomas Woolfe novel which tells the story of a young man breaking away from his "ancient landmarks."

31 It is important to mention that the college years are generally considered to be the "freest" time in one's life in Japan. Having survived the heavy pressure of the high school years' "examination hell", one is free to catch one's breath and have some fun before going out into the very busy and demanding working world. Thus, if there is any time in which a person can "rethink" his or her world view, it would be during these years when the pressures of "the narrow gate" of society are significantly lessened.

32 William O. Avery, "A Lutheran Examines James W. Fowler", *Religious Education* 85 (1990), p.69.

...when we look at what faith development theory does rather than what it says, we find some peculiar departures from its own ideal. When Fowler lists kinds of faith, he tends to exclude anything other than formal religions, particularly theistic ones.³³ Among the religions, *he ignores the oriental ones almost entirely*. In fact, he gives short shrift to anything outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. The central image he chooses in his definition to stage 6 is the biblical "kingdom of God"....³⁴ This suggests that Fowler, his colleagues, and their audience are subject to a pressing interest in the development of Christians, an interest at cross-purposes with their espoused concern about faith development in general.³⁵

Fowler himself has stated that "The most revealing aspect of any theory of human development is the character of the last stages."³⁶ Fowler's theory images the ultimate vision of "universal" faith in terms which may appear "foreign" or "particularistic" to a Japanese. This dilemma will not be resolved without extensive inter-faith dialogue on the part of faith development theorists.

When Fowler speaks as a social scientist, he necessarily speaks of faith as a human universal. That helpful concept has allowed us to examine the faith of the present study's twenty junior college students. We discovered a faith concerned fundamentally with a need to belong to a group of significant others (*mawari*). It is clear that the dialectical relationship between the self and society takes a very distinct form in Japan in contrast to the western world, therefore the issue of how Japanese faith develops beyond Fowler's stage 3 remains open to further investigation. Additionally, imposing theological questions remain unanswered. Still, we can hope that these interviews have provided a window, albeit a small one, into the yet uncharted territory of Japanese faith.

33 Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, pp. 4 and 29 (quoted from Broughton's article)

34 *ibid.* p.29, and "Future Christian and Church Education," in *Hope for the Church: Moltmann in Dialogue with Practical Theology*, ed. T Runyan (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p.111. (also quoted from Broughton's article)

35 Dykstra and Parks, *Faith Development and Fowler*, pp. 93,95.

36 James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 20.