THE SOCIAL WELFARE ACTIVITIES OF JAPANESE NEW RELIGIONS.
RISSHŌ KŌSEIKAI AS A CASE-STUDY

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the social welfare activities promoted by the lay Buddhist organisation Risshō Kōseikai, directed at both members of the organisation and society at large, in order to offer new insight on the public presence of religion in contemporary Japan. In this thesis, I demonstrate how gaps in social care provision institute potential avenues of intervention where religious institutions and individuals can ‘negotiate religion’, i.e. mediate religious values and practices and re-define religion’s position and relevance within Japanese society. Recent scholarship on religiously inspired activism has often interpreted the growing relevance of religious organisations as non-state providers of social services among the signs of a global ‘resurgence’ of religion in the public sphere. This thesis, however, argues that the social engagement of religious actors, or their contribution to addressing existing deficiencies in social welfare provision, does not necessarily translate into a reaffirmation of the public relevance of religion, or in a re-definition of the position of religious institutions within modern societies. Drawing from ethnographic data collected from local congregations of Risshō Kōseikai and surrounding communities, I will illustrate how the movement’s efforts were frustrated by a number of environmental and structural constraints. These obstacles instituted a need for the negotiation, which took place both inside and outside the religious organisation. Although Kōseikai representatives and practitioners eventually managed to address some of the perceived gaps and to an extent fulfilled the religious and organisational goals associated with them, overall their capacity to offer a social contribution was limited. More generally, attempts to negotiate religion through social welfare activities were substantially unsuccessful. In the case of Risshō Kōseikai, rather than carving out a space for religion within contemporary Japanese society, efforts to ‘fill the gaps’ often risked reinforcing its marginality. Data were collected during a 12-month stay in Japan, primarily through participant observation, in-depth interviews and archival research.
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Note on Japanese Names, Terms and Transliteration

All Japanese names are in standard Japanese order of family name first, followed by given name.

Long vowels are indicated by macrons (ō, ū) except for words and names commonly used in English (e.g. Kyoto, Tokyo, Shinto).

When talking about religious institutions associated with the two main religious traditions of Japan, Shinto and Buddhism, I follow standard conventions and refer to Shinto institutions as ‘shrines’ and Buddhist ones as ‘temples’.
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It has been a long and bumpy road so far, but the encounters, experiences and knowledge gained along the way made it one worth travelling.
Chapter 1
Introduction

One day of November 2016, I found myself sitting in a quiet meeting room, in a two-storey building in Tokyo. The facility belonged to a local congregation (Kyōkai) of the Japanese lay Buddhist organisation Risshō Kōseikai. The people around me, mostly women in their 60s and 70s, were all part of the church staff. More specifically, in their capacity as ‘social welfare specialists’ (Shakai Fukushi Senmon Tantōsha), they were devoted to the informal provision of social care directed at vulnerable members of the congregation and the broader community. The group leader, a woman in her 60s called Maeda, opened the meeting with a brief introduction of their undertakings. Kōseikai welfare activities, Maeda explained, were a response to the challenges stemming from Japan’s transformation into a ‘low-birth ageing society’ (Shōshi Kōreika Shakai). Japan was experiencing a crisis in social security and care provision for its shrinking and ageing population. The rising demand for services brought about by contemporary demographic trends, combined with deeper flaws in Japan’s welfare system, resulted in the state failing to provide assistance for the totality of citizens (Estevez-Abe 2008; Goodman 2002; Iwata and Nishizawa 2008; Osawa 2011). The weakening of ‘communal ties’ (Tsunagari) and traditional structures of mutual support further exacerbated deficiencies in social welfare provision. Maeda highlighted how the shift from the

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1 Fieldnotes 17/11/2016.
2 The Kyōkai constitutes the basic unit of the organisation on local level. The English translation commonly used by Kōseikai is ‘Dharma centre’. In this thesis, however, I chose to use the term ‘church’ for two reasons: firstly, it reflects the parallelism with the Japanese term for Christian congregations (also called Kyōkai); secondly, compared to Dharma centre, ‘church’ better conveys the dual meaning of the term, which was used by members to refer to a physical place of worship, but also to the community associated with it. Congregations are further divided into sub-units based on geographical location (Shibu, Chiku, Kumi in decreasing order), which closely resemble subdivisions of local associations (e.g. neighbourly associations).
3 When talking of ‘informal provision’ of social care in this thesis I refer to the range of unwaged and non-professional services offered by families, communities and other private actors.
4 All the names used are pseudonyms.
three-generation household to the nuclear family in particular had huge repercussions for social care. The impressive expansion of institutional and home-based care services for the aged during the early 2000s had partly compensated for these trends. Formal providers (public bodies, professional caregivers and social workers) were, however, still unable to meet demand. The combination of a progressive contraction of state-provided support, a decline in the capacity of families to satisfy the caring needs of their elderly members, and limits of the private, market-based provision (Danely 2014; White 2002; Izuhara 2003; Orpett-Long 2009), had opened a gap in social assistance where other providers were called to intervene. In those ‘places that hands don’t reach’ (te ga todokanai tokoro), to quote an expression often used by a minister I met in the field, Köseikai members found a venue of intervention.

This thesis investigates the social welfare activities promoted by Risshō Köseikai, directed at both members of the organisation and society at large, in order to offer new insight on the public presence of religion in contemporary Japan. Risshō Köseikai is a Japanese new religious organisation (shinshūkyō) primarily focused on the Lotus Sutra (Hokekyō) and ancestor veneration, originally emerging within the tradition of Nichiren Buddhism. It was founded in 1938 by Niwano Nikkyō (1906-1999, born Niwano Shikazō) and Naganuma Myōkō (1889-1957, born Naganuma Masa). They jointly led the organisation until the death of Naganuma in 1957, after

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5 The category of new religions (shinshūkyō) in Japan commonly refers to movements developed since the early modern period (late Tokugawa era, nineteenth century). Despite their significant diversity in terms of size, organisational structure, doctrine and practices, these movements tend to share several common features, such as syncretic teachings, charismatic leadership, and a conception of salvation centred on the achievement of happiness and well-being in this life (see also Note 3, Chapter 2 on ‘this-worldly benefits’). For further details see Baffelli 2016; Baffelli and Reader 2018; Prohl and Nelson 2012; Reader 2015; Shimazono 2004; Staemmler and Dehn 2011.

6 Nichiren (1222-1282) was a Buddhist monk who had been trained in the Tendai tradition. Dissatisfied with the corrupted state of established Buddhist schools, he started a movement advocating the reform of Buddhism. He preached that the final age of Dharma (mappō) was approaching, and that salvation could be found only in the Lotus Sutra (regarded as Shakyamuni’s ultimate teaching) and in the practice of chanting the title of the Lotus or daimoku. Because of his vehement attacks against other temples and secular authorities, Nichiren and his followers suffered persecution by both religious institutions and the government, and he was eventually exiled. During his exile, Nichiren realised a calligraphic mandala, which he regarded as the peak of his teachings and is today venerated by some Nichiren-oriented movements (such as Sōka Gakkai, another new religious organisation) as the daigohonzon (true object of faith). On Nichiren see for example Dolce 1999; Stone 1994, 1999; Stone et al. 1999.
which Niwano assumed sole leadership of Kōseikai. From the end of the 1950s, the movement became increasingly engaged in social activities on local, national and international levels.\(^7\) From its beginning, Kōseikai’s involvement in the field of social welfare and care was shaped by a fundamental concern to fill the ‘gaps in the system’ (*seido no sukima*). Representatives of the central administration dealing with social welfare activities frequently reiterated this idea. Practitioners were exhorted to perform tasks not adequately attended to by formal and informal providers and focus on people cut off from the system. This included, most notably, those commonly entrusted to the care of family and community and now increasingly left to their own devices due to the deterioration of traditional safety nets.

In this thesis, I demonstrate how gaps in social care provision institute potential avenues of intervention where religious institutions and individuals can ‘negotiate religion’, i.e. mediate religious values and practices and re-define religion’s position and relevance within Japanese society. The thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the main factors and motivations underpinning institutional and individual engagement in social welfare provision? How are meanings, obligations and roles negotiated at central and local levels?
- How do Kōseikai practitioners articulate their religiosity in secularised spaces such as the domain of social welfare and care? How do they negotiate functions and responsibilities vis-à-vis other institutions involved?
- What do the social welfare activities promoted by Risshō Kōseikai tell us about the presence of religion in contemporary Japanese society?

Recent scholarship on religiously inspired activism has often interpreted the growing relevance of religious organisations as providers of social services among the signs of a global ‘resurgence’ of religion in the public sphere (Casanova 2008; Gorski 2005; Hustinx et al. 2015; Jawad 2009). This thesis, however, argues that the

\(^7\) The following chapters will provide more information on aspects of Kōseikai’s history, teachings and organisational structure relevant to the discussion. For a comprehensive overview of the organisation, please see Di Febo 2016.
social engagement of religious actors (institutions and practitioners), or their contribution to addressing existing deficiencies in social welfare provision, does not necessarily translate into a reaffirmation of the public relevance of religion, or in a re-definition of the position of religious institutions within modern societies. Drawing from ethnographic data collected from local congregations of Risshō Kōseikai and surrounding communities, I will illustrate how the movement’s attempts to ‘fill the gaps’ encountered multiple obstacles. Practitioners’ efforts were frustrated by a number of environmental and structural constraints, ranging from formal limitations to the public presence of religion, to a more general mistrust toward religious organisations, or issues of tension and competition with other institutions involved. These obstacles instituted a need for the negotiation of meanings, practices and roles, which took place both inside and outside the religious organisation. Although Kōseikai representatives and practitioners eventually managed to address some of the perceived gaps and to an extent fulfilled the religious and organisational goals associated with them, overall their capacity to offer a social contribution was limited. More generally, attempts to negotiate religion through social welfare activities were substantially unsuccessful. In the case of Risshō Kōseikai, rather than carving a space for religion within contemporary Japanese society, efforts to ‘fill the gaps’ often risked reinforcing its marginality.

1.1. The Re-emergence of Religiously Inspired Welfare: From ‘Resurgence’ to ‘Negotiation’

The trends toward demographic ageing and social fragmentation described in the opening section were by no means exclusive to Japan. Most advanced industrialised countries share similar issues (Milligan and Conradson 2006; Muehlebach 2012). These concerns, coupled with trends towards contracting state-provided assistance and public expense on welfare in favour of a progressive de-institutionalisation, de-

8 Data collection took place between September 2016 and August 2017. Fieldwork was carried out with the generous support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council North-West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (AHRC NWCDTP), the University of Manchester, and the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.
centralisation and privatisation of care, in recent years have raised significant challenges in securing the safety and well-being of vulnerable citizens. Community-based approaches to care were among the main strategies adopted by governments to tackle these issues (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000; MacMillian 2006; Milligan and Conradson 2006). The Japanese experience was marked by attempts to revitalise traditional practices of mutual assistance at a local level. By promoting a shift toward a ‘community-based welfare system’ (chiiki shakai fukushi seido, Dahl 2018), Japan appears to be representative of the global dynamics of redistribution of caring responsibilities among public and private actors intertwined with recent neoliberal reforms. The diversification of sources of social services fostered by these trends has reopened spaces for intervention by religious institutions, allowing them to recover part of the role traditionally played in assisting vulnerable members of society that they were forced to abdicate with the emergence of the modern nation-state and welfare system (Hjelm 2011; Inaba 2011; Rivers 2010). The resurgence of religion in the domain of social welfare and care provision emerged with particular clarity in the Western European and North-American contexts, where from the 1990s this trend was also actively encouraged by the state (Annette 2011; Bacon 2006; Conradson 2006; Hossler 2012; Macmillan and Townsend 2006; Olaski 2000). The implementation, in the US, of the ‘Charitable Choice’ legislation (1996), which promoted the involvement of faith-based organisations in publicly funded social security programmes, offers a representative example in this regard.

9 With ‘neoliberal’ reforms I primarily refer to the progressive contraction of state-provided assistance that has occurred in many advanced industrialised societies from the 1990s. These trends have generally stemmed from the curtailment of public expense on social policy dictated by the rise of fiscal pressure, and have been accompanied by efforts to promote private, market-based provision of social services as well as attempts to socialise citizens into unwaged care labour on local scale. See for example Milligan and Conradson 2006; Muehlebach 2012.

10 The ‘Charitable Choice’ refers to a section of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, promulgated in 1996. The section aimed to support the involvement of religiously inspired organisations in social welfare provision by removing discriminations related to their religious connotation, and making them equally eligible to federal funding schemes as non-religious contractors (Cnaan and Boddie 2002; Nagel 2006).
1.1.1. Social Contribution and the ‘Resurgence’ of Religion in the Public Sphere

The growing relevance of religious organisations as alternative sources of social services rekindled academic interest, resulting in a rise in research on religiously inspired provision of social assistance and care (Hustinx et al. 2015; Unruh e Sider 2005). Most recent scholarship on the topic has investigated the social impact of religiously inspired social care activities in relation to global neoliberal trends (Bacon 2006; Cnaan and Boddie 2002; Elisha 2008; Hustinx et al 2015; Jawad 2012a, 2012b; Laird and Cadge 2010; Muehlebach 2012, 2013). Many works have investigated the content, scope and outcomes of services offered by religious organisations, evaluating their effectiveness as care providers vis-à-vis secular institutions (Conradson 2008; Furness and Gilligan 2012; Monsma 2002, 2003; Nagel 2006). These studies have often highlighted the ‘assets’ (Wineburg 2001) that religion can offer to social care provision, and the capacity of religious institutions to compensate for the limits of state- and market-provided services. Gaps in social welfare provision have thus provided religious actors with opportunities to claim new public roles and possibly rearticulate the significance of religion in secularised societies.

The growing international interest in religious welfare provision can be contextualised within a more general revival of scholarly debates on the public presence of religion in modern contexts. The present liveliness of religiously inspired activism is frequently listed among the evidences for the continuing relevance of religion in the public domain. This is seen as challenging the basic assumptions of secularisation theory, which predicted a progressive marginalisation of religion as a consequence of modernisation (Casanova 1994, 2008). More generally, the prominence of religiously inspired social and political mobilisation worldwide (Jawad 2009; Wood 2002), the persisting involvement of religion in the political domain (Delibas 2009; Esposito and Tamimi 2000; Freston 2007; Madeley and Enyedi 2003; Moyser 1991; Nakamura 2001) and the pivotal role played by religious institutions in the fields of humanitarian aid, poverty relief, development, migrants and refuge aid (Ager and Ager 2015; Berger 2003; Brondo and Hefferan 2010; Clarke and Jennings 2008; Clarke and Ware 2015; Deacon and Tomalin 2015;
Watanabe C. 2015) led scholars to speak of a ‘resurgence’ of religion (Antoun and Hegland 1987; Bellah 1985; Casanova 1994, 2012; Davie 2001; Habermas 2006, 2009; Sutton and Vertigans 2005; Yeung 2003). Josè Casanova’s study on ‘public religion’ (1994, 2008) can be regarded as foundational to this debate. Casanova detected a global trend toward the ‘de-privatisation’ of religion. Religions, he contended, ‘refused to accept the marginal and privatised role that theories of modernity and secularisation had reserved for them’ (Casanova 1994:5). It was in civil society in particular that he identified the privileged space for the re-emergence of religion in the public sphere. As Casanova (2012:26) later acknowledged, there were limits in his theoretical-analytical framework, most notably its ‘Western-Christian centrism’. Yet, his view on the renewed publicness of religion as a worldwide phenomenon remained substantially unaltered (Casanova 2008). Jurgen Habermas (2006, 2009) can be also listed among the most prominent intellectuals discussing the re-emergence of the religious in the public sphere, which he explained as a shift toward a ‘post-secular’ society. The re-entrance of religious actors into the public domain, at times actively encouraged by the state (as seen in the case of religiously inspired welfare provision) is one among the inter-related processes making up the ‘return of religion’, which also include a revival of religious beliefs, practices and communities, and an increased attention to or visibility of religion (Hustinx et al. 2015:6-7).

Claims of a renewed significance of religion in modern societies have been often linked to its capacity to offer some form of social contribution. As highlighted above, studies on faith-based welfare have often focused on the role of religious institutions and practitioners in compensating for the limits of social service provision. Other studies have looked more broadly at the possibility that religion and religious actors could help tackle pressing challenges faced by advanced industrial societies, most notably the fragmentation of community belonging and citizenship. In particular, scholars investigating these issues have often highlighted the relevance of religion for the formation of social capital. ‘Social capital’ generally refers to the range of non-material assets and resources linked to the possession of a social network or membership in a group (Smidt 2003). This notion has been used
in different theoretical formulations across the social sciences, and probably found its most renowned conceptualisation in the works of the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Studies on social activism conducted in the last couple of decades, however, commonly drew upon Robert Putnam’s definition (1993, 1995) in his works on associationism in the United States. Putnam highlighted the crucial role played by social capital, defined as ‘features of social organisations such as networks, norms and social trust’ (Putnam 1995), in increasing social connectedness and civic engagement, and generally improving the quality of public life. His research rekindled interest in the role of civic associations in social capital formation, i.e. the capacity to foster social norms of solidarity and reciprocity and facilitate collective action for mutual benefit (Putnam 2002). In this regard, Putnam (2000:66) stressed in particular the importance of religious communities, regarded as ‘the single most important repository of social capital’. Building on these premises, several scholars (Berger 2003; Cnaan et al. 1993; Smidt 2003; Soteri et al 2003; Wood 1997; Wuthnow 1991, 2004) investigated the role of religion and religious institutions in nurturing social trust, in-group reciprocity and inter-group cooperation.

The social capital framework has also informed a major current in research on Japanese religions. In recent years, the debate on religiously inspired social activism has experienced renewed vitality in Japan, especially in relation to the involvement of religious organisations in disaster relief and recovery activities following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami (Inaba 2011; Kasai 2016; McLaughlin 2013a, 2013b; Shimazono 2012; Takahashi 2016). Most scholarship on religiously inspired social activism (Inaba 2011; Inaba and Sakurai 2009; Shimazono 2012; Shimazono and Isomae 2014) has primarily discussed the potential contribution of religious teachings and organisations to fostering prosocial behaviour and reinforcing weakening communal ties. Within a context marked by increasing fragmentation and isolation (Allison 2015), religion has been presented as a possible antidote to the transformation of Japan into, as a NHK programme in 2011 (Inaba 2011)
described it, a ‘relationless society’ (*muen shakai*). Scholars have promoted the idea that religion fosters altruism and social cohesion as well as rekindles traditional values of mutual support and cooperation (Inaba 2011; Inaba and Sakurai 2009). In newly emerging social challenges, these studies contend, religion could find new functions to fulfill to reaffirm its relevance in modern societies. The works of Inaba Keishin (2009, 2011) are particularly representative of these views. In his study on religion and altruism (Inaba 2011), Inaba highlighted the crucial role that religion plays in fostering altruistic behaviour by nurturing sentiments of empathy and compassion. He contended that religion and religious actors could offer a fundamental contribution to the reconsolidation of weakening bonds and the revitalisation of social capital in local communities. Scholars like Sakurai Yoshihide (2009) and Shimazono Susumu (2012, 2014) also shared an optimistic view of the potential role that religious groups can play in strengthening social ties and promoting cooperation.

It is true that religious organisations have assumed increasing relevance as alternative safety nets and sources of social services in Japan (Shirahase 2012). It could be questioned, however, whether religiously inspired engagement necessarily helps to reinforce social connectedness. This thesis illustrates that the relationship between religion, sociality and civic engagement is more complex. I argue that the capacity of religion to foster in-group reciprocity and solidarity does not automatically translate in a contribution to society at large. As Putnam (1995, 2000) himself noted, social capital is a multi-dimensional and polyhedral phenomenon, which can also have consequences that are not socially desirable or beneficial for the community (Putnam 2002:8-9). This thesis adds to these considerations,

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11. The programme denounced a decline in social bonds, presenting the alarming rates of suicide and ‘lonely deaths’ (*kodokushi*, people dying alone in their houses without anyone noticing) as evidence of the disintegration of Japan’s social fabric. See Allison 2015.

12. More specifically, Putnam (2002) contended that ‘inward-looking’ and ‘bonding’ forms of social capital were less likely to produce positive effects on the overall society (*Ibid*). ‘Inward-looking’ social capital refers to networks prioritising the interest of their members as opposed to groups devoted to the common good, i.e. ‘outward-looking’. There is a similar distinction between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital, where the first brings together people who share a common trait (e.g. ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation) and the latter those who are different from each other (Putnam 2002).
illustrating that although religious values helped reinforce notions of reciprocity and cohesion among Köseikai members, these sentiments did not always extend beyond the boundaries of the congregation. More broadly, I will demonstrate that, even when religion contributed to foster the social commitment of members, it did not necessarily help to enhance connectedness and cooperation. Rather, in the Japanese context religion often became a deterrent to collective action.


The limitations of religion as a source of social capital and civic engagement question a broader tendency, emerging in studies on ‘public religion’, to draw a link between the social and political engagement of religious actors, and the public relevance of religion as a social institution. It could be argued that the analytical perspective informing the debate on ‘public religion’ centres too much on the dichotomous opposition between religious decline and revival. Inquiries aimed at establishing whether religion withers or flourishes within modernity, and whether its social significance declines or rises, risk overlooking the multiple and complex interactions between religion and other social spheres, and the transformations that occur in these relations (Moyser 1991). More generally, at a closer look the debate on the public presence of religion reveals several grey areas that must be addressed. In regards to religiously inspired activism more specifically, one of the tensions emerging in the field lies in an often oversimplified representation of the relationship between religion and volunteering. As argued in a recent study edited by Lesley Hustinx, Johan von Essen, Jacques Haers, and Sara Mels (2015), the existence of a positive correlation between religiosity and social engagement is among the most widespread assumptions in existing research on the topic. The issue appears closely related to a methodological gap. The influence of religion on social activism has been frequently investigated in quantitative terms, with a substantial body of research presenting statistical evidence in support of the positive correlation existing between religious affiliation or beliefs, and the tendency to engage in volunteering and other prosocial behaviour (Batson 2011; Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Bennet 2015; Borgonovi 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008;
Such bias is often linked to a uni-dimensional representation of religious motivations for activism (Lichterman 2013; Muers and Brit 2012; Munson 2007). The relevance of faith in shaping conceptions of human well-being, social justice, and solidarity, and in fostering caring and compassionate attitudes toward others has been extensively discussed. Many scholars underlined the role of religious notions of compassion and disinterested love (e.g. Christian caritas) in underpinning practitioners’ engagement in voluntarism and social care practices (Fazlhashemi 2015; Haers and Von Essen 2015; Roos 2015; Wuthnow 1991). These contributions show a tendency to associate religion with other-oriented values, such as empathy, compassion and service. This tendency has also emerged in recent studies on the social activism of Japanese religions mentioned above, most notably Inaba Keishin’s (2011) work on religion and altruism. Such an approach mirrors a broader tension embedded in research on civil engagement, stemming from the alleged dichotomy between volunteering as altruistic and collective and its instrumental and individualistic dimensions (Hustinx et al. 2015).

Placing an excessive emphasis on religious beliefs as motivating factors for social engagement, however, risks overlooking the variety of inter-related motivations that underpin religious actors’ involvement in welfare and care provision. It fails to account for the influence of environmental factors, organisational dynamics, personal experiences and preferences (Lichterman 2013:116-17; Muers and Brit 2012:207). This thesis will tackle these issues by offering a more nuanced account of the relationship between religion and civic engagement. I will unpack the tension between altruistic and instrumental dimensions of religiously inspired volunteering, illustrating how these aspects are not dichotomous but can be simultaneously present and conceptually harmonised. More broadly, the thesis will shed a light on the complex intersection of religious, social and other values motivating religious practitioners’ engagement in social welfare provision. To this end, I draw from Paul Lichterman’s work (2007, 2013, 2015) on the situational nature of religion. Lichterman (2013, 2015) spoke of a ‘unitary action model of religion’ to refer to the

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13 Studies of this type have been conducted also in the Japanese context, see for example Terazawa 2013.
widespread assumption that religious practitioners are primarily driven by religious beliefs at most times. This idea stems from an understanding of religion as an ‘identity-pervading belief’ (Lichterman 2015:243) giving people an unchanging core identity that defines them in all social settings.\(^\text{14}\) This couples with a tendency to attribute the same shared religious sensibilities to the members of the same organisation or tradition. Religion, Lichterman stressed, is experienced differently from different people (Lichterman 2015). He also highlighted how settings play a crucial role in shaping the way religion is articulated and expressed. Depending on the context, ‘congregational identities can bring respect or social mistrust’, which significantly affects how different groups ‘communicate religion’ and participate in the civic arena (Lichterman 2013:142). My thesis will add to this discussion, drawing from the hurdles encountered by Köseikai members engaging in social activities to discuss how the boundaries limiting the public presence of religion in Japan affected the possibility and outcomes of religiously inspired activism.

In doing so, the thesis will also address another significant gap in the knowledge, namely the geographical bias of existing scholarship. As David Conradson (2006) notes, there is an abundance of studies addressing the increasing relevance of religiously inspired welfare in North America and Europe, primarily focusing on Christian denominations. Yet, there is a significant lack of investigation of similar dynamics in non-Western and non-Christian contexts. In the past few years, a growing body of research on the involvement of Islamic institutions and communities in formal and informal provision of social care in Middle East, Africa, South East Asia has started to compensate for this bias (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Clark 2004; Cochrane 2013; Dik 2015; Esposito and Tamimi 2000; Jawad 2009; Khalil 2015; Weiss 2002). Other scholars have targeted newly emerging avenues of inquiry, such as the rise of faith-based activism in the context of Israel’s growing third sector (Shachar 2015; Weiss 2011), or the re-emergence of religiously inspired charitable organisations fostered by recent political developments in China (Carino 2016; Fielder 2016). Nevertheless, the field remains unbalanced. This thesis

\(^{14}\) On this see also Ammerman 2003.
contributes to this debate by drawing attention to a context, Japan, where there is a
trend towards the growing participation of religious actors in social care provision
similar to that of other advanced industrialised countries. This context is, however,
also marked by substantial discrepancies in the conceptualisation and public
presence of religion. Among the factors making the Japanese case significant is a
particularly strict formal separation between religion and the public sphere,
enshrined in the Articles 20 and 89 of the Japanese constitution (Larsson 2017;
Mullins 2012). This primarily resulted from the religious policy adopted by the Allied
Occupation (1945-1952), directed at removing any trace of State Shinto, the civil
religion centred on the emperor that had been mobilised by the state to unite the
nation and support Japan’s militarism and imperialism.15 Legal constraints, coupled
with a widespread social mistrust of religion (Baffelli and Reader 2012; Prohl and
Nelson 2012; Rots and Teuween 2017), significantly affect the ways in which
religious practitioners and institutions at present articulate their religiosity and
define their position vis-à-vis society.

Limitations to religious expression and action are particularly serious in the case of
new religious organisations. These movements experienced rapid expansion after
the end of the Pacific War. This, combined with their active involvement in the
social and political life of the country and the aggressive proselytisation strategies
employed by some of them, gave rise to conflicts with the authorities, the media,
and society as a whole (Baffelli 2016; Kisala and Mullins 2001; Morioka 1994; Prohl
2012; Shimazono 2004). The many controversies faced by new religions in the post-
war era further consolidated their negative reputation as dangerous cults,
developed in the context of Japan’s modernisation (Dorman 2012b; Josephson 2012;
Sawada 2004). Sōka Gakkai, another Nichiren-oriented Buddhist organisation, was
the protagonist of one of the first major controversies, stirred by a combination of
its rampant proselytism and active political engagement (Kisala 2004; McLaughlin
2018). Although Sōka Gakkai probably represents the most conspicuous case, it was
by no means an exception. Risshō Kōseikai also faced a large-scale media and

political scandal in the mid-1950s, as did several other organisations. Tension between new religions and Japanese society grew in the following decades, reaching a dramatic peak on March 20, 1995, when members of Aum Shinrikyō, a religious group founded in the mid-1980s, released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway, killing thirteen people and injuring hundreds. The event not only exacerbated widespread negative perceptions of new religions, but also damaged the public image of religious institutions more broadly. There had been a certain degree of diffidence toward organised religion in previous eras, related to the mobilisation of Shinto in support of the war effort, but also as a result of the conflicts involving new religions and dissatisfaction toward traditional Temple Buddhism (Covell 2005; Tanabe 2006). Yet, the Aum affair dramatically reinforced these sentiments, consolidating the perception of religious institutions as potential threats to society (Baffelli and Reader 2012; Kisala and Mullins 2001). Still today, the historical legacy of controversies surrounding the rise and expansion of new religions, as well as lingering negative perceptions primarily related to the Aum affair, continue to influence the public image of these movements, as well as the everyday life of practitioners. The issues surrounding the public presence of religion in Japan significantly affect its capacity to foster civic engagement or social connectedness. For social welfare provision more specifically, these circumstances question the viability of cooperative approaches between religious institutions, Japanese state and other providers of care, which have become common in other contexts, such as North-America and Western Europe. More broadly, this study questions the universal applicability of ostensibly global trends toward the ‘return of religion’ by demonstrating how, in Japan, the social mobilisation of religious actors did not imply a reaffirmation of the public relevance of religion. Köseikai’s efforts to fill the gaps in social welfare provision, even when successful, were unlikely to significantly affect the public perception of the religious institution. Nor did they impact its

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16 As discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
17 The increasing disengagement of Japanese people from institutionalised religion and growing mistrust toward religious organisations was confirmed by statistical evidence collected in recent years (Inoue 2003, Ishi 2007).
position vis-à-vis the state and other social agencies, due to both external and internal constraints.

1.1.3. Understanding Religion in Modern Societies through Patterns of Negotiation

In the above section I have outlined some of the grey areas emerging from the debate on the ‘return of religion’ in modern societies. Recent scholarship acknowledged these tensions, and attempted to tackle them by shifting the focus of investigation away from religion’s crisis or revival, to the ways in which its position and role are re-defined in relation to present social circumstances and challenges (Ammerman 2007; Hustinx et al. 2015). As religion continues to be part of the social reality we encounter, researchers are called to seek a deeper qualitative understanding of how it operates in the modern world (Ammerman 2007:5) and is mobilised in the civic arena (Lichterman 2007:139). Nancy Ammerman (2007:4), for example, highlighted the need for ‘new ways to think about religion and society’ which could offer a ‘contribution toward understanding the seeming paradox of religion’s simultaneous presence and absence in the modern world’. A possible way to make sense of the tensions emerging in the relation between religion, civic engagement and social welfare, then, could be to look at the practices through which religion is ‘negotiated both formally and informally in the interaction between religious and non-religious actors’ (Bender et al. 2013:10). Scholars have recently ventured in this avenue, moving away from conceptions of religion as circumscribed by institutional boundaries to investigate the ways in which religion is articulated in institutional settings and public spaces, such as hospitals (Cadge 2013) or prisons (Beckford 2005; Sullivan 2009). These contributions drew attention to the role of the legislature, regulatory bodies, and other ‘secular’ institutions in moulding patterns of religious action and expression (Bender et al. 2013:10; Lichterman 2013). These have highlighted the ways in which religion is constructed in society by a variety of settings and structures (Bender et al. 2013:1). In this regard, recent scholarship on religion, secularity and modernity built on a growing area of theory labelled ‘critical religion’ (Goldenberg 2013:40), which stemmed from the ground-breaking contribution of scholars like Talal Asad (1993, 2003), Masuzawa Tomoko
(2005), Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair (2011). These works have brought renewed vitality to the debate on religion, secularity and modernity, challenging the notion of religion as fixed and univocal entity (Goldenberg 2013; Nongbri 2013). Asad’s works in particular have changed the established understanding of secularisation from a univocal process necessarily connected with modernisation, to a historically and culturally bound negotiation embedded in specific configurations of power and knowledge. Religious actors, however, are not passively subject to these dynamics, but actively negotiate their position within society. Matthew Engelke (2013), among others, stressed the importance of investigating the processes through which religious institutions and practitioners attempt to heighten the public presence and social relevance of religion. This included attempts to craft and shape religious sensibilities through aesthetic and affective formations (Engelke 2013; Hirschkind 2006; Meyer 2009).

Gaps in social welfare provision, by creating potential venues of intervention for religious actors, open a suitable ‘space for the renegotiation of the relationship between church and society, between the religious and the non-religious’ (Muers and Brit 2012:217). While shaped by social circumstances and institutional constraints, these venues also provide channels where practitioners can express and enact religious values or attempt to re-define group identities (Laird and Cadge 2010). The ‘polysemous character’ (Munson 2007:121) of religiously inspired social and political engagement, stemming from the substantial overlapping of religious and secular domains, makes it an ideal site for human agency, opening up new possibilities for meaning and action. These ‘polysemous’ spaces can be observed in the Japanese context. The formal separation of religion from other social spheres did not result in its complete exclusion from public life. This was a result, primarily, of the breadth and vagueness of the constitutional definition of religion itself, which left ample space for disputation over what should be included in the category (Mullins 2012; Nishimura 2016). This ambiguity relates also to the substantial discrepancy existing between ‘religion’ (shūkyō) as it came to be conceptualised in Japan, and customary religiosity. Religion was initially defined in relation to Christianity; it was thus modelled on the modern Western notion centred on belief,
and marked by exclusive affiliation and earnest commitment to a specific system of teachings and practices (Fitzgerald 2003; Josephson 2012; Reader 1991). This conception clashed with Japanese conventional religious behaviour, which was characterised by inclusiveness of affiliation, circumstantial approaches to practice and primacy of action over belief (Reader 1991; Reader and Tanabe 1998). These issues have also affected the implementation of the constitutional principle of separation, which has conventionally been interpreted as prohibiting the promotion of a specific institution or set of beliefs and practices. Nondenominational, more diffused forms of religiosity are, by contrast, partially tolerated, especially when presented as cultural traditions and customs (Nishimura 2016; Tsukada 2015). The blurred boundaries between religious and non-religious, prohibited and accepted behaviours thus created spaces of opportunity where religion could be negotiated.

My thesis will unpack the negotiations involved in social welfare and care activities undertaken by Risshō Kōseikai. This analysis will shed a light on the multi-directional processes through which religion is experienced and articulated ‘on the ground’ (McGuire 2008) within Japanese society. That is, how the religious institutions and its members negotiated meanings, practices, and roles in both extra-congregational and intra-congregational contexts. More specifically, this thesis will consider three main dynamics: 1) negotiation across the formal, conventional and perceived boundaries limiting the public presence of religion in contemporary Japan; 2) negotiation of functions and roles within the economy of care; 3) negotiation of religious meanings and practices internal to the religious organisation.

Firstly, this thesis will investigate the ways in which religion is negotiated in contemporary Japan. It will explore the multiple boundaries limiting its public presence, in relation to both formal restrictions and the strong social mistrust of religious organisations. In particular, social welfare activities offer an excellent venue to investigate the persistence of the social stigma around new religions, the limitations stemming from this stigma, and the strategies adopted by Kōseikai.

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18 It has been argued (Josephson 2012; Isomae 2014) that such a discrepancy might be at the heart of the presently widespread tendency of Japanese people to define themselves as ‘non-religious’ (mushūkyō). On the ‘non-religiousness’ of Japanese people see Ama 1996.
members to cope with them. At the same time, in the spaces of interaction that emerged in the domain of social care Kōseikai found potential venues of negotiation, where the religious institution and its practitioners could mediate religious teachings and practices while seeking social recognition. This was especially the case with those opportunities that arose from cooperative initiatives provided by public, quasi-public and private actors. Kōseikai members creatively engaged the interstices emerging from ambiguous definitions of prohibited and accepted behaviour to pursue religious and organisational goals. The outcomes of these processes, however, were still heavily affected by the limitations faced by religious organisations, as well as further constraints emerging in both intra-congregational and extra-congregational contexts.

The second dimension of negotiation which will be considered relates to the intersection between Kōseikai-provided services and the broader social care system. Religiously inspired welfare activism does not exist in a vacuum, but within a framework shaped by law, social conventions, demographical dynamics, political debate, public discourses and media representations. Taking these circumstances into consideration is necessary to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of religiously inspired activism than that which exists in the current scholarship. Most recent studies on religious mobilisation in Japan, however, have primarily addressed volunteering in the ‘extraordinary’ context of natural disasters (Inaba 2011; Kasai 2016; McLaughlin 2013a, 2013b; Shimazono 2012; Takahashi 2016). Comparatively less attention has been paid to social activities conducted on daily basis within local communities. In particular, there has been no comprehensive study investigating religiously inspired social activities in relation to the broader framework of social welfare and care provision. This thesis will address this shortfall, analysing the services offered by Kōseikai in the context of Japan’s economy of care. This will allow for a better understanding of the sorts of issues members actually tried to tackle, and how they served to articulate their function within the system, and thus

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19 The expression ‘economy of care’ has been used to refer to informal economies centred on the unpaid caring labour of women (Danely 2014; Razavi 2007). In this thesis I use the term in a broader sense, to encompass both formal (state-based, market-based) and informal (familial and communal) practices of care, the institutions involved, and the cultural values embedded in the system.
create new social roles for the religious community. The analysis will highlight further obstacles encountered by religious actors, which included practical and formal limitations as well as the need to negotiate the boundaries of their roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis other providers of care.

Impediments to religious activism, however, were not only found outside the congregation. Structural factors such as organisational configuration and intra-congregational power relationships played a crucial role in shaping conceptual and practical aspects of religiously inspired welfare. The third type of negotiation discussed in this thesis addresses the effects of structural vulnerabilities (such as hierarchical ties, ossification, ageing and declining commitment of members) on Kōseikai’s attempts to ‘fill the gaps’ in social care provision. I will build on Talal Asad’s (1993, 2003) construction of religion as the product of a negotiation embedded in configurations of power and knowledge to unpack the process through which the religious significance of social care activities was negotiated in the dialogical spaces emerging within the organisation. Within Kōseikai, religious meanings attributed to social activities were not univocally understood. They could be re-interpreted or contested by practitioners, often in an attempt to reconcile them with diverging priorities or practical limitations. These considerations are important in that they challenge a widespread tendency to assume a substantial homogeneity among members of the same congregation. This thesis responds to the call for more qualitative investigations that could unveil the ‘internal incoherence’ (Bender et al. 2013:10) of religious groups. By unleashing the plethora of different voices that emerged through the ethnographic research, I will shed light on the complexity of religious institutions, beliefs and experiences, as well as the multi-vocal nature of the process through which they are negotiated in modern societies. This thesis illustrates how this process did not unfold one-sidedly as a merely top-down initiative, but as a multi-directional dialogue involving actors situated at various levels of the religious organisation, from the central administration to the grassroots.

The relevance of the inquiry is not merely theoretical. Conceptual processes of definition and re-definition of religious meanings, in fact, had concrete implications
for practitioners, Köseikai as a religious organisation, and society at large. The thesis, therefore, will also contribute to deepen understandings of how religion is present in social activism. There have been studies considering different patterns and degrees to which religious attributes are incorporated in social services, often in an attempt to develop a classification of religiously inspired organisations (Jeavons 1998, 2004; Monsma 1996; Unruh and Sider 2005). However, as noted for example by Heidi R. Unruh (2004), the role that religion actually plays in the provision has not been comprehensively addressed. This thesis tackles the question of ‘where the “faith” in “faith-based organisations” lies’ (Johnsen 2014), namely the ways in which religion contributes to shape the values, priorities and modus operandi of groups and individuals involved in social welfare activities. It does so by discussing how religious beliefs and practices found expression in the planning and delivery of social services promoted by Risshō Köseikai, as well as the meanings attributed to them by its members. These considerations will enhance our knowledge of the relationship between religion and volunteering, showing how religious connotations were mobilised to support Köseikai members’ engagement in the informal provision of social care within their congregations and community. The thesis, however, will also produce new insights regarding the ambiguities of this relationship. I will illustrate that, when moving from the theoretical level to the one of service implementation, the ideals promoted by religious actors did not always produce the desired results. On the contrary, at times religious values and identities became detrimental for social cohesion and collective action.

1.2. Methodology

Based on the above premises, I chose to primarily rely on ethnographic methods of data collection as a way to provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of religiously inspired social activities. This choice was motivated by the methodological bias emerging in existing research on religiously inspired activism, which has been primarily investigated in a quantitative perspective, but also by broader theoretical considerations. This thesis builds upon a growing body of research on ‘lived religion’, grounded on the contributions of scholars like Meredith McGuire (2008), Kelly
Besecke (2005), Courtney Bender (2011; 2013) and Nancy Ammerman (2003, 2005, 2007). These works advocated a departure from narrow or essentialised understandings of religion, constructions that stem from Western modern conceptions shaped by Protestant-inflected views of religion as a ‘deeply held set of beliefs that orient and shape the behaviour of individuals and groups’ (Vasquez 2013:32). Such approaches continue to inform the academic discourse. Recent scholarship instead has sought to understand religion as a multi-dimensional, lived experience rooted in the social realities of everyday life (Ammerman 2007:6; Lichterman 2013:142). These methodological premises are also behind my choice to adopt the expression ‘religiously inspired’ welfare to refer to the activities promoted by Risshō Kōseikai, instead of the more common ‘faith-based’, which, as pointed out by Rana Jawad (2009:64-65) among others, reproduces a belief-centred understanding of religion. As highlighted by Helen Hardacre (2003:71), ‘fieldwork is essential to reaching an understanding of religion as lived and living tradition, as opposed to a body of doctrine or an abstract statement of creed’. The scholarship of recent decades, however, has been marked by a substantial lack of ethnographic studies on Japanese religions, and especially new religions. Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader (2012) have noted that among the repercussions of the Aum affair was a general withdrawal of academics from fieldwork studies on new religions, and the subsequent weakening of the field.20 This thesis compensates for this gap in the scholarship, by drawing on rich ethnographic data to carry out an in-depth investigation of the dynamics through which Kōseikai members negotiated meanings, practices and roles both within and beyond the boundaries of local congregations.

1.2.1. The Case-study

Several factors motivated my choice of Risshō Kōseikai as a case-study for the research project. Firstly, it is one of the most influential players within Japanese religious landscape, claiming a membership of about six million (1.200.000

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20 Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader’s (2018) study of Agonshū, or the works of Levi McLaughlin (2009, 2018) on Sōka Gakkai can be mentioned as significant exceptions.
households), which makes it the second largest Japanese new religious movement after Sōka Gakkai. Nevertheless, it has been addressed only to a very limited extent by scholarly research, and most of the literature available on the organisation – especially in English language – is dated (Anderson 1994; Guthrie 1988; Inaba 1998; Morioka 1979, 1994; Murō 1979; Oshima 1975). The extensive scope of Risshō Kōseikai’s social engagement also makes the movement a good case study. The movement is actively involved in the promotion of inter-faith dialogue and cooperation, humanitarian aid, political activities, environmental campaigns and social activities at a local, national and international level. Social welfare is an important form of Kōseikai’s activism. The movement promotes formal and informal provision of social assistance through various channels, including local congregations, the civic movement Akarui shakai-zukuri undō (Movement for a Brighter Society, Meisha for short), and affiliated welfare facilities. These initiatives, however, have seldom been the object of analysis. There are two relevant exceptions that should be mentioned, namely the works of Robert Kisala (1992; 1994; 1999) and Ranjana Mukhopadhyāya (2005). Kisala addressed the social (1992) and pacifist activities (1999) promoted by Risshō Kōseikai in comparative perspective, in relation to the initiatives sponsored by other new religious organisations. In his analysis of the social welfare activities of Risshō Kōseikai and Tenrikyō (Kisala 1992), he focused in particular on the meanings attributed to these activities, and how they were narrated by practitioners in relation to their religious beliefs and commitments. His work carried out an insightful reflection on the intermingling of faith, ethics and social awareness underpinning members’

21 The organisation’s annals (Kōsei Nenkan 2016) report a membership of 1,244,532 households for 2015. The number of individual members can be estimated at around 6 million followers (See also Prohl and Nelson 2012:245). It is problematic to formulate reliable estimates of new religions’ membership, since most scholarly assessments are rather dated (e.g. Inoue 1996:313), while annual surveys conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Education rely on self-declared figures. Many movements tend to overestimate their adherence, and to adopt a very broad definition of ‘membership’, for example counting as members all the components of a family when one of them joins the organisation (Reader 1991:6-9; Shimazono 2004:4; Staemmler and Dehn 2011:5-6). In addition to issues of reliability of self-reported figures, Roemer (2012) identified further factors undermining the validity of survey data, as for example the tendency to measure religiosity on the basis of criteria like affiliation and attendance of rituals, which are commonly used for Abrahamic belief-centred models of religion but appear less suitable to the Japanese context.
Kisala highlighted the role played by a shared ideological framework rooted in Confucian values in shaping the social ethics of both organisations. Yet, more practical aspects of welfare provision, such as the content and goals of social activities, or the dynamics of service delivery, were only briefly addressed. Ranjana Mukhopadhyāya (2005) went into more detail on these aspects, discussing volunteering initiatives and forms of community service promoted by Risshō Kōseikai and Hōonji, another Buddhist-oriented new religious organisation, within the framework of ‘engaged Buddhism’. Mukhopadhyāya placed her analysis within a broader discussion on Buddhism and modernisation, and in particular the process of social differentiation commonly associated with secularisation. While the work undoubtedly provides precious insights on the social role and function of Buddhism in modern contexts, the adoption of ‘Buddhism’ – understood in its global dimension – as an overarching category at times carries the risk of understating regional and individual specificities of different institutions, such as the differences between Japanese Temple Buddhism and lay Buddhist organisations of more recent formation. Also, the study primarily relied on doctrinal notions to discuss the social ethic underpinning members’ activism. As mentioned above, however, despite the crucial role that religious beliefs undeniably play in supporting members’ initiatives, explanations centred on official theological interpretations do not account for the diversity of individual motivations for social engagement, nor for the complexity of the multiple factors fostering religiously inspired activism. In addition, both Kisala and Mukhopadhyāya chose Meisha as their privileged venue of investigation, while other significant avenues of engagement, such as intra-congregational provision of social care or independent initiatives undertaken by

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22 On the religious foundations of altruism in Risshō Kōseikai see also Inaba 1998.
23 The expression ‘engaged Buddhism’, coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, refers to the involvement of Buddhist leaders and practitioners in political, social, economic and environmental issues as a form of implementation of Buddhist doctrinal teachings. For further details see Queen and Keown 2003. Jaqueline Stone (2013) moved from a similar framework in an article discussing the social engagement of Sōka Gakkai, Risshō Kōseikai and Nipponzan Myōhōrōji.
24 The theory of social differentiation is based on the assumption that modernisation would bring about a progressive diversification of social spheres and institutions, which would come to assume increasingly specialised and compartmentalised functions. This process was listed by Casanova (1994) among the key dimensions of secularisation.
grassroots members, were not considered. Finally, most recent studies on Risshō Kōseikai (Cavaliere 2015; Kisala 1992, 1999; Mukhopadhyaya 2005; Watanabe M. 2016) relied on the central administration and the affiliated academic centre (Chūo Gakujutsu Kenkyūjo) as main channels for collecting data and recruiting informants. Combined with the aforementioned considerations on the importance of studying religion ‘on the ground’ (McGuire 2008), this gap in the scholarship was among the key concerns informing my methodological choices.

1.2.2. Access to the Field and Research Methods

Data was collected over the course of a 12-month stay (September 2016 – August 2017) in Japan, primarily based in the Tokyo metropolitan area and the nearby prefectures of Saitama and Chiba. The research activities focused on local congregations (kyōkai) of Risshō Kōseikai and affiliated organisations. Access to the field was negotiated through two channels: formal interaction with Kōseikai central administration and introductions from personal acquaintances. In particular, a recommendation from a young member I met in the UK proved instrumental to gaining access to Church A, located in central Tokyo, which for the duration of my

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25 Watanabe Masako (2016) touched upon Risshō Kōseikai’s response to ageing, but overall Kōseikai’s locally-based system for informal provision of care has not yet been discussed. Other recent contributions that have dealt with the social activities promoted by Risshō Kōseikai are the works of Ugo Dessì (2014) and Paola Cavaliere (2015). In both cases the analysis has been contextualised within two broader debates, on globalisation and gender respectively. Dessì primarily focused on the international and environmental activities promoted by Risshō Kōseikai, used as a lens to investigate its involvement in global dynamics (on Risshō Kōseikai outside Japan see also Watanabe M. 2008). Cavaliere’s study, instead, examined the role of religiously inspired volunteering practices in constructing Japanese women’s sense of selfhood and social identity.

26 The term kyōkai (church, also used for Christian churches) was adopted in the context of the organisational reforms carried out by Risshō Kōseikai between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, which will be discussed in Chapter 2. Some of the Kōseikai representatives with whom I have discussed the matter suggested that the choice to adopt a term commonly associated with Christian churches, compared to one with a stronger Buddhist connotation such as ‘temples’ (tera) may have been related to Niwano Nikkyō’s growing involvement in inter-faith dialogue and cooperation with Christian denominations over the same years. The decision may have stemmed also from a desire to take some distance from established Buddhist sects (i.e. Temple Buddhism). Unfortunately, the amount of sources available on this stage in the life of the organisation is limited, and the issue is not explicitly discussed in the publications of the founder. It is thus difficult to establish the reason for this choice with certainty.

27 Besides using pseudonyms, in order to protect the anonymity of all informants (especially those holding administrative positions) I decided not to disclose the location of Kōseikai congregations and Meisha branches involved in the study. Letters will be used in substitution of toponyms: Church A
stay remained my primary basis and research setting. While the approval and support of the headquarters was essential to start and carry on data collection, at the same time I believed in the importance of seeking a relatively unmediated access to the grassroots base. My intent was to secure a wider and more diverse sample that could provide me with a deeper understanding of dynamics internal to the organisation. Initial contacts at central and local levels laid the stepping stone to develop a network centred on four main congregations, including the above-mentioned Church A, two more churches located in Tokyo metropolitan area (Church B and Church C), and one in Saitama prefecture (Church D). Besides these primary field sites, I had the chance to visit several more congregations, located between Tokyo, Saitama and Chiba, to conduct interviews and attend events. In each congregation permission to conduct participant observation of activities and interviews with members was commonly negotiated with the head minister. This also applied to cases of participants recruited outside the four main field sites. For this purpose, I prepared a participant sheet in Japanese explaining the content and purpose of the research project, and the topics to be covered in the interviews. Participation in social welfare training courses and educational initiatives organised by the headquarters was also crucial to expand my network of contacts. Training activities more generally proved an extremely rich venue of investigation, providing precious insights into the way social welfare activities were conceptualised and narrated at central level, but also implemented on local scale, thanks to the case-studies presented by course attendees coming from across Japan. These events, thus, also helped to partially overcome the geographical bias of the data collected, offering glimpses into the reality of Kōseikai congregations beyond Tokyo and the Kantō area.

I have set local churches as my privileged focus of analysis, in the intent to achieve a better understanding of how religious meanings and practices codified by the centre were understood at the grassroots level. It also provided a means to demonstrate how practitioners articulated their religiosity when engaging in social

and Meisha A, for example, refer to a congregation and affiliated branch located in the same ward of Tokyo.
activities and religious practices in both intra-congregational and extra-congregational settings. During my stay, I conducted participant observation of religious, social and educational activities carried on at central and local level, both within the religious community and in external contexts. I visited the four congregations on an almost daily basis, regularly attending religious services on *meinichi* (monthly recurrences) and other special occasions (e.g. Buddhist festivities, annual recurrences such as the anniversary of the foundation of the organisation). Church attendance did not only prove instrumental to meeting potential interviewees and building relationships of trust, but it also offered a privileged venue to investigate Kōseikai practice and beliefs in their lived reality. Daily sutra recitation (*gokuyō*) and group counselling (*hōza*) constitute the core of Kōseikai practice. *Gokuyō* consists in a ritual to be performed in front of the altar, including repeated chanting of the *daimoku* (title of the Lotus Sutra, the seven-syllable formula *namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*), recitation of Kōseikai creed, and readings from *Kyōten*, a collection of extracts of the *Lotus* for ceremonial purposes. The service also incorporates functions of ancestor devotion (*senzo kuyō*). *Hōza* (Dharma sittings) are small-group discussion sessions, commonly gathering from ten to twenty participants. Testimonial speeches, addresses given by the head ministers and conversations emerging from *hōza* offered precious insights on how doctrinal notions, including those related to Kōseikai theology of social care, were understood and articulated by members in the context of their daily life. In terms of social activities, I had the chance to take part in a range of initiatives including: home visits to vulnerable members of the congregation; social welfare counselling sessions; study-groups and educational activities; administrative meetings of the specialised staff in charge of social welfare; ‘salon’ activities and inter-generational exchange initiatives taking place in the church premises; volunteering in welfare facilities, such as elderly homes, community events and training courses hosted by congregations or external organisations (e.g. care facilities, welfare councils). Alongside Kōseikai congregations, I have also engaged with several branches of Meisha, including, but not limited to, those affiliated to the congregations I was in contact with. With the branches of Meisha I took part in a wide range of initiatives, encompassing various forms of social service and community volunteering,
educational initiatives and administrative meetings at national, prefectural and local level. Finally, social activities carried out beyond Köseikai’s institutional framework and related organisations offered another fruitful avenue of investigation. More specifically, I conducted participant observation of independent initiatives undertaken by members in individual or collective capacity, such as volunteering in welfare facilities and voluntary associations, or service to the community, e.g. in quality of voluntary district commissioner (minsei’in).

In the field I negotiated my positionality as a non-member interested in the movement and willing to learn more about the teachings and practices of Risshō Köseikai. As noted by Hardacre (2003:71-72), it is common for a researcher doing fieldwork on religion to be seen by the hosting association as ‘a learner’ seeking to understand what the group believes and how it tries to actualise its beliefs. This may translate in a perception of the researcher’s role as ‘childlike, uninformed, and in need of instruction’ (Ibid:72). Accepting this role sincerely was crucial for gaining access and building beneficial relationships with participants. One of the ways in which I did this was by learning Köseikai etiquette and adopting behaviour (use of honorific language, attire, bodily practices) deemed appropriate for a person of my age and sex, especially in the interaction with people in position of authority. While repeated interaction with grassroots members and the personal relationships that developed shortened my distance from the organisation, I made sure to maintain my positionality as non-member. In this regard, my main reference point was the approach adopted by Levi McLaughlin (2009, 2018) in his extended fieldwork among Sōka Gakkai membership. In all contexts, I always introduced myself as a researcher, using both my British and Japanese academic affiliation (Rikkyō University). I clarified that my interest in Risshō Köseikai was purely academic, and made sure to raise no false hope of a possible conversion to the movement. On the rare occasion when practitioners hinted at this possibility, or directly asked me whether I would be interested in joining, I carefully explained that it would have

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28 In his nearly two decades of research on Sōka Gakkai, McLaughlin has studied the teachings of the movement, participated in ritual and cultural activities and developed intimate relationships with a large number of members, while never joining the organisation.
gone against my personal convictions and professional ethics. My position was generally accepted, and I was not subjected to reiterated or pressing proselytisation attempts. My age and ethnicity proved helpful in maintaining an outsider status. Being significantly younger than the majority of my participants (who, as illustrated in the thesis, were mostly past retirement age) and coming from a different cultural (and religious) background ensured that a subtle distance remained between me and the members I engaged with on a daily basis. On some occasions, most notably when conducting observations of religious practices, I felt the need to remark my status as non-member and researcher. During rituals, for example, I avoided joining the recitation of the daimoku (title of the Lotus Sutra) or the chanting of the sutra. I also politely refused to use the ceremonial sash (otasuki) that practitioners wear during the ceremonies, except for one occasion where I took part in a particularly solemn ceremonial service at the Daiseidō (Great Sacred Hall) together with the members of the Youth Division of Church A. Nevertheless, members appreciated my diligence, especially in attending more demanding practices such as the early morning sutra chanting. Participants acknowledged my enthusiasm and willingness to learn about Risshō Kōseikai, and the knowledge that I acquired with time. When participating in hōza, I was often interpellated by discussion leaders, who were interested in the insights that I could offer coming from my different cultural and religious perspective. Offering my take on the sermon or testimonial was one of the ways in which I tried to reciprocate practitioners’ help. Regarding my relationship with the organisation, one of the ways in which I repaid the support received by the central administration was by sharing some of the insights emerging from my research during pre-arranged monthly meetings. I also took part in the ‘International Lotus Sutra Seminar’ organised by Kōseikai and agreed to compile a report for the magazine Dharma World.}

29 Kōseikai membership is articulated in age- and gender-based divisions. Members under 40 belong to the Youth Division (Seinenbu), which is divided into five subgroups: Danshibu, Joshibu (members between 20 and 40 years of age, respectively male and female), Fujinbu (married women and young mothers), Gakuseibu (students) Shōnenbu (children). Marriage and motherhood commonly mark women’s passage from Joshibu to Fujinbu.
30 See Di Febo 2018.
In order to deepen and expand the data collected through participant observation and informal conversations with practitioners, I conducted in-depth interviews with forty-five members involved in social activities in different capacities and contexts, at various levels of the organisation. I chose to focus on members of the organisation because I was particularly interested in investigating the ways in which they understood their social engagement in relation to their religious beliefs and affiliation, as well as other aspects of their everyday life. Interviewees, recruited through pre-existing connections and snowball techniques (Coleman J. 1958), belonged to five main groups:

1) Representatives of the headquarters dealing with social welfare activities, notably members of the Educational Division (Kyōiku Gurūpu), in charge of social welfare training;

2) Head ministers and members of the local administration involved in social welfare activities within their congregations, commonly in their capacity as ‘social welfare specialists’ (shakai fukushi senmon tantōsha);

3) Members of the Meisha branches;

4) Practitioners engaging in social activities in extra-congregational contexts;

5) Staff of Kōseikai-related welfare and educational facilities. More specifically: Kōsei ikujien (Kōsei kindergarten), Aikyōen (elderly care facility), Gakurin (Kōseikai Seminar), and the female vocational school Hōju.

In planning the interviews I had set a tentative sample size between forty and fifty, which I believed would be sufficient to collect a reliable and valuable amount of qualitative data within the available time. Former ethnographic studies on

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31 The choice to exclude recipients of assistance from interviews stemmed from methodological and ethical concerns. As these people commonly experienced a condition of vulnerability (e.g. frail elderly affected by dementia), their participation in the research project posed additional challenges in terms of interviewing techniques and participant-researcher interaction. At the time of fieldwork I considered my training insufficient to effectively address these issues. Time constraints were an additional concern: the involvement of care recipients would have required the permission of their families or the institutions responsible for them, and the process was likely to be time-consuming.

32 More specifically: Kōsei ikujien (Kōsei kindergarten), Aikyōen (elderly care facility), Gakurin (Kōseikai Seminar), and the female vocational school Hōju.

33 Steinar Kvale (1996) argued that a minimum number of 15 interviews is required to achieve ‘data saturation’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I set this value as the lowest bar for my sample size, and based on that I formulated an estimate that would allow me to capture possible variations among the groups but was feasible within the allotted time.
Japanese new religion (e.g. Kisala 1992) have relied on a similar number of participants. Interviews were designed to collect detailed information about participants’ life histories, their relationship with the religious organisation, faith and religious practice, personal experiences of social engagement, the meanings attributed to welfare and care activities and the motivations behind them.\(^{34}\) The use of a semi-structured open-ended interview (Leavy 2014) format provided the flexibility to explore different topics in-depth, and therefore facilitated the collection of descriptive information. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, with one participant at the time, except four cases where interviewees expressed the desire to participate in the interview with their spouse or a fellow member. All interviews were conducted in Japanese. A signed record of consent was obtained at the beginning of the participant’s involvement in the research project.\(^{35}\) Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours, with a few cases lasting as long as three hours, and were conducted in public spaces (e.g. coffee shops), Kōseikai premises, offices of local branches of Meisha, and private homes. As a general principle, I preferred to offer various options and let the interviewees pick the one they felt most comfortable with. Participants were all granted anonymity and confidentiality, and informed of the possibility to interrupt the interview in any moment. I was aware that the interviews might touch upon sensitive topics, related in particular to religious beliefs and practices. As mentioned above, in the past new religious movements have been involved in a number of controversies, and continue to represent a controversial presence within Japanese society today. I expected that the general criticism surrounding new religions might make participants more reluctant to discuss their religious affiliation. I informed them of the possibility to refuse to answer any question deemed intrusive or offensive. This, however, never happened. I believe that the trust relationship built with participants, most of whom I had met several times before the interviews, significantly facilitated the process, making members feel more comfortable

\(^{34}\) A list of interview topics is provided in Appendix I.  
\(^{35}\) The informed consent form and participant information sheet used are provided in Appendix I. The project obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester on May 11, 2016.
opening up to me. Another point I kept in mind when designing and conducting the interviews was terminology, especially around the religious/non-religious or secular semantic divide. These concerns were also related to the issues surrounding the category of religion (shūkyō) itself, which as discussed above, emerged as a modern construct influenced by Western models, and is often perceived as non-applicable to beliefs and practices belonging to Japanese religions. I made every effort to put aside pre-existing definitions of what might constitute ‘religion’, and focused instead on understanding what practices and notions were interpreted by practitioners as religious (Ammerman 2007:5), and how they articulated religious meanings vis-à-vis other sets of values and obligations.

In May 2017, I decided to broaden the pool of interviewees by including a sixth group consisting of professionals of social welfare and care. This decision was motivated by the intent to better contextualise the information provided by Köseikai members. I felt it was important to understand how people outside the movement regarded practitioners and their social engagement, and whether they had a different understanding of the place of religion in contemporary Japanese society. I recruited ten between professional caregivers employed in the welfare facilities where I regularly volunteered with Köseikai members and representatives of social welfare councils located in the areas of the four main field sites. These interviews were generally shorter (under one hour) and took place at the interviewees’ workplace. Their content ranged from the general circumstances of social welfare and care provision in Japan, and relevant legislation and regulations, to public perceptions and personal opinions of volunteering, and religiously inspired social engagement more specifically. These offered precious insights on how ‘religion’ and ‘religious activities’ were understood beyond the boundaries of the congregation, and how public perceptions affected the practicalities of members’ engagement. 36 Data collected through participant observation, informal conversations and interviews were integrated with archival research focused on Risshō Köseikai’s publications and secondary sources about the movement. The consultation of Köseikai-related resources, accessed primarily through the

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36 See in particular in Chapter 6.
organisation’s library (Kōsei Toshokan) and the archives of their publishing company (Kōsei Shuppansha), proved instrumental in tracing the development of Kōseikai’s engagement in social welfare and care activities since its earliest stages. Archival data helped understand how the social activities promoted by the movements had changed over time, what doctrinal concepts were involved in shaping the social commitment of grassroots members, and whether the meaning they attributed to these activities differed from the official narratives offered by the leadership.

1.3. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 introduces the notion of gaps in social welfare provision as a space where religion can be negotiated. Focusing on the progressing expansion of the scope of the movement’s activities from the late 1950s, I investigate the multiple factors that fostered the emergence of Kōseikai’s concern with ‘filling the gaps’. The rise of Kōseikai’s engagement in social care provision is analysed in relation to coeval transformations in Japan’s welfare system and overall social context, as well as developments internal to the organisation. The influence of broader dynamics at work within Japanese religious landscape is also taken in consideration. I discuss how Kōseikai’s involvement in social welfare was justified in missionary terms, as a tool to tackle newly emerging needs and mediate religious values through the spaces of interaction provided by social services. At the same time, the chapter illustrates that these activities also served more practical goals, namely dealing with the aftermath of a major crisis faced by the organisation in the mid-1950s and countering the mounting criticism against new religious movements.

Chapter 3 investigates the role that religion plays in shaping Kōseikai’s efforts to ‘fill the gaps’ and their outcomes. I discuss how religious beliefs influenced members’ perceptions of conventional notions of reciprocity and social obligations traditionally underpinning informal provision of assistance in Japan. Practitioners’ accounts demonstrate how the incorporation of social values within Kōseikai’s religious framework served to reinforce their social commitment by strengthening their sense of indebtedness and perceived obligation to reciprocate, while also increasing expectations of future benefits. These dynamics appeared in line with
present trends in Japan’s social policy, and were especially supportive of
government attempts to revitalise declining communal bonds and traditional
practices of mutual assistance. In this regard, the capacity of religion to foster the
continuation of well-rooted patterns of informal provision of care at the local level
constituted a potential asset for the Japanese state. Yet, the impossibility for public
bodies to directly mobilise religious beliefs and actors as social policy tools
prevented such potential to translate into a revaluation of the religious organisation
vis-à-vis the state.

Chapter 4 investigates the ways in which Risshō Kōseikai negotiated its position
within the broader economy of care by inquiring what specific gaps Risshō Kōseikai
tried to tackle. I discuss how these efforts helped address various demands and
articulate a social role for the religious organisation. The chapter starts from the
latest initiatives implemented by Kōseikai in response to current societal challenges,
notably issues related to ageing within both congregations and society at large, to
outline present patterns of social care provision. Besides fulfilling missionary and
organisational aims, addressing the gaps in Japan’s welfare system offered the
opportunity to carve out a space for the religious organisation within the broader
economy of care. The chapter illustrates how, based on the demands addressed by
members, Kōseikai’s role was articulated in terms of continuity or complementarity
with the main institutions involved, notably family, professional providers and
public bodies. I demonstrate, however, how the ideals promoted by representatives
and practitioners at times clashed with the practical limitations affecting actual
service provision, as well as the need to negotiate roles and responsibilities with
other actors.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus inside Kōseikai to demonstrate that the negotiation of
religion also unfolds within religious institutions. I investigate the impact of
structural factors on the interpretation and implementation of welfare activities
within the organisation. The issue is unpacked by examining the process through
which the religious significance of social care activities was constructed and
negotiated at various levels, considering centre-led training courses alongside
administrative meetings and educational initiatives taking place within local centres.
I highlight how meanings and directives transmitted by the centre were not univocally received by grassroots members, but at times gave way to uncertainty, confusion, or even controversy. These issues instituted a need for negotiation, which took place in the dialogical spaces emerging at central and local levels. The chapter demonstrates that intra-congregational dynamics and configurations of power and knowledge within local congregations significantly hindered Kōseikai’s attempts to ‘fill the gaps’ in social care provision. These dynamics were exacerbated by deeper structural vulnerabilities, including institutional ossification, ageing and declining commitment of members.

Finally, Chapter 6 steps outside the boundaries of the religious organisation, to discuss how Kōseikai members and affiliated groups negotiated their social commitment and religiosity in response to the obstacles encountered in extra-congregational contexts. Individual experiences of engagement offer a glimpse into the various hurdles faced by practitioners, ranging from legal constraints related to the exclusion of religion from the public domain, to constrictions stemming from the widespread mistrust of religious institutions, and new religions more specifically. I discuss the various strategies adopted by members to overcome these obstacles and to smooth cooperation with public actors and other non-state providers, while also tackling the limitations put on the public expression of religiosity. The chapter illustrates how members creatively engaged with the blurred divide between religious and non-religious, prohibited and accepted forms of religious expression, to pursue their missionary aims in compliance with existing constraints. While these strategies allowed practitioners to partially fulfil their goals, the need to remove explicit religious connotations and markers of affiliation questioned the ability of such social welfare activities to reaffirm the relevance of religion within contemporary Japanese society.

Through the analysis of Kōseikai’s efforts to ‘fill the gaps’, this thesis sheds a light on the multi-vocality of the process through which religion is negotiated in modern societies. It unpacks the ways in which Kōseikai practitioners articulated their religiosity in social care provision, and actively engaged the gaps in the system to carve new roles for themselves in contemporary Japanese society. It also illustrates,
however, that the outcomes of these efforts were often unsuccessful. Overall, the thesis challenges the assumption that social engagement of religious actors implies a ‘resurgence’ of religion. The case of Kōseikai demonstrates that, depending on the social circumstances and institutional settings in which the negotiation of religion unfolds, welfare activities might even reinforce its marginality.
Chapter 2
The Development of Risshō Kōseikai’s Social Engagement
Religiously Inspired Welfare as ‘Filling the Gaps’

In a speech delivered in 1973 and published on the magazine Kösei,1 Niwano Nikkyō, founder of Risshō Kōseikai, reflected on how religious institutions and practitioners should think about social welfare, and how they were called to act. Religion, he argued, had always played a crucial role in social care provision, nurturing sentiments of solidarity and compassion for the most vulnerable members of society, which allowed human beings to move away from a primordial condition of competition for survival to a state of harmonious cooperation and mutual assistance. According to Niwano, although modernisation led to the emergence of institutionalised welfare systems, the fundamental values on which they were based could be already found in Buddhism. As these values began to fade, he stressed the need to re-discover the spirit of unity between the self and the other (or ‘same heart in different bodies’ itai dōshin), and invited Kōseikai members to become the driving force behind this change. He encouraged them to rekindle that spirit by devoting themselves to volunteering (borantei) and social service (hōshi katsudō) as a form of bodhisattva practice (bosatsugyō). The speech was representative of the developments occurring in that period. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Risshō Kōseikai manifested a growing commitment to social activities directed at catering for the material and spiritual needs of their members, as well as offering a contribution to local communities and Japanese society at large. Filling the ‘gaps in the system’ (seido no sukima) emerged as the leitmotiv of Kōseikai’s social activities. The organisation’s increasing engagement in the domain of social welfare and care was primarily defined in complementary terms, as tackling newly

1Shakai fukushi ni tsuite. Dō kangae, dō ugokeba ii?’ (How should we think about social welfare, and how should we act?), Kösei 10, 1973. Kösei is a monthly publication issued by Kösei Shuppansha (Kōseikai publishing company). Together with the Kösei Shinbun (weekly) it is the most widely consumed among Kōseikai members.
emerging societal and spiritual needs which were not adequately addressed by other actors.

The chapter introduces the notion of gaps in social welfare provision as venues where religion can be negotiated. I will go back at the origins of Kōseikai’s engagement in social care to investigate the factors fostering the emergence of the movement’s concern with ‘filling the gaps’ in welfare provision. This was encouraged by a combination of missionary aims, environmental circumstances, organisational developments and dynamics at work in the Japanese religious landscape. Kōseikai’s increasing involvement in the field starting from the late 1950s will be analysed within the broader framework of Japan’s welfare system, in relation to coeval developments in social service and care provision. The rise of the movement’s engagement in social welfare and care mirrored a broader trend within Japanese society at large. It coincided with a period when the limits of state and kin-provided assistance were becoming more apparent. This stirred the participation of a wide range of private or quasi-public institutions – including social welfare councils, neighbourly associations, and volunteering organisations – into informal provision of social care and community service. The mobilisation of local actors as non-state providers of support was not a new trend. Intermediate organisations between the state and the individual have played a pivotal role in social care provision in Japan throughout the modern period. This was primarily due to the tendency of the Japanese state to frame its role in strictly residual terms. The central authorities commonly tackled vulnerability by mobilising private actors rather than directly providing assistance, limiting their intervention to those cases not dealt with by kinship and community-based networks of mutual aid (Garon 1997; Goodman 2002). This dynamic did not significantly change after the end of the Pacific War, with the implementation of a state social policy and the emergence

2 Despite the significance of intermediate organisations for social care provision in Japan, they have seldom attracted academic interest. When discussing welfare, most studies tend to focus on social policies, including social security schemes, public assistance, tax regulation and social services (childcare, education, health care and long-term care for the aged or the disabled). However, as argued by Osawa Mari (2011:7) approaches narrowly focused on government-enacted policies fail to account for the fundamental role played by social units operating at the meso-level of society, such as family, community, corporations and NPOs, as providers of social goods and services, both in cooperation with the government or independently from it.
of a formal welfare system. The responsibility for the provision of social care continued to be delegated to subsidiary institutions (Estevez-Abe 2008; Iwata and Nishizawa 2008; Osawa 2011). This trend was revitalised in the 1970s, with the introduction of a new line of social policy labelled as ‘Japanese-style welfare society’, aimed at building a society rooted on the traditional values of harmony and mutual support.

Within this context, religious organisations became increasingly involved in social care provision (Shirahase 2012). This chapter shows the substantial parallels between the social activities promoted by Risshō Kōseikai and the broader dynamics of welfare provision and social transformation. It highlights the influence of environmental factors on the choices of the organisation. Changing social circumstances and newly emerging issues created new gaps for Kōseikai to address. At the same time, developments in legislation, social policy and patterns of care provision defined the guidelines for the modes of engagement chosen at institutional and individual levels. The impact of strategies of mobilisation employed by the state to marshal local actors into unwaged social service and care labour is another factor that should be considered. Together with social circumstances, internal dynamics played a pivotal role in fostering Kōseikai’s growing involvement in the domain of social welfare and care. The venues of intervention created by gaps in formal and informal provision of assistance turned into spaces of opportunity where members could pursue religious and organisational goals. This chapter discusses how the expansion of Kōseikai’s activism emerged in the aftermath of a major crisis faced by the movement in the late 1950s. This represented a watershed moment in its history and triggered a series of radical reforms that would significantly reshape its doctrine, organisational structure, missionary focus and interaction with society. The increasing engagement in social services and care provision on local scale took place as part of these transformations. Social care activities were presented as new missionary practice for changing times, addressing the increasingly complex issues faced by members and opening spaces of interaction with non-Kōseikai people. Broader dynamics at work within the Japanese religious landscape also influenced institutional choices.
and patterns of engagement. In particular, I will argue that social activities were engaged with as a means to counter a growing sense of unease toward new religious organisations. Overall, this chapter shows how ‘filling the gaps’ helped Kōseikai pursue its missionary goals, but also re-define its position within local communities and society at large.

2.1. The Dawn of Kōseikai Welfare

Like many other new religions, from its foundation Risshō Kōseikai had shown a marked concern for pragmatic problems troubling the lives of their members (Niwano 1978:99-100). As recounted by Shibata, the oldest of my participants (92 at the time of fieldwork), in origin Kōseikai was a ‘faith of practical benefits’ (goryaku no shinkō), 3 where chanting the Lotus and worshipping the ancestors made marvellous things happen. The ill would heal, and those suffering because of poverty and money problems would find a way to carry on. 4 In the early years, Kōseikai’s efforts to address the hurdles faced by people in distress was primarily channelled through faith-healing 5 and counselling activities. The majority of those approaching the movement at the time were people suffering from serious illnesses who could not afford conventional medical treatment. Alongside faith-healing and ancestor worship, hōza (Dharma sittings) 6 offered another tool to tackle everyday problems. These dynamics were not exclusive to Risshō Kōseikai, but were a common trend among Japanese new religions. The tendency to offer concrete solutions to practical problems – conventionally condensed in the expression hinbyōsō, i.e. poverty, illness and conflict – alongside religious needs, is widely acknowledged as one of the crucial factor prompting the rapid rise of new religious movements in the post-war period (Davis 1980:9; Reader 1991:198, 203; Shimazono

3 The pursuit of this-worldly benefits (genze riyaku), referring to the wide range of blessings and practical benefits that can be achieved through religious practice, is not circumscribed to new religious organisations, but could be rather regarded as distinctive of Japanese religions in general, as extensively discussed by Ian Reader and George Tanabe (1988:2-7).

4 Interview 20/06/2017.

5 In its early years, Kōseikai presented a rather eclectic doctrine, a recurrent feature in Japanese new religious movements (Prohl 2012:247; Reader 1991:197-98). The newly founded movement incorporated the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and of Nichiren combined with ancestor veneration, divination techniques, elements of faith-healing, ascetic practices and spirit possession.

6 See Chapter 1.
As Japan emerged from the war materially and spiritually devastated, the capacity of these movements to offer assistance, solidarity networks and an emotional place of belonging was instrumental for their success. This was especially true among displaced urban migrants who had abandoned their native communities and were deprived of the material and emotional support that they offered (Prohl and Nelson 2012:4-5; Watanabe M. 2011:69-70). Besides expressive effectiveness, the important instrumental functions fulfilled by new religious organisations were also paramount to their rise. Helen Hardacre (1984:10, 30-34) discussed this in her study on Reiyūkai, another Nichiren-oriented Buddhist organisation to which Niwano Nikkyō and Naganuma Myōkō originally belonged. The reform of religious legislation was another crucial factor prompting the post-war growth of new religious movements. In 1947, religious freedom was legally recognised by the new constitution, and the Religious Corporation Law (Shūkyō hōjin hō), promulgated in 1951, which defined the rights of religious institutions as juridical persons and granted them tax breaks. This fostered an impressive increase in the number of new religious organisations officially created in these years.

7 The end of World War II was followed by a period of rapid expansion of new religious movements in Japan, especially in urban areas. Risshō Kōseikai was also interested by this trend. In the post-war years the organisation began to expand outside the Tokyo metropolitan area, and experienced an impressive increase in its membership, which went from 6000 households in 1951 to 9000 households in 1952, and reached 20000 households in 1954 (Matsuno 1985:441). The first issue of Kōseikai annals (Kōseikai Nenkan), published in 1957, reports a membership of 22546 households for the year 1956.

8 Reiyūkai is a lay Buddhist organisation founded in 1925 by Kubo Kakutarō and Kotani Kimi, his sister-in-law. The movement focuses on ancestor veneration, claiming that inadequate performance of memorial rites represents the main root of personal and social problems. Memorial rites were combined with ascetic practices, elements of faith-healing and spirit mediumship (Hardacre 1984; Kisala 1999; Morioka 1979). Niwano had joined Reiyūkai due to the illness of one of his daughters, and under the guidance of the district leader Arai Sukenobu, became a faithful member. He was also the one who convinced Naganuma Myōkō to join the movement. Together, the two set up a successful branch, and in 1938 decided to abandon Reiyūkai to start their own movement.

9 These included several movements that had been disbanded by the government or that had been forced to register under recognised religious institutions (e.g. Sect Shinto) in the pre-war period, which had been marked by an increasingly strict surveillance on religious activities and repression of religious organisations. Ōmoto probably offers the most representative example in this respect (See Stalker 2008; Staemmler 2011). Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai had collapsed after the arrest of its founder Makiguchi Tsunesaburō and other leading members under the accusation of lese majeste in 1943, and was re-established after the war as Sōka Gakkai by Toda Jōsei, Makiguchi’s most fervent disciple. As for movements breaking free from affiliation with established religious institutions, we could mention Tenrikyō, which before the war had registered under one of the recognised Shinto Sects.
Alongside practices addressing the material and spiritual concerns of members, from the end of the Pacific War Kōseikai became actively involved also in social welfare in a stricter sense. This was expressed in the institution of a series of welfare facilities and participation in various forms of service to the community. These included fundraising and charitable initiatives, support for vulnerable members, cleaning and maintenance activities, visits at local hospitals and care facilities. A significant development was the institution of the first social enterprises, inaugurated by the foundation of Kōsei Kindergarten (Kōsei Ikujien) in 1949 in Wada (Suginami, Tokyo). These events mirrored coeval trends in the broader framework of Japan’s welfare system and social policy, as pointed out by Kuroda, the director of one of the facilities presently managed by the organisation. When we were discussing the dawn of Kōseikai’s engagement in social care provision, Kuroda highlighted the overlap between the institution of the first welfare enterprises and fundamental legal changes in the field. The post-war years represented a crucial moment for the development of Japan’s social care system, triggered by the legislative reforms initiated during the period of Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952). The starting point of this process can be found in the establishment of a system of public assistance based on six main laws. Known as the ‘Six Laws of Welfare’ (fukushi roppō), these were developed from poverty relief measures introduced after the war. These laws laid the foundation for a generalised system of mutual assistance known as the Public Livelihood Protection (seikatsu hogo), which was meant as a departure from the fragmented patchwork of pre-war relief policies. The Public Livelihood Protection Law (Seikatsu hogo hō), promulgated in

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10 In 1953, it was expanded with the inclusion of junior and senior high school education facilities and reconstituted as Kōsei School Complex (Kōsei Gakuen). Kōsei General Hospital (Kōsei Byōin) was instituted in 1952, followed some years later by a nursery school (Kōsei Senmon Gakkō) (Inoue 1996:314; Niwano 1968:122).

11 Interview 20/04/2017.

1946 and revised in 1950, instituted a responsibility for the state to guarantee a minimum living standard for every citizen. Similar rights were granted by the 1947 Constitution (Estevez-Abe 2008; Iwata and Nishizawa 2008). Risshō Kōseikai’s debut in the field of poverty relief and social welfare provision occurred in parallel with these developments. As Kuroda noted, in the same year as the promulgation of the Social Welfare Act (*Shakai Fukushi hō*), which instituted the category of ‘social welfare corporations’ (*shakai fukushi hōjin*), Niwano Nikkyō submitted the documentation for the establishment of Kōseikai General Hospital (Kōsei Byōin), inaugurated in the following year. Kuroda stressed that the principles defined in the hospital’s statute adhered to the basic premises set by the law, particularly their offer of free health care to people in need. He spoke about this coincidence as a ‘miracle’, since Founder Niwano was allegedly unaware of the law, and decided to institute a hospital out of his desire to help people in distress. Kuroda saw that as the proof that both developments shared a common foundation. Social welfare facilities, he added, offered a way to put the faith of Kōseikai into practice (*shinkō wo jitsugen shite iru*).

Kuroda’s account effectively conveyed the idea that social welfare activities were a combined product of social circumstances, which moulded the shape taken by institutional and individual engagement, and missionary aims. These initiatives were motivated by the need to address pressing social issues faced by members as well as a willingness to offer a contribution to the surrounding communities. Yet, from its foundation, Kōseikai-sponsored welfare and care activities also carried a marked missionary connotation. For example, visits to hospitals and care facilities (both Kōseikai-managed and external) conducted from the 1950s often combined instrumental and expressive functions (assistance to caregiving staff and emotional support to recipients) with aspects of doctrinal propagation and spiritual guidance.13 The notion of social care as missionary practice was articulated in two

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13 Examples of these activities can be found on Kōseikai publications from the 1950s, such as early issues of the magazines *Kōsei* and *Kōsei Shinbun*. The use of the expression ‘hospital proselytisation’ (*byōin fukyō*) to refer to these visits can be seen as indicative of their marked missionary connotation. These episodes appear in stark contrast with present circumstances, marked by stricter regulations over religious expression in public spaces, as discussed in Chapter 6.
ways. Firstly, social care activities were attributed value as a salvific tool, based on Köseikai’s this-worldly conception of salvation. Salvation is understood as liberation from suffering and the realisation of a state of happiness and fullness resulting from a harmonious relation with the cosmos, to be achieved in this life.\footnote{Such a conception of salvation is by no means unique to Köseikai, but rather regarded as a common feature among Japanese new religious organisations (Reader 1991; Shimazono 2004), stemming from a ‘vitalistic’ cosmology, rooted in the principles of interconnectedness and interdependence of all existence, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.} In doctrinal terms, the concept of non-duality between material and spiritual dimensions (busshin ichinyo 物心一如, non-duality of body and mind) was central to the articulation of the missionary character of social welfare activities. Salvation was commonly narrated as a state of well-being encompassing both material and emotional or spiritual dimensions, as extensively discussed by the founder. In a speech from 1964, reported in the Yakushin magazine,\footnote{‘Fukushi kokka no genjitsu wo mezashi’ (Aiming at the realisation of a welfare state), Yakushin 8, 1964. Yakushin is a monthly publication specifically directed at the Youth Division (Seinenbu).} Niwano observed that, although religious practitioners tended to focus on the spiritual dimension, it was also important to address material needs. He argued that it became harder to pursue spiritual development when the basic standards for life were not met. As epitomised by the notion of busshin ichinyo, in his opinion these dimensions were one, both had to be addressed in order to save human beings. These ideas were also employed to justify the strong reliance on faith-healing, divination and the pursuit of practical benefits marking the early years. Niwano argued that the harsh conditions experienced by Japanese people undermined their readiness to embrace Köseikai teachings. As such he called for a ‘practical approach’ directed at relieving suffering and addressing pressing concerns (Niwano 1978:95-99). Social welfare activities were another means serving that purpose, fostering spiritual salvation alongside material well-being. Besides their intrinsic value as salvific means, welfare activities served missionary aims by instituting venues for personal interaction. This provided practitioners with opportunities to engage with members of the congregation in need of guidance, but also to reach out to people outside Köseikai. These activities, thus, supported missionary efforts by opening spaces for doctrinal propagation and the provision of spiritual guidance. This missionary value would
become increasingly important in parallel with later organisational developments, and the subsequent expansion of Köseikai’s social engagement between the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Another way in which the religious organisation took care of the material needs of the destitute were social insurance schemes, primarily directed at members. This fact emerged in the conversation with Kuroda, who was one of the directors of Kösei Lifeplan (Fig. 1), a welfare enterprise offering social insurance schemes and home care services. Köseikai Lifeplan was initially instituted in the early 1950s as a mutual aid association (gojokai),16 offering loans to members experiencing financial strain due to death (e.g. funerary expenses) or other unfortunate circumstances, such as injury, accidents, natural disasters. Another initiative taken by the organisation was the creation of a health insurance association (kenkō hoken kumiai), set up in 1963 (Fig. 2).17

Figure 1. Former office of Kösei Lifeplan in Wada (Suginami, Tokyo).

16 Mutual aid associations (also kyōsai) are traditionally formed by groups of individuals who share a common interest. They usually operate by collecting premiums and using the funds to reimburse members facing economic loss due to predicted and unpredicted life risks. They remain today major players in Japan’s insurance market.

17 ‘Shūkyōkai de hajimete, Risshō Köseikai kenkō hoken kumiai ga hassoku’ (Launch of the health insurance association of Risshō Köseikai, the first in the religious world), Kösei shinbun n. 258, 26/7/1963.
Figure 2. Article from Kōsei shinbun. The article reports the launch of Kōseikai’s health insurance association, which offered insurance schemes primarily directed at employees and members of the religious organisation. The title presents the association as ‘the first of its kind in the religious world’.

These schemes were conceived as another way to assist members with their practical concerns and needs. They were a further expression of Kōseikai’s attempts to fill the gaps emerging in Japan’s nascent social welfare system. The laws promulgated in the aftermath of the Pacific War were meant to guarantee social security for all citizens. Yet, as Iwata Masami (2008) has argued, in reality the scope of services offered under the system was rather limited. These limits primarily stemmed from the residual position of the Public Livelihood Protection (seikatsu hogo) within broader welfare legislation. This was conceived as the ‘last resort’ to turn to for those who were not covered by other social security measures, such as those specifically directed at the aged, children or disabled. Destitute people were expected to make use of all their resources and capabilities before applying for public assistance, which included the ability to work, but also the support provided by their kin and community. The system was thus marked by a strong reliance on ‘subsidiarity’ (Esping-Andersen 1990), i.e. the idea that citizens’ needs should be met first by family members, and that the state should intervene only if they have
no capacity to do so. In this respect, the emerging welfare state reproduced the
dynamics that had characterised public assistance in the pre-war period, when the
authorities preferred to outsource care responsibilities by subsidising intermediate
institutions rather than directly providing social services (Garon 1997).

These policies resulted in the emergence of a two-tier system based on the
combination between an informal provision of care within the family and corporate-
based welfare benefits, rooted in the so-called ‘male-breadwinner model’. This
model had as its basic unit the household, constructed on a gendered functional
division of labour. The husband was the main wage earner and provider of
household income, and the wife was responsible for domestic unpaid labour and
caring duties toward children and the elderly (Estevez-Abe 2008; Goodman 2002;
Osawa 2011). The second fundamental premise on which Japan’s welfare state
was built was the role of companies as provider of welfare benefits. Historically, this
was rooted in paternalistic conceptions of the master-apprentice relationships
characterising small size firms in the early modern period. Companies offered to
take on part of the state’s role, acting as a safety net for their employees, in
exchange for their unconditioned loyalty on one side, and government support on
the other. Social security schemes operated by enterprises were subsidised by the
state through ‘functional equivalent programmes’ such as financial incentives (e.g.
tax breaks), market regulation interventions etc. In terms of company-provided

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18 The system equated livelihood security with security of income, assuming that, once the income-
earning capability of the ‘male breadwinner’ was guaranteed the household would be self-sufficient
in addressing the needs of its members (Estevez-Abe 2008; Osawa 2011). As discussed by Osawa
Mari (2011), the male breadwinner model provided the blueprint for the creation and development
of the welfare state during the latter half of the twentieth century, firstly in the United Kingdom and
then internationally.

19 The notion of company as an ‘extended family’, undermined by the emergence of a capitalist
economy, was resurrected in the post-war years with the development of a distinctive employment
system informed by familial nuances, where workers’ devotion and commitment to the firm were
rewarded with provision of welfare benefits, seniority-based promotion and security of income
through life-long employment (Kondo, 1990:165-75).

20 Margarita Estévez-Abe (2008:3-8) spoke of functional equivalent programmes in relation to
mechanisms directed at ensuring citizens’ welfare located outside orthodox social security policies,
either by protecting their income (e.g. tax relief, employment protection measures) or promoting
private welfare provision (market-based social services, corporate welfare benefits and schemes,
informal care work performed by families).
welfare benefits, corporate housing, occupational pension and health insurance schemes probably offer the most relevant examples.

Within this context, the social insurance schemes and services provided by Risshō Kōseikai offer an interesting example of how the religious organisation articulated its efforts to ‘fill the gaps’. These schemes illustrate how they sought to address existing societal and religious needs of members by mimicking emerging forms of social care provision. As Kuroda put it, regardless of what the relationship between religion and social welfare actually was – whether the former influenced the latter or vice versa – ‘that Risshō Kōseikai and Japan’s welfare system were proceeding in parallel was a fact’. In his opinion, that was because poverty relief and support for the weak lay at the heart of Kōseikai faith. For Kuroda, this was true at the time of the founder, and remained so despite the radical transformation of society. He emphasised how, even though the initiatives undertaken by the organisation had changed with the passing of time, their fundamental core remained the same. It was the way in which they put the teachings into practice that mutated in parallel with changing circumstances. \(^{21}\) Besides social transformations and missionary concerns, however, there were also other relevant factors fostering the progressive expansion of Kōseikai’s involvement in social welfare and care. Internal dynamics and structural alterations were dictated by organisational needs. In particular, these developments appear tightly related to the response to a major crisis that Risshō Kōseikai came to face in the latter half of the 1950s. As discussed in the following section, this crisis seriously threatened its existence, and prompted a series of reforms that would significantly change the face of the organisation, as well as its interaction with society.

### 2.2. The 1950s Crisis and its Aftermath

The years 1954-1957 marked a threshold in the history of Risshō Kōseikai. In these years, the movement encountered a number of challenges, including legal charges, media criticism, decline of membership, the threat of legal dissolution and internal

\(^{21}\) Interview 20/04/2017.
The startling expansion of new religions following the end of the Pacific War, and especially their active involvement in the social and political life of the country, attracted growing criticism from the media. These movements were criticised for their aggressive methods of proselytisation, accused of encouraging superstition and irrational thought, criminal activities (sex scandals, drug abuse, money laundering), financial exploitation of members, and violations of social norms of behaviour (Dorman 2012b:207). See also Baffelli 2016.

Until this moment Risshō Kōseikai had not experienced major conflicts with the authorities, apart from a minor incident in 1943, when Niwano and Naganuma were arrested under the Peace Preservation Law (Chian iji hō), with the accusation of ‘confusing people’s minds’ with Myōkō’s spiritual guidance, interrogated and released after two and three weeks respectively. Although the incident caused a decline in membership, Risshō Kōseikai managed to overcome it relatively unscathed (Niwano 1978:116-20).

Firstly, the newspaper accused Risshō Kōseikai of being a ‘bogus religion’ making a profit out of its members, exhorting donations through various means, including threats of ‘divine punishment’ (tenbatsu). Secondly, Kōseikai was vehemently attacked for its religious practice, in particular for faith-healing and the use of divination for proselytisation purposes. Leaders were accused of resorting to prophecies to scare people, in order to encourage them to join the movement or to
proceedings and media attacks went on, the case increasingly assumed a political dimension, with the launch of several investigations by the Diet. Niwano, together with some representative members, was summoned by the Ministry of Justice to respond to the accusations in front of the House of Representatives. The parliamentary investigations went on for several months, but eventually found no material evidence of violations of human rights. At the same time the legal procedures in the Suginami purchase came to an end (Morioka 1994; Murō 1979; Risshō Kōseikai 1983). Concurrently, the conflict with Shiraishi was also approaching a settlement, reached when Kōseikai agreed to the institution of an advisory board to monitor the movement’s activities and discuss the conformity of its teachings to the contents of the Lotus Sutra. As a result, media interest in Kōseikai progressively declined, and the Yomiuri significantly reduced its reports in the latter half of 1956. The tensions produced by the many challenges faced by Kōseikai greatly affected its internal stability. In particular, the incident further aggravated the power imbalance that had emerged in the formerly egalitarian relationship between the two leaders.\footnote{In this first stage, Risshō Kōseikai was structured around a dual-leadership balance or ‘dual-sensei system’ (Risshō Kōseikai 1983:215), based on a functional division of roles between the founders. Naganuma performed spirit possessions and faith-healing, while Niwano devoted to the study of divination techniques and Buddhist teachings, and used them to interpret Naganuma’s visions. However, in time Naganuma emerged as the central figure of Kōseikai by virtue of her personal charisma and success in attracting new members (Niwano 1978:134).} Niwano was increasingly marginalised within the leadership, and a movement to set up an independent organisation centred on the co-foundress emerged. The attempt, though, was prevented by a sudden worsening in Naganuma’s health condition, followed by her death in 1957.

The trials of these years eventually proved beneficial. They triggered a set of radical transformations that allowed Kōseikai to successfully overcome the delicate phase of institutionalisation and emerge as a consolidated movement with more coherent teachings and a stable organisational configuration (Morioka 1979, 1994). The first step in this direction was the concentration of religious authority in the hands of Niwano, a choice of necessity for the Kōseikai leadership after Myōkō’s death. The reunification of the power structure found expression in the ‘Manifestation of
Truth’, a radical doctrinal reform announced by Niwano in 1958. This brought about a substantial rationalisation and systematisation of Köseikai’s doctrine, with the earlier focus on divination and spirit possession deemphasised in favour of a firmer collocation within a Buddhist framework. The reform responded to Köseikai’s need to reaffirm its character as a lay Buddhist movement rooted in the Lotus Sutra, as well as to counter accusations of irrationality made by Shiraishi and the Yomiuri shinbun. To explain this transition, Niwano resorted to a fundamental concept of Mahayana Buddhism, the notion of ‘skilful means’ (hōben), which refers to the various expedients or ‘provisional teachings’ that can be used to guide people towards the truth.\(^{26}\) He justified the use of faith-healing, divine revelations and fortune-telling in the early years of Köseikai in these terms. The death of Naganuma, which deprived Risshō Köseikai of ‘the medium to hear the voice of gods’, was to be interpreted as a sign that the phase of ‘skilful means’ was over, opening a new age focused on the propagation of the ultimate teachings of the Lotus Sutra (Niwano 1978:160-62). Doctrine was re-formulated with a central focus on the Lotus as repository of the ultimate truth. In particular, the teaching of the One Vehicle, regarded as the core of Mahayana Buddhism, was emphasised and integrated with elements of ‘fundamental Buddhism’,\(^{27}\) such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Law of the Twelve Causes and the Six Perfections (Mukhopadhyāya 2005; Niwano 1976; Risshō Köseikai 1983). The figure of the bodhisattva\(^{28}\) was set as a fundamental behavioural model for Köseikai members. They were exhorted to ‘follow the bodhisattva way’ (bosatsugyō) in the pursuit of self-perfection and the salvation of all sentient beings. Missionary practice and perfection of the character were instituted as the core religious goals and true means to achieve both universal and individual salvation (Risshō Köseikai 1983:289). The announcement of the

\(^{26}\) The notion of hōben (skilful means) is introduced in the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, as the range of expedients or ‘provisional teachings’ used by the Buddha to make the ultimate truth of the Lotus intelligible to all living beings, according to their different degrees of spiritual advancement and understanding of the teachings. For further details refer to Pye 2003; Teiser and Stone 2009.

\(^{27}\) The notion of fundamental Buddhism (konpon bukkyō) was elaborated by the scholar Anesaki Masaharu in his attempt to retrace the ‘original form’ of Buddhism, from which both Teravada and Mahayana traditions supposedly developed. For further details see Isomae 2002.

\(^{28}\) In Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva indicates a being destined to enlightenment that chooses not to attain buddhahood immediately in order to save all sentient beings.
Manifestation of Truth was accompanied by a series of proselytisation initiatives on national scale.\(^{29}\) These were followed by the launch of a wide range of doctrinal courses, including training programmes for members of the administration, seminars addressing young members and the publication of textbooks (Morioka 1979:253; Niwano 1978:162).\(^{30}\)

These developments signalled a broadening of the missionary scope of Köseikai, which was also among the factors fostering the substantial organisational restructuring that followed the Manifestation of Truth. In the latter half of the 1950s, Risshō Köseikai had already started to reorganise its legal structure by incorporating subordinate bodies, and assumed a more efficient configuration constituted by many local chapters under a central headquarters. As with other new religious movements, its rapid development, both in terms of increase of membership and geographical expansion, encouraged a transition from a vertical structure centred on relationships resulting from missionary activities (*oyako kankei*, lit. ‘parent-child relationship’), to a more efficient horizontal configuration of local branches based on geographical proximity (Watanabe M. 2011). The ‘national block system’ was implemented in 1960, and further organisational reforms followed shortly after, with the introduction of a system of local units (Morioka 1979:259-60; Risshō Köseikai 1983:311-15). The implementation of the new system had important repercussions for religious and social activities alike. The reorganisation in geographic units resulted in individual congregations becoming more firmly rooted within their neighbourhoods, which enhanced a sense of locality (*chiikisei*) and a stronger perception of Köseikai as part of the community. On the other hand, this shift also contributed to reinforce the missionary efforts of practitioners, now more strongly channelled toward members of their neighbourhoods and regions.

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\(^{29}\) This transition was also marked by the establishment of the Eternal Buddha (*honbutsu*, embodied by a golden statue placed in the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo) as the *gohonzon* (true object of faith), replacing the Nichiren’s calligraphy of the *daimoku* (title of Lotus Sutra), still today regarded as the main object of veneration by most Nichiren-oriented Buddhist movements, as for example Sōka Gakkai. The reform thus lowered the position of Nichiren in favour of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, and can be said to mark Köseikai’s detachment from the Nichiren school.

\(^{30}\) As noted by Norbeck (1970:37), emphasis on doctrinal learning was not unique to Köseikai, but rather an expression of a broader trend initiated by Sōka Gakkai and lately adopted by several other movements in the same years.
These dynamics stemmed from a broader re-formulation of Kōseikai’s missionary focus, expressed by the re-definition of the proselytisation goal ‘from individual salvation to the salvation of society’, formalised in 1966 with the presentation of new guidelines for Kōseikai’s activities. Under the slogan ‘Faith for all the citizens and spirit of unlimited compassion’, Niwano broadened the missionary scope of the organisation to embrace the entire society and ultimately the world. He invited members to actively engage in local communities with the purpose of spreading the teachings of Buddhism and fulfil their mission to save mankind (Risshō Kōseikai 1983:343-44).


During the 1960s, the expansion of Kōseikai’s missionary goals, together with its organisational reconfiguration, fuelled a significant rise in social activism on local scale. The shift in the missionary focus boosted members’ involvement in community service and social activities with the intent to reach out to non-Kōseikai residents of their area, but also to fulfil obligations to contribute to the well-being of the community at large. 31 The tight inter-relation between doctrinal developments and social welfare activities can also be seen in the testimony of Shibata, the elderly member mentioned above. She recounted how, shortly after the introduction of doctrinal training courses, it was announced that Kōseikai members were to devote themselves to the service of others and the improvement of society, which meant to spread Koseikai teachings and ‘gain new converts’ (shinja wo fuyasu) but also to engage in social welfare (fukushi). 32 These years saw an evolution of early sporadic examples of volunteering into more consolidated forms of engagement on a larger scale. The Youth Division (Seinenbu) of Kōseikai had a pioneering role in this transition, embarking on a wide range of projects directed

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31 A further outcome of the organisational reforms of these years was the emergence of a hierarchy of missionary leaders rooted in the local territory. The new configuration not only granted a more efficient approach to missionary practice, thanks to the proximity of practitioners and spiritual leaders, but also laid the foundation for the locally-based system of mutual assistance and care provision that developed in the course of the following decades, as discussed in Chapter 4.

32 Interview 20/06/2017.
beyond the boundaries of the congregation. These included inter-religious cooperation, charitable initiatives and donations, volunteering in hospitals and care facilities, and forms of community service such as road maintenance, rubbish collection, and so forth. The presence of a large and highly-motivated Youth Division, which powered the movement’s engagement in social service and volunteering on a local scale, can be undoubtedly listed among the organisational assets which supported the initiatives implemented in these years, and more specifically Kōseikai’s attempts to fill the gaps in social welfare provision.\[^{33}\]

These developments were part of a more general expansion of the scope of the activities of the organisation on local, national and international scale. Alongside social welfare these encompassed inter-faith dialogue and cooperation, political activism, humanitarian aid and peace work.\[^{34}\] Despite their variety, all these developments originally stemmed from the initiatives – doctrinal systematisation, organisational restructuring and re-definition of the missionary focus – undertaken in response to the crisis faced in the latter half of the 1950s. In this respect, the organisational and personal skills of the founder, who was able to successfully lead the movement out of the crisis and build connections with other religious leaders and influential figures, played a pivotal role in this transition (Murō 1979). Kōseikai leadership proved capable of keeping track with the significant changes taking place in Japanese society, and especially major trends in social welfare provision and community service, as shown by the initiatives undertaken in these years.

### 2.3.1. Building a ‘Brighter Society’: Social Imbalances and the Launch of Meisha

During the 1960s, Japan began to experience the costs of a political agenda narrowly focused on economic development. The government’s tendency to outsource social services had been instrumental in curtailing public expenditure on

\[^{33}\] It seems worthy to note that these circumstances have greatly changed in the following decades. At present, Kōseikai’s membership is experiencing a state of stagnation and demographic ageing, while the generational turnover in the leadership – with Niwano Nichikō, eldest son of Nikkyō, assuming the presidency in 1991 – also undermined the organisation’s capacity to tackle pressing societal needs, and fill the gaps in the welfare system, as discussed later in the thesis.

\[^{34}\] As further discussed later in the chapter.
welfare policy, allowing it to channel its efforts and resources towards recovery and industrial growth. The startling economic rise experienced by Japan from the late 1950s was, however, not accompanied by equal social development. Japan lacked a comprehensive system of social security. At the same time, industrialisation and rapid economic growth triggered a series of radical social transformations that threatened the stability of the system in place. This questioned the adequacy of an approach to welfare provision based on the state’s heavy reliance on intermediate institutions. Massive urbanisation encouraged de-centralisation toward suburban areas, fostering the creation of new town neighbourhoods with no pre-existing social network or community tradition (Fukutake 1982:135-36). Further relevant transformations affected the family. These years were marked by a progressive nuclearisation of the household, accompanied by demographic transition to low fertility, an increase in life expectancy and subsequent acceleration of ageing. Shrinking families continued to be entrusted with the task of guaranteeing the well-being of their members, but became increasingly unable to do so, especially in concomitance with the decline of wider networks of support within neighbourhoods (Izuhara 2003; White 2002). In these years, both the assumptions upon which Japanese welfare system had been built – that the rapid economic growth would continue indefinitely and that the population would remain relatively young – were challenged. As a result a set of hidden institutional vulnerabilities emerged, including inequality in social protection granted to alternative types of households and excessive reliance on women as main providers of care (Estevez-Abe 2008; Laratta 2010; Osawa 2011).

Among the strategies employed by the state to partially compensate for these flaws was the promotion of informal provision of social assistance within local communities. From the early post-war years, government agencies were devoted to the creation and promotion of institutional volunteer groups. These included networks of government-appointed social workers, such as the ‘voluntary district commissioner’ system (minsei’in seido), as well as regional groups such as

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35 The District Commissioner system (minsei’in seido) was originally established in the 1930s as a national system of assistance inspired to a German model, centred on voluntary social workers
neighbourly associations, which were used to mobilise citizens and implement various welfare initiatives and volunteering programmes (Avenell 2010; Haddad 2010). The expansion of community service, however, was also part of a more general increase in social activism on a local scale, which found expression in an impressive rise of civil movements and organisations. In particular, the rise, from the late 1960s, of citizens’ movements addressing political, socio-economic and environmental issues significantly contributed to this trend. It also encouraged a shift in popular consciousness about volunteering, reflected in the adoption of the neologism *boranteia katsudō* (volunteering activities, derived from the English ‘volunteer’), which began to appear on media and Japanese dictionaries from the early 1970s. This neologism expressed a new conception of social engagement based on free will and individual choice, in contrast with traditional forms of service to the community imbued in mutual obligations (Georgeou 2010:468-69; Nakano L. 2000, 2005).  

For Risshō Kōseikai, in 1969 the increasing social engagement at the local level found its major expression in the launch of the Movement for a Brighter Society (Akarui shakai zukuri undō, Meisha for short), a cooperative initiative between Kōseikai churches, welfare facilities, civic movements and local administrations with the common aim of building a ‘brighter’ society. The name of the movement was inspired to the maxim ‘brighten your corner’ (*ichigu wo terasu*), contained in the writings of Saichō (766/67-822, founder of the Tendai school of Japanese Buddhism), which also condensed one of the basic concepts behind the launch of the movement, the idea that social transformation started from change in individual beings and small social groups, namely family and local community. Niwano

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36 At this stage, however, the development of voluntary activities and civil organisations remained limited, and primarily confined to the domain of service to the community. One of the factors hindering the expansion of civil engagement can be found in legal constraints imposed to Japanese non-governmental organisations, whose activities were subordinated to strict supervision from central government agencies. These circumstances changed after the 1995 Hanshin earthquake, which represented another watershed moment for social activism in Japan, as discussed in Chapter 4.
believed that, if everyone were devoted to spread happiness in their immediate surroundings, the combined efforts would result in a general expansion of harmonious relationships across society, nation, and ultimately the world (Niwano 1978:252-54, 1979:17-19; Risshō Kōseikai 1983:361-62). The initiative was launched through a series of conferences across Japan, held between 1969 and 1970. Besides promoting Meisha’s basic rationale, these events also served a more practical purpose, which was to lay a foundation for cooperative networks at a local level by reaching out to representatives of local institutions and community leaders. Kōsei shinbun, Kōsei, and Yakushin covered Meisha conferences extensively. Throughout the 1970s they regularly featured stories of social engagement of individual members or locally-based groups, contributing to foster practitioners’ involvement in the service of their communities.

The launch of Meisha appeared to be in line with Kōseikai’s newly re-formulated religious goals. By fostering interaction and cooperation with local institutions and members of the community, social activities provided members with spaces to engage with non-Kōseikai people, and thus with opportunities to carry out doctrinal propagation and proselytisation. These developments were also meant as a response to changing circumstances and needs, aimed at eradicating social ills and sources of suffering troubling members and non-members alike. As mentioned above, in its early years Kōseikai had focused on forms of religious practice that could offer rapid solutions to practical problems related to the most basic needs of everyday life. As the social context mutated in response to economic growth, the same factors affecting patterns of formal and informal provision of care within Japanese society at large, such as rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, demographic transition and change in family structures, fostered a shift in the instrumental and expressive demands of members (Risshō Kōseikai 1983:353).  

New challenges called for a re-formulation of religious practice. Founder Niwano firmly believed in the need for religion to renovate itself in response to changing  

37 Such a shift was also reflected by changes in the main motivations for joining Risshō Kōseikai and in the nature of problems discussed during hōza, which tendentiously shifted from illness and economic hardship to issues of psychological distress or strained interpersonal relations (Oshima 1975).
social circumstances, and especially stressed the importance of adapting missionary activities according to emerging issues. This, he argued, was necessary to bring human beings toward ‘authentic salvation’ (honshitsu no sukui, Ibid:353), encompassing both the material and spiritual dimensions. As discussed in an article that appeared in Kōsei shinbun in 1975, under the informative title of ‘The practice of welfare is the bodhisattva way’, the diversification and increasing complexity of issues faced by members in this period called for a new approach ‘in order to save people and help them achieve self-sufficiency’. As such, ‘it [was] important to rethink Buddhism from the perspective of several disciplines and make use of social resources to achieve salvation for both material and spiritual sides’. This called for the development of ‘Buddhist welfare’ (bukkyō fukushi), which relied on resources and knowledge from the domain of social care to carry on a bodhisattva practice aimed at saving people (Fig. 3). Publications in these years manifested a marked awareness of the ongoing social transformations and major trends in social care provision. They also demonstrated a willingness to spread knowledge about these changes, which inevitably contributed to shaping the priorities and modes of engagement of the organisation and its grassroots practitioners. The movement appeared particularly concerned about issues related to the diversification of family structures and the perceived weakening of communal ties caused by urbanisation and economic development. Gaps emerging in the system were identified as privileged venues of intervention. Kōseikai members were called to offer assistance to displaced and destitute individuals who were not catered for within traditional safety networks (Risshō Kōseikai 1983:579).

38 ‘Bosatsugyō to wa fukushi no jissen’ (The practice of welfare is the bodhisattva way), Kōsei shinbun n. 814 28/2/1975.
Figure 3. Article from Kōsei shinbun. The article, titled ‘The bodhisattva way is the practice of social welfare’ (Bosatsu-gyō to wa fukushi no jissen) offers an overview of the activities carried out by attendees of the social welfare course within their congregations. It especially focuses on the launch of ‘counselling rooms’ (sodan-shitsu) where members could share their concerns and seek advice on social welfare matters (see enclosed picture).
The lack of support for elderly people within local communities, resulting from the demographic transition toward an ageing population and the change in family structures and residential patterns, represented a particularly pressing concern. Issues related to elderly care began to appear with increasing frequency on the pages of the *Kōsei shinbun* from the late 1960s and were particularly prevalent in the 1970s. They commonly included testimonials of individual members or church-based groups engaging in informal provision of social assistance to frail elderly within their local communities. These efforts were often channelled through institutionalised forms of volunteering, notably the district commissioner system. An article from 1963, for example, presented the case of a member serving as *minsei’in*, devoted to the care of local elderly people living alone, most of whom were bedridden. The article underlined how the services they offered were not limited to instrumental aspects of care and bodily needs of recipients, but also carried missionary value. The *minsei’in* ‘relied on the Dharma to solve the problems faced by his assisted’, advising them on the basis of the teachings.\(^{39}\) In general, patterns of social engagement reported in the publications reflected coeval developments in the domain of social welfare and care provision. An article from 1973, for example, introduced the figure of the home-helper, representative of an emerging sector of home-based care services for the elderly, at this stage primarily sustained by independent volunteering (Fig. 4).\(^{40}\)

\(^{39}\) ‘Mondai wo gohō de kaiketsu’ (Solving problems with the Dharma), *Kōsei Shinbun* n. 275, 6/12/1963.

\(^{40}\) ‘Omowazu ureshi namida ga’ (Involuntary tears of happiness), in *Kōsei Shinbun* n. 711, 01/05/1973.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the introduction of welfare schemes directed at the elderly was accompanied by an expansion and increasing professionalisation of the sectors of nursing care and home-based care services.
2.3.2. Learning to Care: Social Welfare Training Programmes and the ‘Japanese-style Welfare Society’

The need to tackle changing social circumstances and care needs encouraged another crucial development of this period, the introduction of a dedicated training system. The most relevant initiative in this respect was the launch of the Course for Social Welfare (shakai fukushi kōza), inaugurated in 1972 and primarily directed at administrative personnel. It was part of a broader process expanding the scope of the training system, which integrated core courses centred on the Lotus Sutra with
non-doctrinal content, more closely related with everyday life problems.\(^{41}\) Spiritual guidance provided through conventional missionary tools (hōza, tedori and michibiki)\(^ {42}\) at times failed to address the increasingly diverse and complex issues faced by members. This was especially the case when dealing with strictly practical concerns, such as lack of livelihood security or difficulties with caring for vulnerable family members. As such, the Kōseikai leadership deemed it necessary to equip religious leaders and administrative personnel with specialist knowledge and methodologies that could help them tackle contemporary social ills and better assist people in distress.

The introduction of training programmes was instrumental to the systematisation of social welfare activities promoted at the local level. This included the religious meanings attributed to them.\(^ {43}\) Kōseikai’s publications represented a crucial medium for the dissemination of core notions presented in training, and the promotion of social engagement within the grassroots base more generally. Speeches and sermons delivered by Niwano Nikkyō constituted one of the key references. Personal stories of grassroots members reinforced doctrinal concepts articulated by the founder or through educational initiatives. They provided examples of practical implementation that could serve as models for practitioners willing to get involved in social care. Pieces focusing on volunteering activities of the Youth Division played a pivotal role in this respect. The articles presented the efforts of young members volunteering in local welfare facilities and other forms of ‘social service’ (shakai hōshi) as a way to implement the teachings, save others and

\(^{41}\) Alongside social welfare training, the other main educational initiatives ‘directed at society’ (shakai ni mukatta kyōiku) launched in the same years were counselling courses (kaunseringu kōza), domestic education (katei kyōiku), training for educators (kyōikusha kyōiku). See ‘Bukkyō fukushi no kokoro’ (The heart of Buddhist welfare, 2\(^ {nd}\) part), Kōsei shinbun n. 2002 (26/11/1999), following from the previous issue (n. 2001, 19/11/1999).

\(^{42}\) Michibiki, tedori, hōza represent the three main forms of missionary practice in Risshō Kōseikai. As mentioned before, hōza consists in a small group discussion where members are guided to interpret everyday problems and experiences in the light of the teachings. Michibiki (guidance) refers more generally to spiritual guidance provided by missionary leaders in the context of hōza or one-to-one meetings. Tedori (lit. ‘taking the hand’) refers to the act of reaching out to people, and can be used in relation to members of the congregation (often in case of missionary leaders visiting practitioners at home) or outsiders (proselytisation).

\(^{43}\) On the codification of religious meanings through training activities see Chapter 5. Chapter 3 discusses how doctrinal interpretations for social activities contributed to reinforce members’ motivations to engage in social welfare and care by investing these activities of religious significance.
achieve spiritual growth. Stories of social engagement reported on Kōsei-kai publications of the time were integrated with more theoretical contributions discussing the core doctrinal concepts associated with these practices. These could also involve non-Kōsei-kai specialists, notably Buddhist scholars or professionals from the domain of social care. That was for example the case with a column published in Kōsei shinbun in 1973 under the title ‘Religion and Welfare’ (Shūkyō to shakai fukushi). The column, written by a university lecturer specialising in social welfare, discussed the relationship between social care and Buddhism, looking at both historical examples of social engagement of Buddhists institutions and doctrinal concepts supporting it. Here, the ‘spirit of social welfare’ was commonly put in direct correlation with Kōsei-kai teachings and the bodhisattva practice, presenting care activities as a way to use one’s faith for the benefit of society.

The dates of the example provided should ring a bell: 1973 was a crucial year for Japan’s social care system, marked by the launch of the ‘Japanese-style welfare society’ (nihongata fukushi shakai). From the late 1960s, growing demands for the implementation of social reforms had forced the government to re-discuss its political agenda. These led to the introduction of the first universal national-scale schemes for pension and health care, as well as programmes for children’s allowance and free health care for the elderly (Goodman 2002:15-16; Haddad 2010; Estevez-Abe 2008). The reforms were meant to culminate in the institution of a comprehensive, high-budget welfare regime along the lines of those developed in Western Europe (Fukutake 1982:181-82). The year 1973, when the system was to be implemented, was thus designated as the ‘first year of Japanese welfare’ (fukushi gannen). This trend, however, was brusquely interrupted by a setback in Japan’s economic growth following the Oil Shock, which imposed a drastic change of direction in social policy expressed by the launch of the ‘Japanese-style welfare

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44 ‘Chisana zen’i no jitsugyōshō’ (Award for the realisation of small acts of charity), Kōsei Shinbun n. 274, 22/11/1963; ‘Yorokonde hōshi wo’ (Joyfully devoting to service), Kōsei Shinbun n. 119, 25/09/1959.
45 ‘Shūkyō to shakai fukushi’ (Religion and social welfare), Kōsei Shinbun nn. 811-814, February 1975.
46 As stressed for example in a piece published in 1992 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the launch of the social welfare course, ‘Oshie ni nezashita “kokoro no fukushi” chaku jitsu ni’ (Consolidating a ‘welfare of the heart’ rooted in the teachings), Kōsei shinbun n. 1655, 4/9/1992.
society’. This initiative aimed at curtailing public expense in social welfare by harnessing Japan’s own ‘hidden assets’ (Laratta 2010:134). The state relied on narratives that romanticised mutual support and solidarity as distinctive traits of Japanese traditions and culture to encourage families, communities and companies to take on the major burden of social care in its stead (Bestor V. 2002:34, Danely 2014:150-52; Goodman 2002:16-23). Cultural norms prescribing a ‘moral imperative to perform one’s duty toward the other members of the group’ (Befu 1968:450), were consciously exploited by the government, promoting ‘idealised visions of a [...] society where communities had always lived co-operatively and harmoniously, caring for each other and especially for their aged and their sick’ (Thang 2002:172).

Moral campaigns were accompanied by various forms of subsidisation of local actors (Nakano L. 2000:93-94; Georgeou 2010:470), taking the form of material, financial and logistical support for volunteering groups and individuals (Avenell 2010). As part of such broader efforts to socialize care, during the 1970s, state and local authorities sponsored a wide range of ‘community building’ (machi-zukuri) initiatives, directed at reinforcing local ties. These included, for example, inter-generational exchange activities aimed at tackling the increasing isolation and social exclusion of elderly people stemming from changes in family structures and residential patterns (Thang 2002). The state’s increased reliance on private and non-profit sectors also found expression in the institutionalisation of pre-existing networks of mutual aid, whose most representative example is probably offered by social welfare councils (shakai fukushi kyōgikai, in short shakyō). Initially emerging as informal private associations within local communities across Japan, from the 1970s social welfare councils began to be institutionalised as quasi-governmental associations. They brought together city officials with community leaders and organisations involved in social welfare, such as district commissioners, neighbourly associations, voluntary organisations, engaging in a wide range of activities

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47 In their capacity as private actors heavily subsidised by the state, welfare councils occupy a liminal position along the private/public divide. The case of shakyō is not unique, but rather representative of an established pattern of cooperation between communal institutions and public bodies in Japan (Bestor T. 1989; Read and Pekkanen 2009; Van Houwelingen 2012).
encompassing direct services provision, notably care for the elderly, children and disabled (Haddad 2010:35).

Kōseikai’s initiatives of the time reflected these developments. The expansion of practitioners’ engagement in care activities and various forms of service to the community between the late 1960s and the early 1970s was accompanied by a substantial growth of pieces on social welfare and volunteering in Kōseikai publications (especially the Kōsei shinbun). These topics became even more prominent at the same time as the change of direction in social policy; further evidence that the organisation was aware of the developments taking place within the domain of social care and Japanese society at large. A column published on Yakushin in 1972 offers a noteworthy example. The column, authored by two specialists in social care, discussed major deficiencies in Japan’s social security system and changing notions of volunteering. It exhorted young members to devote themselves to the service of their community. More broadly, 1970s publications showed a growing concern for weakening communal ties, attributed to the cultural transformations allegedly accompanying economic growth. Niwano’s speeches and publications of the time blamed material affluence for causing a progressive drift away from the fundamental values of harmony and gratitude, toward materialism and self-centredness.

Inter-dependency and mutual support were placed at the foundation (genten) of the human condition, while cooperative relationships were celebrated as the basic fabric of society, which members were earnestly encouraged to restore (Niwano 1979:19). Young members were especially invited to be ‘the spark that lights the recovery of humanity’, promoting a revitalisation of

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48 Articles published in these years were primarily related to the newly launched Movement for a Brighter Society (Meisha). Besides reports of conferences held across Japan and speeches given by Niwano to promote the initiative, the newspaper granted ample space to individual and collective efforts in local branches of the movement.
49 From February to September 1972, number 2 to number 9.
50 The two columnists were respectively the secretary of a welfare association and a university professor specialising in family and children welfare. In general, collaboration with experts and professionals from the domain of social care, in most cases not members of Kōseikai, emerges as a general trend. The same approach characterised social welfare training programs, where most courses were offered by external instructors recruited among professionals and specialists of social policy, care work and so forth. See Chapter 5.
51 See for example Niwano 1979:11-16, or ‘Bukkyō no oshie wo seikatsu ni ikasō’ (Let’s put the teachings of Buddhism at use in everyday life), in Kōsei shinbun n. 536, 09/05/1969.
communal values through the service of others. These notions interestingly echoed some of the arguments made by the government in relation to the ‘beautiful customs’ of the Japanese nation, used to support community-building initiatives promoted within the framework of the ‘Japanese-style welfare society’.

More generally, state efforts to mobilise local institutions and citizens into serving as proxy providers of social assistance seemed to have exerted an influence on Risshō Kōseikai. This is suggested by an overview of the initiatives undertaken by grassroots members, reported on by publications in the same years. Attendees of social welfare courses were particularly encouraged to put the notions acquired through training to use in the context of their churches and communities, setting up social initiatives tailored on specific local needs. Welfare counselling (fukushi sōdan) represented a preeminent field of intervention. Trainees often inaugurated counselling sessions within their churches, using their expertise to offer advice over matters of social welfare and care. Alongside counselling, course graduates participated in a wide range of activities. Volunteering through the local welfare council or at nearby caring facilities (e.g. elderly homes), either on an individual basis or involving other members of the congregation, was a popular form of engagement, as was serving the community in the capacity of volunteer district commissioners, or by taking on a role within a local organisation, e.g. neighbourly associations. These developments show how Kōseikai members were actively involved in the rise of civic engagement at the local level that was taking place in Japan in the same years, and channelled through both institutionalised and independent volunteerism. Training courses in social welfare offered by the organisation played a crucial role in encouraging this trend, mobilising practitioners.

52 ‘Ningen kāfuku he no gakaribi’ (The spark for the human recovery), Yakushin 3, March 1972.
53 ‘Oshie ni nezashita ‘kokoro no fukushi’ chaku jitsu ni’ (Consolidating a ‘welfare of the heart’ rooted in the teachings), Kōsei shinbun n. 1655, 4/9/1992.
54 ‘Counselling’ (sōdan), was not primarily aimed at providing emotional support and spiritual guidance, but rather offered more practical forms of assistance, as for example information on available welfare schemes and care services, and help with the application process (See also Chapter 4). Indeed, counselling intended as psychological assistance and emotional care was commonly referred to with the expression kounseringu (transliteration of the English word).
into the service of their congregation and communities. The ‘development of human resources that can contribute to their local society’ was one of the basic goals of the courses, as often reiterated in articles showcasing the initiatives undertaken by trainees (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Article from Kōsei shinbun. The article, titled ‘A contribution to the welfare of the local society’ (Chiiki shakai no fukushi ni kōken), illustrates some of the activities conducted by the graduates of social welfare training courses. These include the institution of a ‘volunteering corner’ where welfare specialists of two congregations offered information about civic activities, volunteering and training opportunities. The article offers this as an example of how trainees can put their specialist knowledge at use in their everyday life, to benefit the congregation and community alike.

More generally, in these years volunteer development courses offered by various institutions (e.g. shakyō) were instrumental in the mobilisation of new groups of volunteers, such as housewives, elderly, youths (Avenell 2010), and still today play a crucial role in marshalling citizens into informal provision of assistance on local scale. To be further discussed in Chapter 3.
2.4. Patterns of Imitation and Competition within Japanese Religious Landscape

The examples provided above showed how narratives widespread in civic society and strategies employed by the government to marshal local actors into social care provision undoubtedly contributed to shape Kōseikai’s engagement. Nevertheless, it would be reductive to dismiss members’ initiatives as merely the result of state mobilisation, or the influence of environmental factors. As seen in relation to publications and social welfare training courses, the religious organisation itself appeared strongly committed to fostering members’ participation in social welfare activities. I have discussed above how Kōseikai’s willingness to ‘fill the gaps’ and offer a contribution to local community was tightly related to the missionary value attributed to these activities as new salvific tools for changing social times and venues of interaction with non-Kōseikai individuals and institutions. Alongside missionary aims, organisational dynamics – notably the response to the 1950s crisis – and coeval developments in Japan’s welfare system also seemed to play a relevant role in fostering Kōseikai’s venture into social care provision. Another crucial factor which should be taken into account here were broader dynamics at work within Japanese religious milieu, namely patterns of competition and cooperation with other religious institutions.

Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader (2011, 2018) have underlined the importance of considering dynamics of interaction among religious organisations, arguing that ‘new religious movements do not exist in a vacuum, but operate within a wider context in which the actions and examples of other, often rival, groups can influence the directions they take’ (Baffelli and Reader 2018:3). In the case of Kōseikai, the comparison with Sōka Gakkai is particularly relevant. The rivalry between Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai, especially in the political arena, has already been object of scholarly investigation (Murō 1979; Nakano T. 2003). In the early 1950s, Sōka Gakkai rose unexpectedly to national prominence. Its startling rise, combined with its uncompromising attitude toward other religious organisations, and active engagement in politics, which culminated in the foundation of the political party Kōmeitō in the 1960s (Ehrhardt et al. 2014; Kisala 2004; McLaughlin
2018; Nakano T. 2003), fostered political activism among new religions more generally. This was expressed by the foundation of Shinshūren (an abbreviation for Shin Nihon Shūkyō Dantai Rengōkai, the Federation of the New Religious Organisations of Japan), created in October 1951 from the fusion of two previous networks. Besides opposing Sōka Gakkai, the federation was meant to provide new religious movements with a solid platform for political representation as well as a united front against media criticism (Dorman 2012b:204). Experiences of governmental persecution suffered by some within these movements, and fears of a possible comeback of State Shinto and pre-war restrictions were other major factors encouraging new religions to seek political influence (Murō 1979; Nakano T. 2003). Kōseikai had been instrumental in the foundation of the federation, and throughout the following decades remained one of its leading members, playing a key role in shaping its political orientation. It was primarily under the aegis of the federation that Kōseikai articulated its political participation. Under the federation it also began its involvement in inter-religious cooperation, peace work and humanitarian aid on international scale,\(^{56}\) starting with the 1963 anti-nuclear campaign (Niwano 1978:191).\(^{57}\) In parallel with these developments, the choice to devote the movement to social welfare activities sought to increase the organisation’s social influence, while also avoiding the criticism associated with the more confrontational stance that had made Sōka Gakkai notorious.

\(^{56}\) These years were also marked by a growing awareness of international issues within Japanese society at large, resulting from national and global dynamics, namely: increasing globalisation of Japan’s economy, availability of information through mass media and growth in opportunities to interact with other cultures. Such changing consciousness boosted the emergence of NGOs, as well as a general increase in participation in humanitarian initiatives on an international scale (Georgeou 2010:471; Kuroda 2003).

\(^{57}\) The 1963 anti-nuclear campaign organised by Shinshūren can be regarded as the departing point of Kōseikai’s international engagement. In the following years, Niwano was invited to India by the Maha Bodhi Society, a Buddhist organisation, and to the Second Vatican Council in Rome by Pope Paul VI. In the same years, Risshō Kōseikai also established contact with the American Unitarian Universalists, became a member of the Buddhist Council for World Federation, and joined the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). The movement’s increasing engagement in inter-religious dialogue culminated with the organisation of the first World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCPR), held in Kyoto in 1970. From the 1970s, Risshō Kōseikai became increasingly active in international aid and peace work. For a more detailed overview of Kōseikai’s inter-religious and international activities see Di Febo 2016; Kisala 1999; Stone 2003; Watts 2004.
Once again, the words of Shibata offered a glimpse into the events of these years. When recounting the beginning of Köseikai’s earnest involvement in social welfare and care, she pointed out how these developments took place shortly after Sōka Gakkai had launched their massive proselytisation campaign, and had begun to engage in politics. For a while, Shibata recounted, Köseikai practitioners had devoted themselves similarly vehemently to electoral campaigning, sponsoring individual candidates. Yet, at some point Founder Niwano declared that ‘they were a religious organisation, not a political one’, and should thus avoid political activities, and focus instead on making the world a better place by gaining converts (shinjashite) and contributing to society (shakainikōken). The emphasis placed on forms of engagement that could be positively evaluated as making a contribution, rather than stirring controversy, may have been a strategy to avoid criticism but also to heighten Köseikai’s public profile by means of contraposition with more controversial religious groups. In this respect, the rise of Köseikai’s engagement in social activities on local scale overlapped with the outbreak of a major scandal involving Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō. This was triggered by an attempt to stop the publication of a book critical of Gakkai, and ultimately resulted in a formal declaration of independence between the two organisations in 1970 (Kisala 2004; McLaughlin 2009). These developments probably played a role in encouraging Köseikai’s shift of focus from political activism towards other forms of engagement. Risshō Köseikai had already experienced its share of conflict with media and authorities during the 1950s, as recounted above. It could be argued that addressing pressing social ills and existing gaps in formal and informal provision of assistance may have allowed Köseikai to rehabilitate its public image by presenting itself in a positive light, as a valuable element of society, while also countering the growing criticism toward new religious organisations more generally. We will look more into this in the following chapters, where I will argue that current attempts to ‘fill the gaps’ may create opportunities to articulate a role for the religious

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58 Interview 20/06/2017.
59 As mentioned before, in the post-war period Japanese new religions were involved in multiple conflicts with the authorities, the media, and overall society (Baffelli 2016; Dorman 2012; Prohl 2012; Shimazono 2004).
organisation within contemporary Japanese society vis-à-vis other intermediate institutions operating at the local level.

Dynamics of competition were not the only way in which interaction with other religious institutions influenced the development of Köseikai’s social engagement. Risshō Köseikai’s increasing involvement in social welfare provision in the 1960s and 1970s was not unique among religious organisations, or even Buddhist organisations. During the period of Japan’s rapid economic growth, Buddhist sects developed a number of public outreach and social welfare programmes, such as the Sōtō Volunteer Association (SVA) launched by the Sōtō Sect, or the ‘Light Up Your Corner Movement’ launched by the Tendai Sect, which were generally aimed at promoting cooperative welfare and youth care programmes based on the teachings of Buddhism, and re-define the bonds between temple and lay support base (Covell 2005:100-102). The similarities between these initiatives and Köseikai-sponsored activities appear evident. In particular, a striking parallelism can be traced between Tendai’s Light Up Your Corner Movement and Meisha, which were not only launched in the same year (1969) but were also named after the same maxim of Saichō (see above), and pursued similar aims of nurturing cooperative ties with local institutions and community members. The pivotal role played by youth associations constituted another relevant commonality. Within the Tendai sect too, groups like the Tendai Young Buddhist Association (Tendaishū Bukkyō Seinen Renmei), founded in the 1960s, lead the way in calling for new forms of engagement able to address the problems of contemporary society (Covell 2005:104-105). While prompted by changing social circumstances and needs, these programmes were also aimed at carving out new roles for priests and temples, and generally improving the image of Temple Buddhism. They sought to counter negative perceptions stemming from its tight connection with funerary practices, and advocating for the continuing relevance of Buddhist institutions in contemporary Japanese society. As in the case of Köseikai, then, these initiatives were a response to both social transformations and institutional crisis. More generally, it seems likely that initiatives undertaken by Risshō Köseikai in this period were partly modelled on the examples provided by fellow religious institutions, especially considering that the same years were also
marked by the organisation’s growing involvement in inter-faith cooperation. In this respect, the longstanding dialogue with many Christian groups, including several socially engaged associations such as the Focolare Movement, probably contributed to shape its social ethics and approach to welfare provision. Köseikai did not represent an exception in this sense: as noted by Stephen Covell (2005:99), despite the well-rooted tradition of social welfare provision by Buddhist institutions in ancient and premodern times, modern Buddhist welfare was modelled through the interaction with Christianity, on the basis of discourses and methods promoted by pioneer voluntary Christian associations active from the Meiji period.

In conclusion, this chapter introduced the notion of gaps in social welfare provision as potential venues to negotiate religion, i.e. spreading religious teachings and values and re-define the position of religious actors within society. The overview of the rise of Köseikai-promoted welfare activities, framed within the broader context of coeval social transformations and patterns of civic engagement, demonstrated how addressing those gaps for Köseikai fulfilled both religious and organisational demands. Social welfare was presented as a missionary tool aimed at addressing newly emerging needs and challenges. At the same time, these activities were part of a broader response to both internal crisis and environmental changes, including a growing criticism toward new religious organisations. These dynamics encouraged a shift in Köseikai’s modes of participation in society, which was significantly influenced by contemporary developments in the social welfare system and initiatives undertaken in the same years by rival and fellow religious groups. There was a substantial overlap between Köseikai-sponsored activities and services offered by other non-state actors involved in informal provision of care at the local level, such as district commissioners and community-based networks of support. Considering the striking similarities existing between religiously inspired services and those functions performed by other intermediate institutions, we may wonder

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whether they possessed any distinctive religious connotation, and what role did it play in relation to Kōseikai’s efforts to ‘fill the gaps’. The following chapter will address these issues. I will argue that the religious significance ascribed to social welfare by practitioners was instrumental in supporting these attempts, and had concrete repercussions on the broader economy of care. More specifically, the chapter will show how the incorporation of social values – notably well-rooted notions of reciprocity – within Kōseikai doctrinal framework, served to reinforce members’ commitment to civic engagement. It did so by strengthening their perceived sense of indebtedness and obligation to reciprocate, while also increasing expectations for future benefits. These dynamics carried significant implications for present trends in Japan’s welfare system and social policy. Most notable among these are the attempts to rekindle traditional values and declining structures of mutual support, hinting at the possibility that the ‘assets’ offered by Risshō Kōseikai in this respect could serve to renegotiate its position vis-à-vis the state.
Chapter 3
Socioreligious Reciprocity in Relationships of Care
Patterns of Indebtedness and Exchange in Kōseikai Welfare

On a sunny morning of February 2017, I was walking in a quiet neighbourhood in the Northern outskirts of Tokyo, alongside one of the missionary leaders of the local Kōseikai branch. Accompanied by a few members, we headed to the house of the Satōs, an elderly couple belonging to the same congregation. The husband and wife, both in their 80s, used to actively participate in church activities, but at this point seldom left their home due to their poor health. When we reached the house, the two hosts greeted us warmly, visibly happy to receive the visit. The visitors exhibited the same warmth and commented affectionately on how good it was to find them healthy, or to see them after such a long time. This atmosphere lingered during the performance of the service and the following hōza, where the themes of gratitude, respect and affection for the elderly hosts dominated the discussion. The Satōs were praised for their long and fervent engagement in religious practice, and for their great contribution to the life of the congregation. The visitors stressed in particular the crucial role of the wife, who had served for a long time as shunin, and in that capacity had offered assistance and guidance to many members. Although in different formulations, most of those presents expressed gratitude to the couple for having taken care of them and a willingness to return the favour. Regular visits to the Satōs’ house, with the aim of ensuring their safety and offering companionship and emotional support, were seen as an opportunity to repay such indebtedness.\(^1\)

Overall, the meeting showcased a dynamic of reciprocal exchange between taking care and being cared for which would recurrently emerge in other visits and Kōseikai-promoted social care activities.

The relevance of reciprocal obligations rooted in notions of inter-dependence and indebtedness for social interaction in Japan is widely acknowledged (Befu 1968; Fieldnotes 04/02/2017).

\(^1\) Fieldnotes 04/02/2017.
Notions of indebtedness and reciprocity have also traditionally played a crucial role in shaping patterns of mutual assistance on a local scale: practices of care addressing vulnerable members of society are generally informed by social values – such as filial obligations, neighbourly aid, paternalistic conceptions of employment relationships – embedded in a logic of exchange, where obligations to repay indebtedness for past benevolence or expectations for future benefits have represented a key motivational mechanism for the provision of resources and services. The government has also cultivated these ideas as a means of relief provision and social management (Garon 1997:29). As Dorinne Kondo contends (1990:106-107), from at least the Tokugawa period central and local authorities have consciously resorted to such deeply rooted cultural values to reinforce social stability, maintain public order and foster adherence to normative behaviour. Indebtedness toward parents and superiors and the fundamental interconnectedness and inter-dependence among human beings have been drawn upon to justify and support government intervention, but also as ‘productive discourses’ to mobilise resources, people and feelings. Social welfare initiatives in Japan have long engaged with the same principles, integrating discourses that have fostered notions of mutual assistance and self-help rooted in Confucian moral values, to marshal a wide range of institutions acting as providers of informal care in lieu of the state (Garon 1997). Traditional patterns of reciprocal assistance remain valid today, with community-based volunteering still representing the dominant form of social engagement within Japanese neighbourhoods. This is tightly bound to dynamics of favour-gratitude reciprocity rooted in ‘sentiments of indebtedness, observing duty and repaying social debts’ (Stevens 1997:231) embedded in interpersonal relations (Nakano L. 2005).

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2 A 1997 survey by the Economic Planning Agency found that 67.7 percent of volunteers worked within their own city, ward, town (Nakano L. 2000:96).

3 As discussed in the following chapter, the ‘volunteering revolution’ (Avenell 2010) triggered by the mass mobilisation following the 1995 Hanshin earthquake imposed a brief change of direction, introducing a new conception of social activism centred on generalised engagement as opposed to traditional models of communal participation (Goodman 2002:21). This trend, however, did not last long: in the span of a few years, public interest toward voluntary activities outside community service began to decline, and at present, although most Japanese may acknowledge the social
As shown by the visit at the Satōs’ house, the social engagement of Kōseikai members echoed conventional patterns of exchange similar to those informing the provision of care within other social units, notably families and local communities. Observations on the ground, interviews and conversations confirmed the crucial importance of indebtedness and reciprocity in shaping practitioners’ social commitment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, welfare activities also had a marked religious element and were conceived as a form of ‘bodhisattva practice’ aimed at fulfilling the two-fold religious goal of salvation of mankind and perfection of the self. We might wonder, then, how religious interpretations affected other factors fuelling practitioners’ social commitment. In particular, how did religious beliefs influence their perception of values and obligations conventionally associated with informal provision of social care and community service? This question relates to the broader issue of religious connotations of social activities in Risshō Kōseikai. The overview presented in the previous chapter hinted at a substantial overlap between Kōseikai-promoted assistance, and services offered by other non-state providers operating on local scale, such as district commissioners, social welfare councils and local associations. These considerations may lead us to ask whether these activities possessed any distinctively religious connotation in the eyes of practitioners or recipients. This question also addresses a significant gap in the existing literature on religious activism. As noted in Chapter 1, scholarly works on religiously inspired welfare have primarily focused on the pragmatic aspects of services offered by religious organisations, such as content, scope and outcomes, often with the intent to evaluate their effectiveness as alternative providers of social care compensating for the curtailment of public assistance. Comparatively less attention has been paid instead to the role that religion plays in the process, and very few studies have considered how religious meanings and practices are articulated in social care provision (Unruh and Sider 2005). The present chapter will address this gap, bringing new insights on ‘where

significance of ‘generalised’ volunteering in theory, they tend to conceive their sphere of responsibility as limited to personal networks (Nakano L. 2000:95; Stevens 1997:115).

4 As will be further discussed in Chapter 4, informal provision of social care within local churches commonly assumes familial undertones rooted in the representation of the congregation as a ‘large family’ (daikazoku).
the “faith” in faith-based organisations lies’ (Johnsen 2014), by unpacking the religious significance attributed to social welfare activities within Risshō Kōseikai.

I do not argue for the existence of a ‘religious essence’ inherent in Kōseikai-promoted activities. As will be further discussed later in the thesis, I move from the premise that religious meanings are socially constructed through multi-vocal dynamics of negotiation unfolding at different levels of the religious organisation, as well as in the interaction between religious and non-religious actors. Religious values, moreover, do not exist as fixed or isolated entities, but are tightly intertwined with other conceptual spheres. As pointed out by Ziad Munson (2007:127), ‘religion does not exist in a tidy, social box’. In an effort to resist the tendency, widespread in social sciences, to pursue an univocal meaning for social experiences, Munson emphasised the need to acknowledge the empirical intertwining of the religious and non-religious spheres, and recognise the ‘polysemous character’ of religiously inspired social and political engagement. Moving from these premises, in this chapter I will highlight the complex intermingling of religious and social values and practices, focusing in particular on practitioners’ interpretation of well-rooted notions of indebtedness and reciprocity.

I will discuss how the incorporation of social obligations within a religious framework marked by a substantial continuity between social and religious forms of interaction – as rooted on similar premises of exchange – served to reinforce the key motivational mechanisms underpinning members’ involvement in social care. This chapter will show how the attribution of a religious justification to cultural tropes like the debt of gratitude toward the elderly, or the importance of offering a contribution to one’s community produced a conflation of social and religious forms of reciprocity. This strengthened members’ feelings of mutual dependency and indebtedness toward others, as well as expectations for future benefits, thus increasing the perceived obligation to reciprocate. It also served to expand the target of retribution to an (ideally) universal dimension. The discussion will draw attention to the complexity of inter-related motivations that underpin the social engagement of religious actors, stemming from the ‘constant intermingling of religious and non-religious factors’ (Muers and Brit 2014:214), and thus challenge
oversimplified representations of religiously inspired welfare activities (Lichterman 2013; Unruh and Sider 2005). More generally, these considerations can enrich our understanding of the relationship between religion and volunteering by problematizing widespread assumptions rooted on the alleged dichotomy between instrumental behaviour and religious values, commonly presented as nurturing altruism and uninterested caring attitudes toward others. I will show how, in the case of Kōseikai members, the religious meanings associated with welfare activities were not conceived of as in contrast to the logic of exchange, which conventionally underpins informal provision of social services. On the contrary, religious re-interpretations allowed for the simultaneity and mutual dependency of self-interest and altruistic efforts. Moreover, the re-interpretation of social assistance in the light of Kōseikai’s doctrine served to increase the exchange value of these practices, through a two-fold process of conceptual expansion of the relationship of care and diversification of the resources exchanged.

We may wonder, then, what the potential implications of these dynamics for Japan’s welfare system were, especially in relation to Kōseikai’s positioning within this broader framework. The relevance of religious connotations of social care is by no means circumscribed to a merely theoretical level, as the meanings attributed to these activities had concrete repercussions for practitioners, the religious organisation, and the broader economy of care. In particular, the case of Kōseikai, where the attribution of religious significance to welfare activities served to strengthen social obligations, and enhance members’ willingness to participate in community service, appeared to contrast with current trends toward the progressive deterioration of conventional practices of informal provision of assistance to vulnerable subjects, and the core social values associated with them. These dynamics open further avenues of investigation on the position of religion and religious institutions in the economy of care. Notably, they raise questions about their potential to serve the interests of the state, by acting in support of neoliberal practices of privatisation, de-centralisation and de-institutionalisation of care. The concluding section will address the issue, adding to the lively debate on
the intersection of religion, social policy and neoliberalism, by offering some interesting insights on ‘what people are actually doing with religion in the civic arena’ (Lichterman 2007:139). In particular, I will argue that, although religion provided some potential ‘assets’ (Wineburg 2001) for the Japanese state, notably in terms of rhetorical tools for the promotion of civic engagement, together with a pool of willing volunteers, these resources could not be directly mobilised by public actors, primarily due to the constitutional principle of separation. In this respect, then, religious connotations seemed to hinder the possibility that social care activities could serve to provide a new public role for Risshō Kōseikai within contemporary Japanese society.

3.1. Hito no yaku ni tachitai: Indebtedness and Reciprocity in Risshō Kōseikai

As exemplified by the Satōs’ house episode outlined above, despite their alleged decline within Japanese society at large, reciprocal obligations based on generational and local ties were still held in high esteem by Kōseikai members. These ties played a significant role in motivating practitioners’ engagement in social care provision directed at both fellow members of the congregation and the local community at large. Observations on the ground were confirmed by interviews and conversations with practitioners involved in these activities, who commonly explained that their participation was motivated by a willingness to be of help to others (hito no yaku ni tachitai), rooted in a sentiment of gratitude for their support. In doing so, they often invoked the teachings of the founder, who in his speeches recurrently stressed the importance of devoting oneself to the service of others. An expression frequently quoted in conversations and interviews was ‘mazu hitosama’ (first of all, others), condensing the Kōseikai ideal of putting the needs of others before one’s own and actively working for their benefit. The high value attributed to the act of serving others was commonly linked to a general concept of interdependency among human beings. As once told to me by the head minister of one of the congregations, ‘human beings cannot live alone’ (ningen wa hitori ja ikite

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5 See for example the works of Andrea Karin Muehlebach, discussed later in the chapter.
ikenai). It is only in virtue of their capacity to build communal ties, he explained, that they are able to survive, a fact that applies in particular to the domain of social welfare and care. These ideas echoed in the words of my participants, many of who spoke about their life depending on the benevolence and support of those around them. These themes emerged for example in the interview with Sawada, a social welfare specialist from Church C. When asked about the motivations behind her social engagement, she simply replied that, since everyone benefited from the support of others throughout his or her life, it was only natural to feel the desire to do something in return. In her words:

You cannot live by yourself after all [...] People cannot live by themselves, and I want to help them. That is the basis I think. After all, I benefit from the help of others myself. Therefore, if the chance arises, I am happy if I can be of help to many people in return. I think that’s necessary [...] I grew up surrounded by good people [...] everyone cherished me and treated me with kindness, and they all helped me with many things. It was the same later on in my life [...] which is why, since I cannot live alone, at least if I can be of help to others, I want to do it.

A similar explanation was offered by Kawano, a young employee of Aikyōen. She suggested her choice to become a professional caregiver resulted from a desire to do something to help others. This stemmed from a sentiment of gratitude towards her parents, and more generally towards all those people who had taken care of her and continued to support her on everyday basis. In her case, awareness of the caring attention she had received was enhanced by the poor health conditions that she endured during her infancy, which made her particularly dependent from close kin and neighbours. These considerations nurtured her desire to make herself useful to people, to reciprocate the help received throughout her life, which was among the major factors supporting her everyday engagement in nursing care work. Besides gratitude for support received, expectations for future assistance constituted another key factor fuelling members’ willingness to help others. This emerged in the case of Urayama, an elderly member devoted to social care provision within her congregation and volunteering in an elderly care facility.

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6 Fieldnotes 07/02/2017.
7 Interview 06/07/2017.
8 Interview 15/05/2017.
9 One of the two elderly care facilities affiliated to Kōseikai.
10 Interview 06/06/2017.
Although she also indicated a desire to be of use to others as the main motivation behind her social undertakings, the expectation that she would need assistance in her old age represented another major reason. Urayama pointed out how, being 75 at the time of the interview, she felt close to shifting from the position of offering care to that of receiving it. ‘After all’, she commented, ‘I will pass on the other side soon. I should do my best while I still can make myself useful’.  

Participants articulated sentiments of gratitude for the support received from others in various forms, targeted at both the congregation and society at large. The existence of dynamics of reciprocal assistance among members emerged frequently while in the field. Practitioners recurrently emphasised the crucial role of the religious community in their everyday life, defining intra-congregational relationships in terms of ‘mutual support’ or ‘mutual aid’ (sasaeai, tasukeai) or fictive kinship. This support could be articulated in strictly religious terms, as spiritual guidance and assistance with the practice, but it also took the form of practical aid and social care provision within congregations. Indebtedness toward the religious community for example was offered as a key motivation for accepting administrative positions – such as the role of ‘social welfare specialist’ – as emerged in the hōza held among attendees of the training course. Similar themes found expression in meetings of the social welfare staff in Church A and Church C. A representative example was offered by Uno, a woman in her 70s who joined the welfare staff of Church A during my stay. At the time of her first meeting, she had just recovered from a long period of illness, during which she was bedridden and unable to perform even basic daily tasks. When she introduced herself to other staff members, she recounted how the support of the congregation had been essential to her during those hard times: fellow members would visit her frequently, offering practical aid and companionship. Without these visits, she added, she might have fallen into depression. Devoting herself to social care activities was a means to

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11 Interview 11/05/2017.
12 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017. See Chapter 4 for a detailed overview of the system of social care provision currently at work within Köseikai congregations.
express gratitude for being looked after by the congregation.\textsuperscript{13} Awareness of the support provided from people around them, and the sentiments of gratitude stemming from it, were not circumscribed to fellow Kōseikai members, but commonly framed within a broader conception of indebtedness. This was based on a fundamental idea of mutual dependency among human beings in the context of everyday life, which fostered a sense of obligation to return the favour by offering a contribution to the local community (\textit{chiiki shakai ni kōken suru}), particularly by assisting its most vulnerable members. These considerations highlight once again how discourses circulating within the religious organisation echoed narratives widespread in the broader domain of social welfare.

In practitioners’ accounts social norms of reciprocity coexisted with the religious meanings attributed to them. As mentioned above, the attribution of religious significance to social care activities did not negate their roots in notions of indebtedness and the obligation to return benefits that they had received. Rather, it fostered a conflation of the religious and social dimensions of reciprocity, based on the transactional conception of religious interaction characterising Japanese religious consciousness more generally. Indeed, the relevance of notions of indebtedness and reciprocity in Japan is not limited to morality and social norms of behaviour: they also play a crucial role in shaping patterns of religious action. Robert Bellah (1985) and Winston Davis (1992), among others, drew attention to the repayment of benefits as a central motive of Japanese religious behaviour, locating the fundamental premise of Japanese morality in the convictions that at birth individuals have already contracted a debt for the benefits (\textit{on}) received from \textit{kami}, the Buddha, parents, ancestors, and the emperor, which increases during life due to other benefits received (Davis 1992:175). Bellah (1985) identified the repayment of blessings (\textit{hōon}) as one of the main driving forces beneath religious action, stressing how religious obligations owed to divine and spiritual entities were not antithetical to social ones, but rather supported them (Bellah 1985:78-79). Davis (1992) further elaborated on the transactional nature of relationships

\textsuperscript{13} Fieldnotes 17/01/2017.
between practitioners and the divine entity, arguing that religious affiliation can be motivated by either the pursuit of benefits or the obligation to return the benefits received. Another fundamental contribution on the topic was offered by Ian Reader and George Tanabe (1998), who highlighted the centrality of the notion of this-worldly benefits (genze riyaku)\textsuperscript{14} in Japanese religions, identifying the practice of seeking benefits as the core of Japanese religious consciousness. These works revealed a substantial continuity between religious and social behaviour, stressing how the indebtedness contracted toward divine and spiritual entities and resulting obligations to reciprocate are not conceived as intrinsically different from social conceptions of reciprocity. The incorporation of practices of care within Kōseikai’s ‘theology of exchange’ (Coleman S. 2004; Elisha 2008)\textsuperscript{15} resulted in the emergence of a sacralised economy of care marked by a substantial continuity between religious and non-religious modes of interaction, highlighting the conventional nature of the boundaries between religion and other social spheres.

3.2. Ikaseru chikara: Socioreligious Relationships of Exchange

The conceptual foundation for the integration of social and religious forms of reciprocity primarily lied in the principles of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of all existence informing Kōseikai’s cosmological and soteriological framework. In Risshō Kōseikai, the cosmos is conceived as an inter-related whole permeated by a universal life force identified with the Eternal Buddha.\textsuperscript{16} All living beings are believed to exist in a state of inter-connectedness within this single vital

\textsuperscript{14} Refer to Note 3, Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{15} In his analysis of social engagement among Protestant evangelists, Omri Elisha (2008) spoke of a ‘theology of exchange’ lying at the roots of evangelism, which produced a tension between Christian romanticised conception of compassion as unconditional and uninterested gift, and moral obligations of accountability imposed on recipients of assistance, expected to reciprocate with efforts to achieve financial self-sufficiency and cultivate moral responsibility. Similarly, Simon Coleman’s (2004) study on charismatic Protestantism in Sweden also underlined the existence of a logic of exchange and reciprocity in the moral framework underpinning religious giving.

\textsuperscript{16} Such a worldview is not distinctive of Kōseikai, but rather common to most new religions of older generation: scholars like Robert Kisala (1999) and Helen Hardacre (1986) argued that new religions tend to share a common worldview marked by inter-connectedness and inter-dependency among all levels of the cosmos, rooted in Neo-Confucian principles. More generally, vitalistic cosmological perspectives rooted in inter-connectedness can be seen as a recurrent trait of Japanese religions, as noted for example by Ian Reader (1991). On the vitalistic conception of salvation see in particular Tsushima et al. 1979.
principle. Ancestor veneration is also integrated in this framework, as spirits of the dead are believed to be part of the same life stream as all other existence, ultimately originating from the Eternal Buddha. Existing as part of this life-force, all living beings share a true essence or innate nature of oneness with the Buddha, expressed in the concept of Buddha-nature (busshō). These notions are also combined with karmic beliefs: the fundamental inter-dependence of all phenomena is explained in relation to the Law of the Twelve Causes (jūnin-innen) or law of dependent origination, which states that everything in the universe changes based on a fundamental relation of causation. As stressed by Founder Niwano: ‘All things in this world, with no exception, are related to one another. There is nothing that leads an isolated existence that is wholly separated from other things […] We are inseparably bound up with one another, and we all exist through being permeated by the same life-energy’ (Niwano 1976:30-31). The principle or law that regulates the process of dependent origination is also identified as the Eternal Buddha, the vital force that permeates the entire universe and ‘causes us to live with his benevolence’ (Ibidem:209-10). In other words, according to Köseikai, we do not simply live, but it is the benevolence of the Buddha and the cosmos that ‘let us live’ or ‘causes us to live’ (ikasarete iru). We own our life, as well as everything that happens to us, to this fundamental life force. This is the meaning of the expression ‘ikaseru chikara’ (the force that causes you to live), one of the core concepts promoted by the organisation (Fig. 6).

![Figure 6. Köseikai logo. The sentence on the top recites ‘the living force that makes you to live’ (ikasare, ikiru chikara).](image)

17 For a detailed discussion of Köseikai’s re-interpretation of the notion of karma in the light of vitalistic cosmology see Kisala 1994.
3.2.1. Social Care as Hōon: Repaying Benevolence and Pursuing Religious Benefits

The re-interpretation of conventional notions of mutual dependency and reciprocity within a religious framework, marked by the inter-dependence of all existence and phenomena, had the effect of reinforcing moral obligations among Kōseikai members by deepening and expanding their feelings of indebtedness toward others. This occurred through two inter-related dynamics. Firstly, the integration of social care practices in Kōseikai’s vitalistic worldview fostered a conceptual expansion of the dynamics of exchange implied in the relationship of care, broadening the target of repayment. By virtue of the principle of inter-connectedness, the dyad caregiver/recipient was expanded to include a third component, identified with the Eternal Buddha, spirits of the ancestors, or the entire cosmos, which could be regarded as a form of ‘triadisation’ of reciprocity (Lebra 1975). At the same time, the process also entailed a diversification of the resources exchanged, as social goods and services combined with religious benefits bestowed by divine and spiritual beings. The inclusion of religious benefits instituted a further dimension of indebtedness, and thus an additional source of legitimacy for reciprocal obligations, unbound from material premises of exchange traditionally underpinning notions of filial piety and neighbourly aid. The two dynamics turned living beings into the target of diffused sentiments of indebtedness and gratitude for the blessings received from the Buddha and the ancestors, all partaking in the single divine principle permeating the cosmos. On the other hand, by virtue of the same principle, any action benefitting others, including welfare activities, turned into a potential act of devotion to the Eternal Buddha.

In his opening address for the year 2016, President Niwano Nichikō reiterated the importance of devoting oneself to the service of others, stressing how such spirit

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18 Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1975:559-60) argued that, although reciprocity is commonly conceived as a dyadic relationship of exchange, in practice it tends to evolve in a more complex social structure. Lebra speaks of a ‘triadisation’ in relation to the expansion of the original dyad with the inclusion of a third element. It should be noted that social obligations more generally tend to imply some form of triadisation, in particular on a local level where communal aid is usually rooted in an extended understanding of reciprocity, the target for repayment and source for future benefits are found in the community as a whole rather than in the specific recipient of care. What distinguished the case of Kōseikai was that the involvement of a divine or spiritual actor, i.e. the Buddha or spirits of the dead.
should be always rooted in a sentiment of gratitude for the gift of life, and the
benevolence of the Buddha that ‘causes us to live’. The connection between
willingness to help others and gratitude for blessings received also found expression
in a testimonial given on the occasion of the commemoration of the foundation of
Kōseikai, to which I assisted in Church A. The speaker professed her gratitude
toward the Buddha, whose benevolence healed her seriously ill daughter, adding
that she decided to accept a role (oyaku) in the church as a way of repaying this
indebtedness by putting herself in the service of others. Social care qualified as a
possible form of hōon, i.e. a way to express gratitude for the blessings received
from the cosmos and repay the indebtedness originated from them. It also
increased the likelihood of future benefits, by virtue of the broad conception of
religious practice in Kōseikai, reflected in the loose and diverse definitions of
‘bodhisattva practice’ offered by members. For example Sawada, the member of
Church C mentioned above, stressed how the ‘bodhisattva way’ included
propagating the teachings (fukyō) and their implementation (jikkō), as well as active
contribution to one’s family and community. Nishimura, a social welfare specialist
from Church B, spoke in similar terms, simply stating that every action
implementing the teachings constituted practice. This comment reflected a more
general emphasis on the importance of putting Kōseikai teachings in practice in the
context of daily life. As mentioned by Akane, a young member of the same
congregation, bodhisattva practice unfolded in common, daily actions, and
especially in ‘things done for the benefit of others’. A similar view was offered by

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19 ‘Mazu hitosama no kokoro de’ (In the spirit of ‘First of all others’), Kōsei 2016 1, 12-16.
20 Monthly ceremonies and major events held at the Daiseidō (the Great Sacred Hall, Kōseikai main
   ceremony hall) are commonly broadcast live and watched in streaming in local churches nationwide.
21 The term oyaku (role, position) was used to refer to various roles and tasks belonging to the
   religious practice and daily life of churches, ranging from ritual tasks, e.g. chanting the sutra, striking
   the bell or performing other actions during the service, all the way up to administrative positions
   within the church or missionary undertakings. The expression appears well representative of the
   substantial identity of purpose among the various roles within Kōseikai: all positions and tasks,
   despite their diversity, are conceived in continuity, since they ultimately serve the fundamental goals
   of salvation of others and perfection of the self.
22 Fieldnotes 10/03/2017.
23 Interview 15/05/2017.
24 Interview 17/05/2017.
25 Interview 04/07/2017.
26 Informal conversation 22/07/2017.
Amano, a member of Church A who earnestly served the community as voluntary district commissioner, president of the neighbourhood association, and by volunteering at the local welfare council. He defined the bodhisattva way as ‘unconditionally offering whatever one can do for others’. ‘We all have something we can do or are good at’, Amano noted, ‘Putting those skills at the service of others, that is what bodhisattva practice means’. These words underlined the crucial importance attributed to helping others as a form of religious practice, and thus as a way to express gratitude and return the benefits received from the cosmos. Members engaging in welfare activities often described them in these terms. This was the case for Hirayama, a shibuchō of Church D, in Saitama prefecture. Besides caring for vulnerable members of the congregation, which was one of her responsibilities as missionary leader, in the last few years she had devoted herself to assisting the local elderly population as a voluntary district commissioner. When recounting the beginning of her involvement in social care provision, Hirayama explained that she used to have a rather selfish attitude toward life but that the encounter with Kōseikai had made her realise that she benefitted from the support of many people, and that everything comes as a blessing from the cosmos. This realisation filled her with a willingness to reciprocate this benevolence by helping others. Similar themes also emerged in the interview with Shibata, the elderly woman mentioned in Chapter 2, who had been involved in social care most of her life. While we were visiting one of the nearly thirty welfare facilities that she managed, Shibata explained that social work had made her more and more aware that she was not simply living, but ‘receiving life’ from the cosmos. She stressed how this deepened her gratitude for the gift of life, the support of people around her, and especially the benevolence of the Buddha (hotokesama no hakarai), thanks

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27 The Amano case showcases the many options open to members willing to get involved in their community, which included positions in mutual interest associations or networks of assistance operating on local level, such as neighbourly associations or the voluntary district commissioner system (minsei'in seido). See also Chapter 6.
28 Interview 06/07/2017.
29 Interview 26/07/2017.
30 Fieldnotes 20/07/2017.
to whom everything was achieved. Shibata also stressed how the bodhisattva practice meant ‘to develop a heart close to the Buddha’, unveiling how the notion of *bosatsugyō* combined service to others with aspects of personal cultivation.

These examples illustrated how reciprocal obligations associated with informal provision of social care acquired religious significance by being re-interpreted in light of Kōseikai teachings. The process did not significantly alter the original rationale for care practices, as these activities continued to be motivated primarily by the debt of gratitude for benefits received. Yet, social indebtedness merged with a religious dimension of reciprocity. Besides gratitude for the benevolence of the Buddha, the ancestors and other living beings, another fundamental concept through which religious indebtedness was articulated was the one of merit (*kudoku*). The notion of merit of course is by no means exclusive to Kōseikai teachings, but can rather be listed among the core concepts of Buddhism, primarily related to the doctrine of karma and dependent origination as virtue acquired through good deeds (meritorious actions, in Sanskrit *punna*) and the divine blessings or good fortune stemming from it (Inagaki 1989:508; Tanabe 2004:355-57). Meritorious actions are believed to generate good karmic fruits, resulting in positive retribution in the present life or the future, and generally contributing to the fundamental aim of overcoming suffering (Harvey 2000:15-18; Reader and Tanabe 1998:112-14). Karmic fruitfulness can be also shared with others, or transferred to specific individuals. In particular, the notion of merit transfer is tightly related to ancestor veneration, as memorialisation rites can be used to transfer merit to the soul of the deceased, in order to improve their karma (Harvey 2000:65-66; Tanabe 2004). Risshō Kōseikai also attributes high relevance to the transfer of merit through

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31 *Hakarai* can be translated as ‘good offices’. The notion was linked to the idea that everything is arranged by the Buddha, constantly reiterated in *hōza* and conversations: members stressed how any event, even misfortunes, should be seen as a conscious act of the Buddha, aimed at teaching people something about themselves or their actions. This idea can be regarded as another expression of the generalised sense of indebtedness related to ‘being caused to live’ by the fundamental vital principle.

32 The Buddhist canon identifies three main forms of meritorious action: giving or generosity (Sanskrit *dāna*), moral virtue (*śīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*) (Harvey 2000:61; Keown 1992:46).
ancestor veneration. Alongside this conventional conception of merit as virtue accumulated through karmic relationships, however, Kōseikai members also used the notion in broader and looser terms, to refer to any kind of religious benefit resulting from practice and personal interaction. When mentioned in interviews and conversations, kudoku was attributed a wide range of meanings, generally defined as something beneficial or for which to be grateful, and even as a reward for serving others. Merit in particular often assumed the connotation of learning, as wisdom or knowledge acquired through practice, described in concrete, experiential terms, as ‘something learnt’, notably a realisation of one’s shortcomings.

Social care was regarded as a particularly effective way to accumulate merit (kudoku wo tsumu), as expressed by the following exchange among members talking about forms of reward received from social activities:

A: ‘[through care activities] I receive plenty of merit (kudoku wo ippai itadaite iru).’

B: ‘What kind of merit can you feel?’

A: ‘Being able to listen to many conversations makes me happy. It taught me to see the good in the other person. I came to see the light. By virtue of the interaction [karmic relationship] with others, I too am shining’.

More generally, forms of spiritual advancement and personal development achieved through engagement in social activities were often described as merit. For example Hirayama, the shibuchō mentioned above, regarded the fact that she ‘became a person that cares about others’ as a form of kudoku. These affirmations were framed in a broader conception of interpersonal relations as a potential venue to learn about aspects of one’s character that needed improvement, stemming from the strong relational connotation of religious practice in Kōseikai. As

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33 The importance of merit transfer in practices of ancestor veneration can be regarded as a legacy of its parent organisation, Reiyūkai. Helen Hardacre (1984:153) discussed the relevance of memorialisation practices in Reiyūkai, highlighting their reciprocal nature as benefiting both the deceased, by improving their karma, and descendants, in form of ancestors’ protection and blessings.

34 Informal conversation 14/10/2017; Interview 09/06/2017.

35 Personal testimonials offered in hōza frequently linked kudoku to personal experiences of suffering and failure, which members re-read in terms of trials and lessons from the Buddha, or more generally as opportunities for learning and personal development.

36 Interview 22/07/2017.

37 Fieldnotes 14/05/2017.

38 Interview 20/07/2017.
mentioned above, engaging with others was not only deemed instrumental for their salvation, but also of paramount importance for the self-cultivation of practitioners. As once concisely stated by a missionary leader in hōza, ‘you cannot practice alone’, meaning that only through social interaction it is possible to learn more about oneself. Even by simply offering themselves as interlocutors (aite), others were thus believed to provide practitioners with opportunities to perfect themselves. Since the insights gained through personal interaction were seen as a form of merit, all living beings were equated to the Buddha and the ancestors as ‘givers of merits’ and regarded as equally deserving gratitude. This can be seen as another formulation of reciprocity related to religious benefits, in the form of both indebtedness for blessings received, and the pursuit of future benefits through the accumulation of merit.

3.2.2. The Buddha-nature and the Identification of Self and Other

Based on these considerations, we could say that, for Kōseikai members, activities benefitting others were, at least to a certain extent, motivated by self-interest in the form of expectation of reward. That said, it would be limiting to conceive of notions of merit and self-gain in contradiction to members’ efforts to help others. On the contrary, the two aspects were inextricably intertwined. The principle of the inter-connectedness of all existence instituted a direct correlation between the condition of others and the self, resulting in a relationship of mutual dependence between individual and universal salvation. Since all living beings are part of the same life, no one can achieve happiness while others are suffering. The religious notion of inter-dependence between personal benefits and other-benefits elicited a further expansion of reciprocity, which resulted in the conflation of ‘egoistic’ and ‘altruistic’ behaviour based on a denial of the ontological distinction between self and other, in virtue of the identification of both with the fundamental vital principle.

As mentioned before, Risshō Kōseikai teaches that, as part of a single life force, all living beings share the essence of the Eternal Buddha, or Buddha-nature (busshō).

39 Fieldnotes 10/12/2016.
Awareness that all human beings possess the nature of the Buddha constituted one of the basic premises of social engagement in Kōseikai, where care activities were understood as a form of veneration of the Buddha-nature of the other, as well as an act of cultivation of the Buddha-nature within oneself. Within such a ‘sacralised economy of care’, the identification of the recipient with the divine being can be said to further expand reciprocity from the triadic relationship between self, other and the fundamental vital principle (encompassing the Eternal Buddha, the ancestors or the cosmos as a whole) by ultimately unifying the three and conceptually universalising the relationship of exchange. By means of assimilating the identity of the self and the other with the divine entity, the dyadic relationship between giver and recipient was extinguished in a unitary subject. In more strictly doctrinal terms, this idea found expression in the notion of non-duality between self and others (jita ittai). The realisation of such an identity was expected to generate empathy and sentiments of compassion, naturally resulting in caring acts toward others, as repeatedly stressed by the founder in his speeches and publications, and reiterated in conversations and interviews with members. As once pointed out by a member of Church A, since all life is inter-connected, individual happiness is tightly interwoven with happiness of others, and their suffering reverberated within one’s life. ‘When you hurt someone, there is a part of you that feels pain as well, isn’t there? When you make someone happy, you feel a bit happier yourself, right?’ she asked, adding that all human beings possessed the capacity to rejoice and to suffer with others, and that was what, in her opinion, constituted the ‘Buddha-nature’.40

More generally, the interpenetration of self-benefit and other-benefit further reinforced the reciprocal connotation of religious and social activities, which in Kōseikai were always seen as simultaneously self-oriented and other-oriented. I had the chance to discuss the complex intersection between self-interest and other-benefit informing practitioners’ behaviour with Reverend Tanabe, head minister and former member of the central administration (International Division). While unpacking the notion of kudoku in one of our conversations, he observed that the

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40 Interview 06/06/2017.
attitude of Kōseikai members was best understood as an expression of perfect integration of self-benefit and other-benefit (jiri rita enman 自利利他円満). This concept – also shared by other Buddhist schools within the Mahayana tradition, notably the True Pure Land Sect – he described as the act of benefitting oneself while serving others, or to help others in order to achieve personal satisfaction. Tanabe added that, although willingness to help others is commonly given as the main motivation to engage in missionary practice and social activities alike, to achieve liberation from suffering remained the basic rationale for practice. ‘After all’, he added, ‘the main goal of Kōseikai members is to become bodhisattvas’. In this perspective, even when directed at saving others, religious action could never be regarded as completely disinterested, since it always pursued some form of personal benefit, be it through accumulation of merit or self-cultivation. This was what, in his opinion, distinguished bodhisattva practice (bosatsu-gyō) from ‘volunteering’ (boranteia) in a strict sense: if volunteering was defined as ‘uninterested action based on free will’, bodhisattva practice, which always implied some form of self-gain in terms of religious benefits or spiritual growth, could not be included in the category.41 Another interesting take on the matter came from Kuroda, the director of one of the Kōseikai-related welfare facilities, met in Chapter 2. In his opinion, all religious traditions shared a common concern for the assistance of vulnerable subjects, although their approaches differed. In particular, Kuroda stressed the relevance of reward (mikaeri) in Buddhist social ethic, in contrast with the Christian notion of charity. He argued that, in Buddhism, the idea of rewards for ethical action traditionally served as an ‘expedient’ (hōben) to lead people toward the right path. He explained that all Buddhist sects preached some kind of beneficial return for religious practice, be it the purification of one’s soul or access to the Pure Land. Practitioners could be said to engage in religious practice with this reward in mind, even when they are not consciously seeking for it. That was what, in Kuroda’s opinion, made the Christian approach to social activism, unbound from retribution, ‘purer’ than the Buddhist one, always at least partly motivated by self-interest.42

41 Informal conversation on 14/10/2017.
42 Interview 20/04/2017.
Kuroda’s comments appeared particularly interesting as they hinted at a broader question, which is the role of theological discrepancies in shaping religious practitioners’ approach to social activism. The Christian romanticised conception of compassion as absolute love, gratuitous and uninterested, might be hard to reconcile with instrumental aspects of social action, such as personal benefits obtained by practitioners or other elements of exchange. Such tension, however, was relatively absent in the case of Kōseikai. In general, members did not see altruistic and instrumental aspects of care practices as antithetical, and even when the two aspects were presented in opposition, they were conceptually harmonised by reintegration in the cosmological and soteriological framework of the organisation. Both Tanabe and Kuroda outlined a contraposition between instrumentality and altruism, formulated as a difference between bodhisattva practice and voluntarism in the first case, and between Buddhist and Christian social ethic in the second. Yet, in neither case did this result in tension, as the discrepancy found justification in the doctrinal concepts of perfect integration of self-benefit and other-benefit and skilful means.

These considerations are noteworthy in relation to current trends in the scholarship, namely the assumption of a dichotomous opposition between instrumental behaviour and altruistic motivations commonly associated to religiously inspired social activism. As discussed in Chapter 1, the tendency to associate religious values with other-oriented and uninterested behaviour emerges with clarity in the context of Japan, where many recent works on faith-based activism earnestly promoted the idea of religion as fostering altruism (ritashugi, Inaba 2011) and prosocial values,

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43 Omri Elisha (2008), for example, in his study of socially engaged evangelists observed how practitioners struggled to reconcile the Christian notion of caritas as ‘unconditioned gift’ with the fact that provision of assistance was tied to moral obligations to repay benevolence with gratitude and personal commitment.

44 More generally, in Buddhism the practice of compassion (karuna) is not conceived as antithetical to the pursuit of self-benefit, but rather articulated in continuity with it. In virtue of the doctrine of dependent origination mentioned above, helping others is believed to bring some benefit to the practitioner, in the form of merit or personal development (Harvey 2000:34; Keown 1992:122-27). A concept that well exemplifies this integration is the notion of giving (dana), which is attributed crucial importance in Buddhist practice as one of the highest forms of ethical action. The moral value of giving, however, does not imply the denial of self-interested motivations, as giving in quality of meritorious action (punna) is associated with the accumulation of merit and thus religious benefits for the practitioner (Harvey 2000:19-21, 125-26; Keown 1992:46).
emphasising the potential contribution that it could offer to contemporary society (Inaba and Sakurai 2009; Shimazono and Isomae 2014). The removal of the conceptual distinction between self-oriented and other-oriented action in Risshō Kōseikai questions the viability of the categories of ‘altruism’ and ‘egoism’ in the context of religiously-connoted social engagement in Japan. It also exposes the broader problem of the translatability of categories developed in Euro-American and Christian societies to different cultural and religious contexts. More generally, it highlights the need for more nuanced approaches to the analysis of individual motivations for activism, which would account for the simultaneous presence of self-oriented and other-oriented motivations, but also for the substantial continuity between religious and social forms of interaction.

In sum, up to this point I have unpacked the process through which social obligations and notions of reciprocity, conventionally associated with informal provision of social care and mutual assistance, became invested with religious significance when re-interpreted in light of Kōseikai teachings. By virtue of the principle of inter-dependence and inter-connectedness of all existence, sentiments of gratitude and indebtedness toward others were reinforced through two inter-related dynamics. In the first, the relationship of care was progressively broadened to encompass the Buddha, ancestors and the cosmos, and ultimately universalised with the proclamation of ontological non-duality between self and other. The second process fostered a diversification of the resources exchanged within this relationship, with the integration of benefits of a religious nature. The incorporation of social values within the doctrinal framework of the organisation appeared to enhance the strength and perceived legitimacy of social conventions by instituting an additional ideological foundation for reciprocal obligations, fuelling members’ involvement in social care activities. Based on these premises, the following section will consider the potential implications of these dynamics for Japan’s broader economy of care, and for Kōseikai’s positioning within it.
3.3. Implications for the Social Welfare System

In March 2017, I joined a group of about twenty members of Church C, led by Yoshida, a social welfare trainee and head of the welfare staff, in attending a training course held at the elderly care facility where they regularly volunteered. Arriving at the facility, we were handed a couple of booklets about dementia and elderly care, as well as a plastic orange bangle, which served to attest the completion of the course (Fig. 7). The initiative was part of a national campaign sponsored by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, aimed at training ‘supporters’ for people affected by dementia. Similar courses were held by care facilities, social welfare councils, and non-profit organisations (NPO) across Japan.

The general aim was to equip citizens with some basic knowledge on senile diseases, their symptoms and effects, and the best ways to offer support to frail elderly in their everyday lives. As explained by Yoshida on another occasion, that was not the first training course that they had attended. The year before, he and other members of the congregation (including the head minister) had participated in a training initiative sponsored by the local social welfare council, aimed at encouraging the creation of a network of assistance for vulnerable members of the community. These initiatives could be seen as part of a broader trend toward the socialisation of elderly care promoted by the Japanese government, stemming from the need to compensate for the limits of domestic and institutional care. The instructor, a member of the facility staff, stressed this point explaining that their main reason for hosting the course was that there were not enough trained caregivers and thus citizens’ cooperation was essential. The orange ring served to mark those who had been trained to care for people affected by dementia. The course instructor encouraged attendees to always wear them, so that they could be identified as people able to help in case someone in their surroundings was in need of assistance. Besides occasional provision of assistance within their neighbourhood,

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45 Fieldnotes 06/03/2017.
46 In the field I met several other people (both members and non-members of Kōseikai) who had attended the course, such as the social welfare specialist of Church B, who proudly showed me his own orange bracelet during our interview (17/05/2017).
47 Fieldnotes 25/01/2017.
he suggested further options for putting the training at use, which included cooperation with local authorities as well as volunteering in care facilities or social welfare corporations.

![Figure 7. Plastic bangle of the ‘Dementia supporters’ campaign (ninchishō sapōtā kyanpan) promoted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.](image)

As discussed by Simon Avenell (2010), training activities have long been one of the main tools employed by the Japanese government to mobilise citizens into institutionalised and independent forms of volunteering directed at compensating for the limits of state-provided assistance. Central and local authorities have adopted strategies including the revitalisation of pre-existing structures of support, as well as the creation of new networks of mutual assistance on a local scale, to meet societal challenges and address existing gaps in social care provision. These efforts have intensified in recent years. The perceived decline of communal ties translated into a wide range of initiatives, involving both government and local institutions, primarily directed at rekindling the values of harmony, filial piety, solidarity, propagandizing ideals of self-sufficiency and collective responsibility of local communities. Recent developments in social policy have further encouraged the mobilisation of non-state providers by promoting a shift toward a locally-based
welfare system. Communal networks of assistance have emerged from the cooperation among a wide range of public, quasi-public and private institutions, including public administration, social welfare councils, local associations, professional caregivers and medical services, voluntary organisations, and individual citizens. The institution of the ‘Community-based integrated Care System’ (chiiiki hōkatsu kea shisutemu), first introduced with the 2006 reform of the Long-Term Care Insurance Law (Kaigo hoken hō), represented the most significant step in this direction. A crucial watershed in the implementation of the programme was the introduction of ‘Community general support centres’ in 2012. Their main responsibilities were to organise preventive care measures for seniors, provide advice to people in need of professional care or to their family members, and to work toward the construction of local networks of cooperation by fostering knowledge exchange and creating opportunities for interaction among the various actors involved (Dahl 2018; Morikawa 2014). These functions appear in continuity with the ones that other locally-based associations, notably social welfare councils or the district commissioner system, have been fulfilling for decades. Considering the dynamics examined in the chapter, it must be asked whether religious values also contributed to efforts directed at revitalising the ideological foundations for non-state provision of social care, and fostering the continuation of established patterns of engagement. More generally, we may wonder whether Risshō Kōseikai – or religion – could be said to be an ‘asset’ (Wineburg 2001) to Japan’s welfare system, and what the implications could be for its positioning within the broader economy of care, and Japanese society at large.

48 A recent trend can be found in the provision of social services in the form of ‘paid volunteering’ (yūshō boranteia), which refers to forms of social assistance and service to the community offered voluntary but in exchange for a small fee. Although the concept may appear unusual in relation to the conventional notion of volunteering as gratuitous commitment, it is at present one of the most popular forms of engagement in Japan, where social welfare councils, neighbourly associations, NPOs and volunteering centres operate many such networks on a local scale.

49 See Chapter 4.

50 In a recent study investigating the growing relevance of religiously inspired welfare provision in the United States, Robert Wineburg (2001:139-46) identified seven key assets that religious communities bring to the social welfare system: a mission to serve; a pool of volunteers; a sacred space that could be used for meetings, community forums, educational activities, and recruiting; the
The manipulation of religious values has been among the strategies employed by state actors to promote neoliberal practices of privatisation, de-centralisation and de-institutionalisation of care, as Andrea Karin Muehlebach (2012, 2013) has argued. In her study of social welfare provision in Italy, Muehlebach discussed the emergence of a ‘moral neoliberal’ regime where the Italian state manipulated Catholic traditions and values, notably notions of solidarity, compassion and charity, to mobilize citizens into unwaged care labour, compensating for its withdrawal from the provision of assistance (Muehlebach 2013:455). Religious values became a tool for the resignification of social care practices, made valuable through their re-interpretation in ethical terms, as part of a broader attempt from the Italian state to craft a new sense of citizenship based on individual capacity to offer a contribution to the collectivity (Muehlebach 2012:17-18). Similarly, in the case of Kōseikai, religious values could be said to contribute to the reproduction and consolidation of ideals of good citizenship. We have seen how the re-interpretation of social obligations within Kōseikai’s doctrinal framework – marked by continuity between social and religious forms of interaction rooted in similar premises of exchange – strengthened members’ feelings of mutual dependency and indebtedness toward others, while also increasing their expectations of future benefits. In the case of Kōseikai, therefore, obligations to reciprocate for the support received and offer a contribution to one’s community became sacralised by means of their integration within a universalised relationship of exchange with the cosmos. The attribution of a religious justification to cultural tropes like the debt of gratitude toward the elderly, or the importance of offering a contribution to one’s community, combined with the broader tendency toward moral and social conservatism expressed by the perpetuation of romanticised images of family and society, served to reinforce key motivational mechanisms underpinning members’ involvement in social care.\(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) The promotion of idealised images of the traditional family and community will be further discussed in Chapter 4. It should be noted that social and moral conservatism are not exclusive to Risshō Kōseikai, but rather represent a recurrent feature in Japanese new religions and older generation, as noted for example by Helen Hardacre (1984) or Ian Reader (2015).
Religion has long played a role in underpinning civil responsibilities in the history of Japan, and no less so in relation to social care. I have mentioned before how, since at least the early modern period, notions of mutual dependency, indebtedness and relative obligations to ‘return the benefits’ rooted in Confucian ethics have been widely used by authorities for the mobilisation of private actors (Garon 1997; Kondo 1990). At present the uniquely strict separation of religion and the state (seikyō bunri) in Japan, enshrined in Article 20 of the Post-war Constitution, makes the possibility of a direct manipulation of religious values by political actors unlikely. Religious values nevertheless served the interests of the state, and notably the goal of promoting civic engagement, by increasing practitioners’ likelihood to volunteer. That occurred through the combination between Köseikai members’ sense of mission, the perceived obligation to reciprocate for the blessings received, and other factors fostering participation in social activities, such as social welfare training programmes or church commitments (e.g. receiving oyaku as missionary leader or responsible of social welfare). These circumstances seemed to enhance their responsiveness to the attempts of state and para-state actors (local associations, social welfare councils) to recruit voluntary providers of social services, such as the ‘orange bangle’ campaign mentioned above.

This trend emerged with particular clarity in relation to the present decline in well-rooted patterns of social engagement on the local scale, such as the district commissioner system or neighbourly associations. As noted by Mary Alice Haddad (2007:85-86), in recent years the pool of traditional community volunteers has progressively shrunk, and currently their number is no longer sufficient to meet the growing demands of social services. Fieldwork findings confirmed these trends, as emerged in interviews conducted with representatives of social welfare councils, who often noted that participation rates in local associations and networks of

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52 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the case of Japan is marked by a uniquely strict separation of religion and the state, which makes the use of explicitly religious notions in political discourses highly problematic. Besides legal constraints, the widespread mistrust toward religion and religious institutions represents a further disincentive for the mobilisation of religious values by state actors. The issue of the public presence of religion in Japan, and its interaction with public actors, will be further discussed in Chapter 6.
support were rapidly dropping. When I spoke with Hirayama about her service as a district commissioner, she also underlined the present shortage of volunteers. In the past, she noted, it used to be seen as a prestigious role, assigned to the important members (erai kata) of the community, and associated with a certain status and sense of obligation. In time, however, things had greatly changed: nowadays, most people refused the position, and generally preferred not to get personally involved in volunteer provision of assistance. It had become hard to find people willing to take on the task. Hirayama confessed that she too had thought of refusing at first, since she was already busy with other church commitments, but then the head minister persuaded her otherwise, stressing that ‘to put the teachings of Köseikai at use in the community was what founder Niwano would have wanted from her’.

Another interesting aspect emerged from my interview with Amano, the member of Church A mentioned above. He defined religion as the ‘foundation’ (shitaji) for his engagement in volunteer social service provision, stressing how the practice of tedori, in particular, could be regarded as a form of ‘watching over’ the people of the community. He explained that participating in religious practice since his youth, and learning from the example of his parents’ earnest engagement in missionary activities, served as a ‘preparation’ (junbi) for social service, in that it nurtured his sentiments of compassion, but also taught him a way of interacting with people. These experiences led him to naturally develop a caring attitude toward others, which was not something you can simply teach, but that had to be acquired through experience, by learning and practicing the faith. ‘Serving as a minsei’in, you know, it’s not for everyone’. Here, Amano was not only referring to the presence or lack of motivation, but also to other kinds of personal skills, such as the capacity to start a conversation with everyone, or persistence in reaching out to those who refused assistance. It was through missionary practice that he learnt how to do that, and it

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53 Interviews 29/05/2017; 15/06/2017.
54 See Note 35, Chapter 2.
55 Interview 20/07/2017.
56 Tedori (手取り), which can be translated as ‘taking the hands’, is a form of missionary practice that consists of home visits directed at providing assistance and spiritual guidance to members of the congregation as well as reaching out to non-Köseikai people (sansha tedori). See Note 42, Chapter 2.
had become natural for him to approach people in that way.\textsuperscript{57} Amano exemplified how, while religious beliefs offered an ideological foundation for social engagement, belonging to Kōseikai also fostered members’ propensity to devote themselves to informal provision of care by socialising them into patterns of personal interaction conducive for social service. This idea frequently emerged in the field, as for example in a conversation with Yoshida, where he noted that there were many among Church C members who engaged in social care provision in formal or informal ways, and that was especially common for missionary leaders, as they are ‘used to interacting with people’.\textsuperscript{58}

The attribution of religious significance to social obligations, combined with patterns of socialisation intrinsic to religious practice, served to reinforce traditional values and increase the social commitment of members. In turn, they contributed to the persistence of established modes of engagement and structures of support on a local scale. These examples were representative of a broader trend among participants, many of whom devoted themselves to community service in the capacity of district commissioner or by participating in existing networks and forms of assistance, most notably local associations and communal networks of mutual aid, such as those centred on social welfare councils.\textsuperscript{59} Kōseikai members’ willingness to engage in community volunteering and informal care provision emerged as a countertendency to the present decline of social engagement at local level. Religious beliefs, by fostering ideals of good citizenship and civic responsibility promoted by the Japanese government and enhancing members’ responsiveness to state attempts to mobilise citizens into informal provision of social assistance, seemed to play a key role in this respect. Religiously inspired activism, thus, can be said to offer a relevant contribution to the continuation of these institutions, and to a certain extent partially succeeded in filling an existing gap in Japan’s economy of care. Yet, it is important to recognise that religious values cannot be directly

\textsuperscript{57} Interview 06/07/2017.
\textsuperscript{58} Fieldnotes 06/03/2017.
\textsuperscript{59} Serving as minsei’in was a particularly recurrent form of engagement among Kōseikai members, as frequently stated by participants and confirmed by observations on the ground. In the field I encountered many members occupying this position, several of them mentioned in this and other chapters.
mobilised by public bodies, and that religious actors’ participation in care provision is restricted by legal and practical constraints, as will be further discussed in Chapter 5. If, then, we were to draw a comparison between Kōseikai and other intermediate institutions (i.e. non-religious providers of social assistance), in the face of a substantial overlapping in terms of services provided, religiosity could be said to institute a competitive disadvantage, primarily affecting its interaction with the state. Therefore, while on the one hand religious connotations undoubtedly supported Kōseikai’s attempts to ‘fill the gaps’, on the other hand they exposed the limits that social welfare activities had in repositioning the religious organisation in Japanese society. This was also related to the fact that, although social welfare activities were invested with religious significance in the eyes of practitioners, the boundaries delimiting the public presence of religion in Japan prevented them from conveying those values in the context of their social engagement. They were thus prevented from any attempt to articulate the ‘distinctiveness’ of Kōseikai-promoted assistance as religiously connoted.

Chapter 4 digs further into the matter of Kōseikai’s positioning within Japan’s economy of care. I start from current patterns of social welfare provision, examined in relation to recent developments in the welfare system, to investigate what kind of gaps the religious organisation is trying to fill. Drawing from ethnographic examples, the chapter discusses how Kōseikai-promoted services tackled present deficiencies in expressive and instrumental functions of care. Issues related to demographic ageing within the membership and Japanese population at large are particularly prescient here and the study examines what factors were shaping or hindering attempts to address newly emerging challenges. I argue that, apart from fulfilling religious goals and organisational demands, compensating for the gaps emerging in Japan’s social welfare system could help to advocate for a role for Risshō Kōseikai within the economy of care, defined in terms of continuity and

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60 As emerged in the overview of the development of the organisation’s engagement in social care provision offered in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 will provide further insights on the substantial continuity between Kōseikai-promoted services, and those offered by other non-state actors involved in informal provision of care at the local level.

61 To be further discussed in Chapter 6.
complementarity with formal and informal providers. The chapter demonstrates, however, how the ideals promoted by the religious organisation and its practitioners came up against a series of obstacles emerging in the context of service provision, including practical limitations, legal constraints, and the need to negotiate boundaries of responsibilities with other institutions involved, most notably family and professional actors. These limitations significantly undermined the effectiveness of Köseikai-provided services, and more generally questioned the extent to which social activities could serve to renegotiate the movement’s relevance within contemporary Japanese society.
Among the representatives of Kōseikai whom I had the chance to meet, Reverend Murata was probably the most knowledgeable in the field of social welfare and care. Before becoming the head minister of Church D, where we met, he had been employed for nearly twenty years in the Social Contribution Group (Shakai Köken Gurupu),\(^1\) the division in charge of welfare activities within Kōseikai central administration. In that capacity, he had been devoted to researching social care provision in Japan and abroad. He used this knowledge in the planning and implementation of welfare initiatives directed at Kōseikai members and local communities alike. During one of our first conversations, in his office over tea, Murata stressed the heavy impact that recent social transformations had over the nature of care relationships within Japanese society and beyond. In Japan, he noted, structures of mutual support within families and neighbourhoods had always played a crucial role in securing the survival of local communities and the well-being of their members. In the past, the norm was for vulnerable people to be cared for within their families and villages, which were collectively responsible for assisting the old, the poor and the weak. This system, however, was significantly affected by the radical social changes brought about by modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. In particular, Murata stressed how economic development, by creating the possibility to accumulate wealth, introduced inequality in society and fostered sentiments of greed, jealousy and self-centredness, which corrupted communal ties rooted in solidarity.\(^2\) Alongside these cultural shifts, Murata pointed out how other socio-economic changes, such as the decrease in marriage and fertility rate, nuclearisation of the family, diversification in residential patterns (with

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1 At present incorporated in the Educational Division (Kyōiku Gurūpu).
2 Fieldnotes 07/02/2017.
the increase of elderly-only households), and the rise in female participation in the labour force,\(^3\) resulted in the progressive decline in the capacity of families to take care of their vulnerable members. This created a massive gap in social welfare and the provision of care for the elderly. Although Japan had been experiencing a demographic transition to a low-fertility, ageing society (shōshi kōreika) since at least the 1970s, it was from the 1990s that elderly care became a major political concern. The need to find alternatives to family care became a priority in the political agenda, and the Japanese government began to develop welfare programmes addressing senior citizens. The Golden Plan of 1990 can be regarded as the first government attempt to tackle these issues. The scheme, launched with the slogan ‘from care by family to care by society’ (Campbell 2000) aimed at socialising the costs of providing for the elderly, relieving families from caring duties, in part, by guaranteeing an increased provision of home-help, day care and other services (Danely 2014:48-52; Goodman 2002:13-15; Orpett-Long 2009; White 2002:176-77). Economic recession induced the need to re-formulate social security schemes to cut public expenditure, resulting in the introduction of the Long-Term Care Insurance system (Kaigo hoken seido) in 2000.\(^4\) The plan addressed the growing needs and limits of domestic care by introducing a market approach, thus promoting a conceptual shift from care as expected of the family and allocated by the state, to care as part of the social contract (Izuhara 2003:398-99). These measures encouraged a tremendous expansion in the demand for institutional care and social services, fostering a significant growth in private, market-based provision, and an increasing professionalisation and standardisation of care practices by means of state regulation, institution of managerial positions, training programmes and certification systems (Lebra 2014).

\(^3\) The rise in female labour force participation in particular compromised the established role of the wife/daughter as the main caregiver within the household (Danely 2014; White 2002; Izuhara 2003; Orpett-Long 2009). Regarding increasing difficulties faced by women in reconciling caregiving responsibilities with work commitments and domestic duties see for example Lee 2010, Tsutsui et al. 2014.

\(^4\) In contrast to previous Golden Plans, which were entirely funded by taxes, the new scheme combined taxes and insurance premiums (Danely 2014; Izuhara 2003).
In our interview, Murata observed that the development of a care industry produced a shift away from the traditional structures of care. Fostered by state policy and combined with the disrupting effects that socio-economic changes had on communal bonds and practices of mutual assistance, care services were increasingly outsourced. In the place of care by the family and community, a new system emerged where these services were entrusted to specialised institutions in exchange for money. This had the effect of making human beings increasingly independent from one another. In Murata’s opinion, however, the expansion of private provision of social services alone could not compensate for the huge gap created by the disintegration of kin-based and community-based structures of support. He highlighted the many flaws of state-provided and market-provided assistance, which originated from both the regulations and the structural limits of the system. These included the inadequacy of services, or the limited monetary power of recipients of care. Firstly, he noted how people who lacked the financial resources to access fee-based care, and who used to be supported by communal networks of assistance, were now left behind. Secondly, the expansion in the demand of institutional care encouraged by government measures was not met by an adequate number of facilities or qualified care workers (Danely 2014; Orpett-Long 2009). Even for those who managed to access these services, however, there were demands that both public assistance and professional caregivers failed to meet. Most pressing was the absence of care in regard to emotional needs produced by the shift toward an increasingly individualistic society. Formal and practical limitations increasingly bound the role of care workers. Professional regulations and legal constraints related to the codification of services under the Long-term Care Insurance scheme, but also the shortage of qualified personnel in care facilities and home-based care services (i.e. home-helpers), often prevented caregivers from responding to the expressive demands of patients. Services offered by professional providers tended to focus on the physical needs of recipients, while

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5 As pointed out by Lebra (2004:171-75), the institutionalisation and professionalisation of caregiving – including the introduction of training programmes and certification systems, the institution of managerial positions, the standardisation of care practices through state regulation – encouraged an increasing specialisation of caregivers in instrumental tasks, notably physical labour addressing the bodily needs of the recipient.
overlooking other dimensions of care, notably issues related to their emotional well-being, isolation and social exclusion (Tsutsui et al. 2014). Combined with a decline in the caring role of the family, the conventional locus of expressive relationships, these developments contributed to institute a ‘space of need’, where other actors were called to intervene. More specifically, in the qualitative and quantitative gaps marking social care provision in contemporary Japan, Murata saw a role to play for religious institutions.  

Murata’s testimony offered a glimpse into the most pressing issues facing Japan’s social welfare and care. It showed a sector affected by a combination of the progressive contraction of state-provided assistance, the deterioration of the capacity of families to fulfil caring duties for the elderly, and the limitations of market-based services. These circumstances, combined with recent developments in social policy mentioned in the previous chapter, encouraged a trend toward the expansion and diversification of sources of social services, resulting in a progressive growth in the relevance of intermediate institutions as non-state providers of welfare and care (Osawa 2011). As Risshō Kōseikai also strives to contribute to this field, we may ask where the services provided by the religious organisation stand within the broader economy of care. What are the gaps addressed by the movement, and how do these relate to its religious and organisational goals? This chapter endeavours to answer these questions, moving from the most recent developments in Kōseikai-provided care, to investigate how social transformations, newly emerging challenges and developments in Japan’s welfare system contributed to shape current patterns of engagement. These will be explored both in terms of informal provision of assistance within local congregations and services directed at surrounding communities. Alongside the present features of the system, the analysis will consider the main factors underpinning Kōseikai’s social activities, as well as those limiting it. Recent initiatives undertaken by the organisation served multiple functions, including missionary aims and organisational demands associated with an ageing membership, but also the need to counter negative

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6 Fieldnotes 07/02/2017.
perceptions of new religious organisations widespread in Japanese society. In this respect, gaps in social care provision offered opportunities for intervention and cooperation with non-Kōseikai people and institutions, opening avenues where the religious organisation and its practitioners may be able to re-define their role and significance within Japan’s economy of care and society at large. At the same time, however, these spaces were also informed by practical and formal constraints, which, together with the need to negotiate roles and responsibilities with other actors involved, could significantly undermine the effectiveness of members’ initiatives.

4.1. Recent Developments and Present Circumstances of Kōseikai Welfare

One bright autumnal afternoon, I found myself sitting in a sun-bathed dining room, sipping tea and eating sweets with a group of Kōseikai ladies belonging to a chiku of Church B. Most of those present were over 80 years old and one in her 90s. We spent a couple of hours chatting amiably, mostly about old age and issues connected with it. This afternoon tea was part of a series of monthly meetings organised by the local missionary leader, aimed at getting frail elderly members living in the area together on a regular basis. Small talk, complaints about health problems and a bit of gossip were alternated with readings from Kōseikai publications, disquisitions of memorial rites and religious practice, as well as more pragmatic church matters such as collection of donations (fuse). Just a few days earlier, I had accompanied two other Kōseikai representatives to visit an elderly woman living with her husband. The woman used to be an active member of the congregation, but could now barely leave her house due to poor health. After performing a brief service (gokuyō) in front of the family altar in commemoration of the household’s ancestors, we devoted the rest of the morning to small talk and origami-making. As we folded cranes and flowers, the women chatted about common acquaintances, everyday problems and other mundane topics. Here and there, the visitors would casually drop a question about the host’s health, family

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7 Fieldnotes 17/11/2016.
circumstances and her general well-being. Whenever she left the room, they exchanged concerned comments about her state, and especially her slow decline into dementia. As they would explain to me later, those visits were a way to watch over the woman, but also to address her advancing senility and sense of loneliness by engaging her in conversation and practical tasks such as the origami-making.8

Home visits to vulnerable members of the congregation were one of the principal means of informal provision of care within the local congregations of Risshō Kōseikai. These visits were part of a locally-based system of mutual assistance emerging from developments that had occurred in the last couple of decades. In parallel with a rising concern for the rapid ageing of the population within the political sphere and society at large, in recent years interest in these issues had grown within the religious organisation as well. Awareness of the challenges posed by demographic ageing was not an entirely new trend: as seen in Chapter 2, themes like the need to take care of elderly people within local communities or the importance of keeping healthy and active in old age had long made their appearance in the speeches of Niwano Nikkyō and Kōseikai publications. During the 1990s, however, the growing concern for the caring needs of the elderly found expression in a significant growth of articles discussing nursing care, home-care services, emotional support for caregivers and other problems connected with demographic ageing, as shown by the examples below (Fig. 8, 9).9

9 ‘Kaigo wa otoshiyori no tachiba de’ (Nursing care from the perspective of the elderly), in Kōsei shinbun n. 1839 (05/07/1996); ‘Nayamikatariai, taiken wo kyōyū yoriyoi kaigo he te wo tazusaeru’ (Recounting concerns, sharing experiences. Heading toward an increasingly better nursing care), in Kōsei shinbun n. 1991 (03/09/1999).
Figure 8. Article from Kösei shinbun. The article discusses elderly care, focusing in particular on the issues of dementia (boke) and caregiving fatigue. These topics are addressed by the representative of a voluntary group offering phone counselling (denwa sōdan) to people caring for an elderly family member. While the piece acknowledges the physical and emotional burden that caring for an elderly person affected by dementia may involve, it also highlights the importance of keeping the feelings of the recipient in mind when performing care. This is summarised in the title, which reads ‘Nursing care from the stance of elderly people’ (Kaigo wa otoshiyori no tachiba de).
Figure 9. Article from Kōsei shinbun. The article reports the case of a support group for caregivers (kaigosha noatsu kai) created by a local church. The group gathered people performing nursing care for elderly members of their families. They would meet regularly to exchange knowledge, share personal experiences and concerns, and counter caregiving fatigue thanks to the emotional support gained from personal interaction.

These issues also became a privileged target of investigation for the central administration of Kōseikai, primarily conducted through Kōseikai’s Academic Research Centre (Chuō Gakujutsu Kenkyūjo). As reported by Murata and other representatives of the division, in those years research activities focused on the advancement of ageing within the movement, the practical needs of elderly members, and potential responses to these issues from a missionary perspective. Ultimately, this resulted in the production of a ‘Ten Year Plan for social welfare
initiatives in a super-ageing society’ (*Chōkōrei shakai ni okeru kongo jūnenkan no shakai fukushi no torikumi*) issued in 2009 by the Social Contribution Group. The document examined possible responses to ageing and related issues, instituting elderly care as the main priority for activities conducted on the local level. These trends can be read as evidence of the continuing efforts of the organisation to grasp shifting social circumstances and adapt religious and social activities to newly emerging needs. Yet Köseikai’s concern with elderly care also stemmed from more practical organisational demands related to the rapid ageing of its own membership. Köseikai membership has long shifted to a majority of second, third and fourth generation members. As the organisation struggles to gain new converts and secure the religious commitment of younger generations, the rate of elderly members has grown to an overwhelmingly high number (Watanabe M. 2016). Such circumstances pose new challenges for local congregations, which at present not only have to deal with an increasing number of frail elderly requiring assistance, but also with the need to find new roles for aged members who are still healthy and willing to be of use. More broadly, the growing relevance of intermediate organisations as informal providers of care within Japanese society at large can be also listed among the factors stirring social engagement at both central and grassroots levels. In continuity with this trend, Risshō Köseikai manifested a renewed awareness of its social role, and in particular its duty to contribute to the well-being of local communities. More specifically, the gaps emerging in the social care system created a space where the religious organisation could advocate a role for itself on a par with other social institutions. Environmental influences and organisational needs combined to shape Köseikai’s current forms of engagement, articulated in two main dimensions: systematised provision of social care within local congregations, and members’ participation in civic activities and community service on local scale.

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10 Fieldnotes 06/11/2016, Interview 08/04/2017.
11 Other older new religious organisations are confronted with similar issues, as further discussed in Chapter 5.
4.1.1. Social Welfare Specialists and the Institutionalisation of Social Care Provision within Local Congregations

The pressing need to assist frail elderly people both within Risshō Kōseikai and society at large, together with the progressive diversification of social issues faced by members, resulted in the institution, in 1999, of a ‘social welfare specialist’ (shakai fukushi senmon tantōsha) within the administrative staff of local congregations specifically entrusted with responsibility over social welfare issues. This measure can be seen as an attempt to adapt religious practice and administrative patterns to changing social circumstances and needs. This is demonstrated particularly well by a two-part article published in 1999, reporting a dialogue between university lecturers and representatives of the central administration of Kōseikai. Contributors highlighted the similarity between Kōseikai doctrine and social welfare theory. They framed the institution of social welfare specialists within the context of the societal changes that had occurred in Japan since the end of the Pacific War, including urbanisation, demographic ageing, nuclearisation of family, and major developments in the domain of social welfare, with a special emphasis on the recently introduced nursing care insurance schemes.

The need to combine spiritual salvation (kokoro no men no sukui) with material or formal support (katachi no shien) was also reiterated, presenting social welfare as the missionary practice for the new era (atarashi jidai no fukyōkan). Social welfare specialists became the new and principal targets of the training system, which was reorganised as a two-year programme. The aim remained to equip members with the tools to address the problems troubling those they assisted. As stressed by Noda, a representative of the Educational Division (Kyōiku Gurūpu) in charge of training courses, most of those assuming the role had barely any previous knowledge of social welfare schemes and services. They were mostly ‘ordinary grannies’ (futsū no obāchan) confronted with complex social issues. ‘You would be surprised’ he added, ‘to see what kind of problems these grannies tackle every

This innovation was part of a broader process of de-centralisation of social care provision and human resources development within Kōseikai, marked by a shift of responsibilities from central administration to local congregations. The decision to grant greater autonomy to local centres over educational and social activities was aimed at making the system more responsive to the specific needs of the community, and promoted an increasing diversification of social welfare activities at grassroots level. The introduction of specialised staff in charge of social welfare within local centres contributed to the institutionalisation of pre-existing practices of social care provision. This resulted in the emergence of a locally-based system of assistance articulated along two axes: a vertical line following the hierarchy of local leaders (also referred to as ‘missionary line’, fukyō rain), and a horizontal line centred on the specialist team in charge of social welfare (Fig. 10). The interplay between the two axes created a safety network resting on the ties of mutual support informing the congregation. This was aimed at securing the well-being of members by taking care of their religious needs alongside more pragmatic issues, and ideally extending beyond the boundaries of the church to benefit the local community at large.

![Diagram of the church administration](image)

Figure 10. Position of the social welfare specialist in the church administration (as described in the training course material).

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13 Fieldnotes 08/11/2016.
The ‘missionary line’ was constituted by leaders of the subunits within the church (*shibuchō, shunin* and *kumichō*, leaders of *shibu, chiku* and *kumi* respectively), with the head minister at their top. Köseikai identified the salvation of all mankind as one of its core religious goals, and thus all members were expected to devote to proselytisation and propagation of the teachings as part of their bodhisattva practice. However, members of the missionary line were attributed a special role in this respect, being entrusted with the task of providing spiritual guidance (*michibiki*) to those in their care.\(^{14}\) Missionary leaders were not only deemed responsible for the religious needs of members, but expected to secure their general well-being, which encompassed more practical concerns, such as health, safety, financial stability, family harmony, emotional well-being. At times, however, practitioners faced issues that could not be tackled with conventional missionary tools. It was primarily in those cases that social welfare specialists were expected to intervene. Members chosen for the task often had experience as missionary leaders themselves, having served as *shibuchō* or *shunin*, and could be also assisted by a group of voluntary members, referred to as the ‘welfare staff’ (*fukushi sutaffu*). As with other roles within the church staff, the position (oyaku)\(^{15}\) of ‘social welfare specialist’ was assigned by the head minister. Social welfare specialists were asked to make use of the knowledge and skills acquired through training within localities, engaging in social activities directed both at members of the congregation and the surrounding community. As stated in the course material, ‘the role of the social welfare specialist is to cooperate with the missionary line in the capacity of a member of the church staff, providing relief to members, making use of social resources and contributing to the propagation of teachings’. More specifically, social welfare specialists are charged three main tasks:

\(^{14}\) The development of the church hierarchy in its present configuration can be regarded as a consequence of the organisational reforms implemented shortly after the Manifestation of Truth: as mentioned in Chapter 2, the numerical and territorial expansion of membership created the need to shift from the vertical ties spontaneously formed by proselytisation to a more efficient organisational configuration based on geographical proximity. Thus, this implied a shift from responsibility over one’s direct converts to a missionary role over members living in a set geographical area (Morioka 1979; Risshō Köseikai 1983; Watanabe M. 2011). Chapter 5 will look more closely at the impact of organisational structure and intra-congregational dynamics on social care provision within Köseikai.

\(^{15}\) See Note 21, Chapter 3.
1) Offer advice and support to the self-sufficiency (*jiritsu shien*) of members, making use of social resources and human resources available within the church;
2) Collect and provide information on present welfare schemes and social services;
3) Contribute to local society while developing a missionary approach tailored to everyday life.16

As mentioned in the previous section, at present social care provision in Japan rests on the intersection between state-based and market-based formal systems, kin-provided caregiving and locally-based systems of reciprocal care (Danely 2014:27). We may ask, then, where Kōseikai-promoted care stands within this broader framework: do Kōseikai members contribute to tackle any of the existing gaps in social care provision? The following section seeks to answer the question by presenting an overview of the main services provided through the system, focusing in particular on the needs that they strive to address, as well as similarities and differences with initiatives promoted by other institutions.

### 4.1.2. Role and Activities of Social Welfare Specialists

The two episodes recounted at the beginning of the section offered a glimpse into one of the main forms taken by Kōseikai-provided care, namely home visits directed at members of the congregation in need of assistance. Lone elderly people, together with members of the movement who are sick, bedridden or affected by disabilities, represented the primary target of these activities, especially when unable to attend the church regularly or leave the house often due to poor health. Home visits tended to be planned at *shibu* level, but it was the *shunin* that commonly played a pivotal role. They were entrusted with responsibility towards members residing in a specific neighbourhood (*chiku*): it was their duty to check on the conditions of members requiring special attention by visiting them regularly (once or twice a month, in some cases even weekly) or reaching out to them through phone calls or other means. The purpose of home visits, which were usually referred to as ‘friendly visits’ (*yūai hōmon*), was two-fold. Firstly, they served to safeguard the psychophysical well-being of vulnerable members. The *shunin* would

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16 Quoting from ‘Shakai fukushi senmon tantōsha no yakuwari to katsudō’ (p.1), part of the course material for the training course for the newly appointed social welfare specialists, attended in 2016/2017.
usually inquire about their health, family circumstances, or other issues. If, during one of these visits, they noticed some problem, they would report to their shibuchō – or even the kyōkaichō in particularly serious cases – and if necessary contact the family. Depending on the specific configuration adopted by the individual congregation, the welfare staff may also be actively involved in home visits, usually in support of representatives of the missionary line struggling with a high number of people requiring assistance. Kōseikai’s home visits closely resembled the ‘safety check’ (anpi kakunin) and ‘watching over’ (mimamori) activities performed by a range of locally-based structures of support. First and foremost among these are the voluntary district commissioner system, but more informal networks centred on social welfare councils, neighbourly associations, voluntary organisations also fulfil these functions. Another key aspect of home visits was to provide companionship, human interaction and emotional support, mitigating feelings of isolation. This kind of assistance was provided primarily by offering a sympathetic ear, adopting techniques of ‘active listening’ (keichō) learnt through social welfare training. Aside from emotional care, attentive listening could serve more practical purposes, occasionally throwing light on issues of concern or distress for the recipient (e.g. health problems, financial difficulties, conflicts with family members, inadequacy of caregiving support), which had to be addressed.

Emotional care more generally was attributed a crucial role within Kōseikai-promoted activities, to the extent that it could be regarded as the main societal need members felt they needed to tackle. Recent scholarly contributions on social engagement of Japanese religious institutions have highlighted the growing relevance of religious actors as providers of emotional care, especially in relation to relief activities directed at victims of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster which stroke North-East Japan in 2011 (Inaba 2011; Kasai 2016; McLaughlin 2013a, 2013b; Takahashi 2016). This trend has been often interpreted as signalling the emergence of a new public role for religion within contemporary Japanese society.17

When we contextualise religiously inspired activities within present circumstances

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17 The matter will be further discussed in the Conclusion.
of social welfare provision in Japan, however, the distinctiveness of such ‘emotional care’ comes to be questioned. While Kōseikai’s emphasis on emotional support for its members can be seen as an attempt to address an existing deficiency in expressive functions of care, these concerns were not exclusive to the religious organisation, but rather shared by a wider range of intermediate institutions. The gap created by the combination of a decline in family-based care giving and a tendency of professional providers to prioritise the instrumental needs of recipients in recent years has fostered a significant rise in locally-based practices of emotional care (*kokoro no kea*, mainly used to refer to psychological counselling). These activities, promoted by a wide range of local actors including voluntary organisations, neighbourly associations and district commissioners, closely resemble Kōseikai-provided assistance. Popular services include ‘active listening’ and ‘salon activities’ (*saron katsudō*) aimed at promoting interpersonal interaction among members of the community. Volunteers might offer themselves as ‘conversation partners’ at nursing care facilities for example, integrating instrumental functions performed by professional caregivers, or provide companionship to lonely individuals who request their services. These services are commonly performed through the local welfare councils, volunteering associations or NPOs. Köseikai members employed similar methods. Alongside home visits, practitioners took care of the emotional well-being of recipients of assistance through initiatives directed more broadly at promoting interaction within the congregation, such as luncheons or cafes. They usually involved gathering a specific target group (elderly people, family members performing nursing care, young mothers), combining purposes of entertainment and bonding with provision of practical support, primarily through exchange of information and advice. Many of these initiatives focused on inter-generational exchange. Promoting interaction between children, youth and elderly people, as frequently explained by participants and reiterated in social welfare training, was deemed particularly important given demographic ageing, a shift in family patterns and increasing isolation. These ideas were commonly linked to a more general need to restore weakening communal ties

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18 See for example Bachmann 2014.
and revitalise fundamental values of mutual support and gratitude in younger
generations. As the interview with Reverend Murata (mentioned at the beginning of
the chapter) revealed, discourses of care in Risshō Kōseikai often reproduced
widespread narratives of Japan’s transformation into a ‘relationless society’ (Allison
2015; Inaba 2011). These were suffused in the cultural tropes of inter-dependency
and mutual support that the organisation’s leadership has been promoting since the
1960s.19

Social welfare counselling (shakai fukushi sōdan) represented the second major
stream of engagement, and the main task performed by welfare specialists. In
continuity with a trend started in the 1970s, when graduates of social welfare
courses began to set up ‘consultation rooms’ on church premises, most
congregations held periodical counselling sessions. These were often combined
with religious services or other church events, and aimed at helping members tackle
practical problems by offering advice and information on social security schemes,
care services, and other available resources. These sessions could be generic or
focused on specific issues, such as healthcare, legal matters (Fig. 11), or insurance
schemes for long-term nursing care for the elderly. In the case of an elderly person,
for example, welfare specialists could assist the family with the application for
services under the Long-Term Care Insurance scheme, offer information on other
insurance plans offered by local authorities and social welfare councils, or help with
the search for an adequate nursing care facility. In a similar fashion, they provided
assistance for problems related to care for disabled people, childrearing, livelihood
support, inheritance, healthcare, and education. In some cases, counselling
activities could also involve experts in relevant fields (e.g. professional social
workers, certified caregivers or attorneys).

In this respect, social welfare specialists were commonly afforded a ‘bridging’
(hashiwatashi) or ‘pipeline’ (paipu no yaku) role, as defined in the course material.
Rather than providing a solution to the problem themselves, they were expected to
make use of the knowledge and skills gained through training to mediate between

19 As seen in Chapter 2.
members of the congregation (whether individuals in distress or representatives of the missionary line in need of backup) and external actors (public administration and other formal and informal providers of care) in order to facilitate access to social resources available on local scale. The expression ‘social resources’ (shakai shigen) was used in a broad sense, to encompass social security schemes offered by public administration and local authorities, such as the Long-Term Care Insurance scheme or public assistance and welfare programmes, as well as services offered by state and non-state providers.

The bridging role performed by the social welfare specialist of Risshō Kōseikai can be seen as addressing another significant gap in social care provision, i.e. the limited ‘user-friendliness’ of the social security system. Emotional needs were not the only issue to be addressed. As noted by recent studies on Japan’s welfare system (Estevez-Abe 2008; Iwata and Nishizawa 2008; Osawa 2011), existing gaps in social care provision are exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the system: public assistance is provided through many different schemes, and the relationship among them is often obscure. This creates difficulties in accessing the services, especially for older people. This flaw emerges with particular clarity when we look at the Public Livelihood System (seikatsu hogo). As mentioned in Chapter 2, public assistance was introduced in the post-war years as a residual measure targeted at cases not covered by other social security schemes, such as those specifically directed at the aged, children or disabled people. Although the progressive expansion of social legislation has progressively narrowed the applicability of the seikatsu hogo, the law has never been substantially revised, resulting in a rather tangled relationship between the Public Livelihood Protection and social welfare schemes introduced at a later stage (Iwata 2008).

Participants, including both Kōseikai members and professionals in the field, frequently stressed that the multi-layered and convoluted nature of the social welfare system made it complex to navigate, especially for older people and other disadvantaged groups. It was essential, they argued, to help them access the services by providing information and advice. In response to these issues, state-appointed volunteers and independent voluntary associations have been offering
advice on social welfare programmes and assistance in applying for them for decades (Haddad 2007; Stevens 1997). Nowadays nursing care facilities, in cooperation with the public administration, also perform similar functions. Additionally, within Kōseikai, the social welfare specialists or practitioners serving as community volunteers most frequently offered counselling on social welfare matters and assistance with application to public. The ‘pipeline’ analogy, used by Kōseikai members, is significant given that is one used frequently, as Haddad notes (2007:5, 25), by Japanese voluntary associations, who tend to define their role as mediating between citizens and authorities by conveying ideas, information and policies. Another way in which social welfare specialists fulfilled their role as mediators was by spreading knowledge within local churches. Those attending social welfare courses commonly shared the contents of this training with other administrative staff, often by setting up study groups. In addition, the welfare staff might involve members in training or other educational activities, either held at the church or offered by external institutions (welfare councils, care facilities). They might also organise visits to care facilities, or publish newsletters.

In terms of institutionalised provision of assistance, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Risshō Kōseikai also offers social insurance plans that cover healthcare, natural disasters and other accidents. These are primarily provided by the Kōseikai LifePlan (Kōseikai Raifupuran), or the Tachibana Corporation (Tachibana Sangyō), another enterprise associated with the religious organisation. Although these schemes are not formally aimed at the Kōseikai membership, members are their target market, as shown for example by the health insurance plan ‘Healthy Insurance’ (Sukoyaka hoken), defined as a ‘structure of mutual support for members’ (kaiin no sōgochitsujo, Fig. 12). The promotion and adoption of these plans is tightly interwoven into the daily life of the congregations, at times even integrated in ritual practices. I once assisted to the presentation of an insurance plan for earthquake damages during a service in Church A. Immediately after the chanting of the sutra, a man, wearing the same otasuki (ceremonial sash) as the rest of the congregation,

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20 These activities also played a key role in the codification and transmission of theological interpretations for social activities within the organisation, as will be further discussed in Chapter 5.
stood up from the audience and approached the podium. He introduced himself as a representative of the Kōseikai Lifeplan, and explained the main features of the schemes and the application process. This brief address was followed by the usual sermon (hōwa) given by the head minister. After the service, when most of the participants had divided into their respective units to begin the hōza, the man occupied a post set up in a corner of the hall, offering advice to those who were interested in the plan. The healthcare insurance scheme mentioned above (Sukoyaka hoken) was also promoted in similar fashion. The church staff were directly involved in the application process. The necessary documentation could be requested at the church office, while the missionary leaders took care of collecting forms from members of their unit and passing them to the central administration. It was also common to see representatives of the Tachibana Corporation hold counselling sessions on the church premises, commonly advertised through posters or verbal announcements.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

Figure 1. Poster advertising free legal counselling sessions at the headquarters.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

Figure 2. ‘Healthy Insurance’ pamphlet, presenting two insurance schemes: a plan for illness and one for injuries and casualties. The top sentence recites ‘a structure of mutual support for members’.

22 Fieldnotes 10/12/2016.
The brief overview presented above offers a general idea of the main activities promoted by Risshō Kōseikai at an institutional and a grassroots level, as well as the specific needs and gaps in social care provision that they sought to address. Before digging further into the question of how Kōseikai-provided services fit into the broader framework of Japan’s welfare system, it is necessary to briefly explore the factors underpinning these activities. As seen in the previous chapters, and reiterated here, social welfare activities were primarily conceived in relation to Kōseikai’s missionary ambitions. They were a salvific tool fit to address changing social needs and newly emerging challenges. In this respect, the developments that occurred in recent years appear to be in line with the premises set by Founder Niwano, most notably the need to constantly renovate religious practice in order to adapt it to a reality in continuous transformation. Missionary aims aside, however, there were also more pragmatic concerns motivating Kōseikai’s commitment to social welfare provision, and elderly care more specifically, namely issues stemming from the rapid ageing of its own membership. The institutionalisation of a system of social care provision, and especially the creation of the position of social welfare specialist, was aimed at better catering for the religious and social needs of a growing number of frail elderly people. As pointed out by Yoshida, head welfare specialist of Church C, it also forged an alternative role for older members, notably former missionary leaders, who could no longer fulfil the obligations associated to the position of shunin or shibuchō but still wanted to be an active part of the life of the congregation in some form.23 This aspect emerged with particular clarity in social welfare courses, where many attendees reported to have switched to the position of social welfare specialist as a less demanding alternative to missionary roles. Yet, in terms of organisational dynamics, welfare activities (and especially home visits or gatherings) also fulfilled more narrowly administrative functions, such as the collection of donations and membership fees, or the distribution of Kōseikai weekly and monthly publications (Kōsei shinbun and Kōsei). Institutional initiatives such as social insurance schemes and welfare facilities constituted also a source of revenue for the organisation.

23 Interview 17/04/2017.
Alongside missionary aims and organisational demands, social welfare activities also served to improve public opinion of the religious institution. Risshō Kōseikai addressing pressing societal needs presented the organisation in a positive light. By contributing to society, the widespread mistrust toward new religions movements was mitigated in some measure. Although these organisations had long been object of public criticism – and Risshō Kōseikai had also been involved in a clash with authorities and the media in the 1950s – the sarin gas attack perpetrated in 1995 by Aum Shinrikyō had exacerbated former controversies and significantly reinforced negative perceptions of religious institutions as dangerous and potentially disruptive to the social order (Baffelli and Reader 2012). These developments instituted a further challenge for Kōseikai, a challenge that social welfare activities could help to tackle by promoting a counter-narrative of religious organisations as a productive influence within society. This idea emerged in a conversation with a representative of the central administration, who suggested that social activities had contributed to counter the negative impact that the Aum affair had had on the image of Risshō Kōseikai, and its interaction with society. Although the public perception of the movement remains somewhat problematic, he believed that its diligent and continued engagement in social care ‘had been acknowledged by society’, concluding that ‘while Risshō Kōseikai may promote many activities, social recognition is what matters the most’. Addressing existing deficiencies in instrumental and expressive functions of care offered a viable path to renegotiate the position of Kōseikai within Japanese society. The gaps in social care provision opened potential venues of intervention where members could operate shoulder-to-shoulder with other providers, and establish a role for themselves vis-à-vis the main institutions involved in this domain. Ideals and reality, however, did not always go hand in hand. When moving to the level of actual service provision, the idyllic image presented by Kōseikai representatives and members at times gave way to different dynamics. To unpack these, the next section examines Kōseikai’s

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24 See Chapter 1.
25 The issue will be further discussed in Chapter 6.
26 Interview 27/07/2017.
positioning within Japan’s economy of care, focusing on practitioners’ interaction with family members, professionals and public bodies.

4.2. Risshō Kōseikai in the Economy of Care

Where does Risshō Kōseikai stand within the broader economy of care? As mentioned above, Kōseikai-provided assistance was primarily defined in residual terms, as addressing needs not adequately satisfied by other formal and informal providers of care. Responding to demands left unanswered by public and private institutions allowed Kōseikai representatives and grassroots members to articulate a role for the religious community in terms of continuity and complementary with the main actors participating in Japan’s economy of care, notably family, public administration and professional providers. However, moving from a theoretical level to actual service provision, these ideals clashed with several obstacles. Practitioners were confronted with the need to negotiate roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis other providers. Practical limitations (lack of professional expertise, legal authority) were also an issue, often stemming from their liminal status as neither kin nor professionals. Service provision, thus, was subordinated to collaboration with other agents involved. This interaction, however, did not always run smoothly, and could expose tensions. In the end, issues and practical difficulties emerging in the context of activity implementation reduced the effectiveness of the services offered by practitioners. This was especially the case in the absence of cooperative relationships with other formal and informal providers. More broadly, it hindered Kōseikai leadership’s attempts to introduce innovations directed at addressing newly emerged religious, organisational and social needs. These issues were apparent in the interaction between Kōseikai practitioners and the family members of the recipients of care.

4.2.1. The Religious Community as Extended Family

Since its origins, the family was always of crucial importance in Kōseikai and regarded as the fundamental unit of society and main repository of expressive relations. These ideas were central in the works and speeches of Niwano Nikkyō. He
earnestly promoted a romanticised image of the traditional extended family, framed in narratives of communal life in rural villages, rooted in cooperation and mutual aid. The founder commonly presented his own family as embodying this ideal, as his autobiography recounted (Niwano 1978). He was born into a large family, living in harmony under the same roof, where members helped and supported each other. Such childhood experiences, Niwano stressed, taught him the fundamental truth that all life is inter-connected, and that human beings cannot live without one another, instilling within him the desire to help others. These ideals remain alive today, as I had the chance to observe on the occasion of the commemoration of Niwano’s birth held in Church A. Here, accounts of the life of the founder were interweaved with nostalgic images of idyllic life in the traditional family and rural community.  

Family was attributed particular relevance in relation to social welfare provision. However, even though family was still regarded as the main repository of caring duties toward vulnerable members, practitioners were also aware that the combination of socio-economic, demographic and legal changes that had occurred in recent decades had significantly undermined its capacity to meet these expectations. In this respect, Kōseikai activities were primarily framed as supporting and integrating the caring role of the family, compensating for the negative effects of social transformations. That primarily translated into assisting family members dealing with elderly care, by offering emotional support, advice on available schemes or mediating between the family and various service providers, such as care facilities, community support centres, or social welfare councils. These were the cases most frequently reported in social welfare training sessions, where members often shared experiences of assisting adult children (commonly daughters) caring for their elderly parents or in-laws. For example Yoshida, the welfare specialist from Church C mentioned above, was helping a young woman devoted to full-time nursing care for her mother, and approaching a state of ‘caregiving exhaustion’ (kaigo hirō). While offering sympathy and emotional support, Yoshida

27 Fieldnotes 15/11/2016.
supported her on a more practical level, helping with an application to the Long-term Care Insurance scheme and liaising with a nursing care facility. The daughter had asked him, as a representative of the church, to get in touch with the facility on her behalf, since she was ashamed to seek advice at the community support centre.\textsuperscript{28} The episode was indicative of a broader dynamic observed in the field: the effects of the social stigma associated with public assistance. As noted by Iwata and Nishizawa (2008), for example, relying on social services and welfare benefits in Japan is commonly seen in a negative light, perceived as leeching off state resources. Although, as noted by participants, the public perception of welfare programmes and those who benefit from them has changed in recent years, and people – especially elderly – have become more likely to apply for services, there is still a strong sense of welfare recipients as being a burden to the collective. More generally, mediating with local authorities and care facilities, as well as providing advice on legal, financial and administrative matters, were among the main tasks performed by social welfare specialists alongside emotional care.

Filling the gaps in the caring functions of the family, however, could also mean taking over familial obligations, i.e. becoming a substitute family member. This was especially the case in where there was an absence of kin, as with lone elderly or elderly couples with no close family or whose relatives were unable to care for them on a daily basis. A course attendee from Chiba prefecture shared such an example with her fellow trainees. She had been asked to watch over an elderly man, left alone after the recent death of his wife, by his daughter, living in another city.\textsuperscript{29} These dynamics were generally integrated in a broader familial narrative embedded in Risshō Kōseikai, frequently voiced by representatives of the central administration and grassroots members alike, and rooted on the idea of the religious community as a ‘large family’ (daikazoku). The congregation was defined as an extension of the family, characterised by continuity in modes of interaction and informal provision of care based on mutual dependency, indebtedness and

\textsuperscript{28} Fieldnotes 23/04/2017.  
\textsuperscript{29} Fieldnotes 22/04/2017.
reciprocity.\textsuperscript{30} It was conceived as an alternative safety network for those who had no kin or whose family members could not assist them. As explained by a social welfare trainee from the Aomori prefecture, the system could be seen as a structure of mutual aid functioning as a ‘big household’ (ookii katei), where she acted ‘like a mother’ (okāsan no yō ni).\textsuperscript{31}

Family and religious organisation were assumed to maintain a cooperative relationship rooted in a shared purpose, securing the safety and well-being of frail members. Despite these ideals, however, the involvement of Köseikai members in the provision of care occasionally generated frictions with the families of care recipients. This related primarily to the failure to establish and maintain proper boundaries for respective roles and responsibilities. Practitioners’ willingness to be of help, even when motivated by the best intentions, could turn into a source of conflict, especially in the case of contrasting opinions over the well-being of the elderly beneficiary. The official stance promoted within Köseikai was to respect and adapt to the decisions of family members, as frequently reiterated in social welfare training sessions and administrative meetings in local churches. Yet, at times practitioners felt the urge to impose their views or try to persuade the recipient against the will of the family. That could happen when they felt that relatives lacked an in-depth understanding of the situation, for example in the case of adult children living far away, who visited their parents only sporadically, and sometimes failed to realise the gravity of their conditions.\textsuperscript{32} Regarding health problems, Kajiwara, a social welfare specialist from Saitama prefecture, pointed out how family members were often the last to notice the symptoms, because they didn’t spend enough time with the person or simply didn’t want to accept the reality. In such cases, it could be hard to convince them of the need for a medical examination, as she experienced in the case of an elderly member in an advanced state of dementia, looked after by her son. It was the shunin responsible who had first noticed the symptoms, and convinced the son to seek Kajiwara’s advice. They had attended a counselling

\textsuperscript{30} Fictive kinship nuances emerged in patterns of indebtedness and reciprocity on a generational basis, as seen in Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{31} Fieldnotes 11/02/2017.
\textsuperscript{32} Fieldnotes 04/04/2017.
session together, but disagreed over the measures to take, with the son refusing to apply to the Long-Term Care Insurance scheme. Moreover, he expressed a general dissatisfaction with the attitude of the shunin, whom he felt was meddling in private family matters, visiting his mother too often and even advising her on serious matters such as money.33

This case was representative of the tensions that could emerge when Kōseikai members ventured into sensitive areas. Complains about the ‘invasive’ behaviour of missionary leaders were frequently reported at social welfare training sessions. Some issues appeared potentially more controversial than others, such as healthcare, financial matters, decisions concerning property and important life choices. In a conversation over lunchtime, social welfare trainees expressed uncertainty over the proper boundaries of their engagement, asking each other ‘to what extent they could get involved in family matters’.34 Members’ intervention in those domains did not only carry a greater potential for clashes with family members, but could also have more serious repercussions, for example in terms of legal responsibility. Awareness of the potential risks led some local leaders to establish rules for their subordinates. Kajiwara explained that the head minister of her church had set a series of guidelines for missionary line and welfare staff, delineating the boundaries of their involvement in the assistance of members in need. Among these was a general prohibition on handling money. In some cases, however, it proved difficult to stick to those rules, as shown by Kajiwara’s own experience. She was taking care of a lone elderly woman, with no close family. To pay for medical services and other daily needs, the beneficiary needed to have cash available on a regular basis. However, she was unable to visit the bank and withdraw the money herself, and thus often asked Kajiwara to do it in her stead, entrusting her with the bankbook. Kajiwara felt uncomfortable with the task, which put her in a risky position: she not only lacked the legal authority to handle that person’s financial resources, but considering the senility of the care recipient, there was the danger that the elderly woman would forget about the request or

33 Fieldnotes 11/02/2017.
34 Fieldnotes 22/04/2017.
misremembered the amount, and accuse Kajiwara of stealing the money. These circumstances required the intervention of a family member, Kajiwara noted. Yet, the woman had only two distant nephews, who had granted their cooperation over strictly legal matters (e.g. signing the application for public assistance), but besides this seemed unwilling to assist their aunt. The episode hinted at another possible scenario in the interaction between religious community and family reported by practitioners, namely the case of family members taking advantage of Kōseikai’s readiness to offer assistance. In a few cases, practitioners suggested that relatives, notably adult children, at times neglected their obligations and unloaded the burden of caring duties onto the religious community, relying on them to take care of their parents. Assistance, they felt, was expected as a repayment for all the efforts and resources that their parents had devoted to Kōseikai, especially for elderly members who had served the congregation for a long time.

More generally, the case of Kajiwara was indicative of the limits encountered by practitioners when lacking the support of the recipient’s family. Despite their willingness to compensate for the decline of kin-provided care, in the context of actual service provision Kōseikai members were inevitably confronted with several obstacles, stemming from both formal constraints and practical limitations. As once observed by Yoshida, in most cases they could not solve the issue themselves even if they wanted, but could only act in support of the family’s initiatives. Without the authorisation of a family member, they could not arrange medical examinations, handle money, apply for public assistance or social insurance schemes. For example, in the event that the recipient needed medical aid, even if they accompanied him or her to the hospital to take an examination, the doctor would not give them any information, since they were not kin. Their role, whether by choice or necessity, was therefore always secondary to that of the family. The family’s lack of cooperation – as well as the absence of relatives – could significantly undermine their efforts. These circumstances could become a source of frustration for practitioners. They

36 Fieldnotes 22/04/2017.
37 Fieldnotes 04/04/2017.
felt the clash between their willingness and perceived obligation to help vulnerable members of the congregation, and the actual limits of what they could accomplish as non-kin, keenly.

4.2.2. Complementing Formal Provision: Functional Differentiation with Professional Caregivers

The limits of Köseikai-provided assistance were not exclusive to its interaction with the family, but also applied to the sphere of formal provision, namely state- and market-based assistance. As noted during one of the meetings of Church C’s welfare staff, there were many issues that members could not solve by themselves, as they required the professional expertise of a certified caregiver or the intervention of the public administration.\(^{38}\) It was often stressed, especially in training, that Köseikai members were not specialists, and should thus abstain from performing tasks demanding knowledge, skills or formal qualifications that they did not possess, notably nursing care. While a lack of professional expertise and legal constraints limited the scope of the services that Köseikai members were able to offer, existing – qualitative and quantitative – gaps in formal provision of assistance created opportunities for intervention. They allowed members to define their role in terms of functional differentiation and complementarity with state- and market-based care. Expressive functions of care in particular were attributed crucial importance. Köseikai members frequently pointed out that professional caregivers (home-helpers, staff of care facilities) could not satisfactorily address the emotional demands of recipients, due to formal and practical constraints. Members performing visits often argued that solitude was the main problem faced by elderly people. They emphasised the importance of spending time with them, talking and listening to what they wanted to say. As once stated in a meeting of Church A’s welfare staff, ‘even listening to recipients’ stories is very important […] that is also social welfare’.\(^{39}\) Besides mitigating loneliness, personal interaction and conversation were deemed paramount to the overall health of senile elderly people.

\(^{38}\) Fieldnotes 24/04/2017.

\(^{39}\) Fieldnotes 17/01/2017.
They helped to keep their brain active and counter the advancement of dementia. Practitioners noted that home-helpers (or the personnel of nursing care facilities) seldom had the time to sit and talk with clients.\(^{40}\) This deficiency in the expressive functions of care, characterising professional provision, was intensified by the family’s growing inability to address the emotional needs of elderly members.

The relevance of emotional support for Kōseikai caregivers and recipients of assistance alike emerged with clarity in a home visit carried out with Maeda, head of the welfare staff in Church A, to an elderly lady called Mizuno, living with her son and his family. Mizuno was cheerful and chatty: she greeted us merrily when we reached the house, and then talked almost without interruption throughout the duration of our stay, which lasted about an hour and a half. She told us about her weak legs and other health problems; about the death of her daughter the year before; about her childhood and youth; common acquaintances from the congregation; her pension and the difficulties in living with that little money; her grandsons and great-grandsons. Words poured out from Mizuno like a river in flood, investing us with memories happy and sad, past regrets and present concerns. While she talked, Maeda mostly nodded, occasionally interjecting the conversation with a ‘Is that so?’, acknowledging the difficulties Mizuno had been through, or rejoicing about the happy moments. She praised her memory and fluency in speaking, and complimented her for being healthy and sound. In doing so, she was applying techniques of ‘active listening’ learnt at Kōseikai social welfare training course. Here and there, she would also discretely drop a question about Mizuno’s well-being, asking whether there was something bothering her at the moment. On our way back, I commented that Mizuno was very energetic, and seemed to really enjoy chatting. Maeda replied that she must have been happy to have someone listening to her, explaining that, despite living with her family, Mizuno was very lonely. Both her son and daughter-in-law were out during the day, as were their children, and the old lady spent most of her time by herself. She received assistance from a home-helper, but that person was busy with practical chores, and didn’t really have the time to sit down and simply have a chat with her. Therefore, when

\(^{40}\) Fieldnotes 04/04/2017.
she or another member of the congregation went for a visit, she talked as much as she could. ‘I wonder’, Maeda thoughtfully added, ‘for how many days had she been waiting this time’.41

Although Kōseikai members generally regarded emotional care as their main priority, gaps in formal provision of assistance could also be detected on the instrumental level. Practitioners commented that the support offered by home-helpers was often insufficient, as normally it did not cover household chores such as cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking, small repairs, especially when the recipient had been assigned a relatively low degree of caring needs in the Long-Term Care Insurance system.42 These tasks, however, could be challenging for a frail elderly person or someone affected by disability, instituting a further space of need where they felt the necessity to intervene. Alongside emotional support, therefore, home visits to frail members could also involve more practical forms of assistance.43 Mediation between recipients and providers of care can be regarded as another way in which Kōseikai-provided assistance complemented state and market-based services. As shown by the ethnographic examples offered above, the main functions fulfilled by the social welfare specialists involved offering information on available state- and privately-sponsored schemes of support for the elderly, as well as facilitating access to them by liaising with local authorities, professional providers and the other institutions involved. In sum, welfare activities carried out by the congregation were seen as integrating services provided by other actors, rather than in contrast or competition with them. Practitioners articulated their engagement in complementary terms, as contributing to the shared goal of guaranteeing a comprehensive coverage – in both qualitative and quantitative terms – of the needs of vulnerable members of society. As in the case of the family, however, in this regard ideal premises of cooperation did not always mean smooth interaction. Whereas practitioners commonly avoided invading formal providers’

41 Fieldnotes 28/01/2017.
42 Home-based care services are rigidly codified under the Long-Term Insurance system in terms of both duration and tasks that caregivers need to perform in correspondence with different levels of caring needs.
43 Fieldnotes 25/03/2017, 04/04/2017.
sphere of responsibility, and tailored their intervention to address those demands left unanswered by professional caregivers and home-helpers, tensions could occasionally emerge in their interaction, primarily due the liminal position of Köseikai members, possessing neither kinship relationships with the recipients, nor professional qualifications or a legally recognised status. Although I never came across cases of open conflict, members showed a general uneasiness about interacting with home-helpers and care managers, and took precautions to avoid crossing paths with them, for example by abstaining from visiting on set days, or excusing themselves if a caregiver arrived. The liminality of Köseikai members as neither family nor formally acknowledged social workers could also problematise their stance when seeking cooperation from public bodies. More generally, as will be extensively discussed in Chapter 6, when engaging with other – formal or informal – providers of assistance, Köseikai members faced multiple hurdles, which were primarily (but not exclusively) related to their religious identity. These limitations significantly affected the scope of activities promoted by local congregations, as further discussed in the following section.

4.3. Social Contribution: Köseikai in the Local Community

Since the activities discussed up to this point were primarily targeted at members of the congregation, it presents the question as to what kind of services the religious organisation and its practitioners offered to the local community and society at large. In terms of institutional forms of social contribution, the most representative example can be probably found in the welfare facilities affiliated to Risshō Köseikai. At present these include a general hospital (Kösei Byōin) with its related nursing care school (Kösei Kango Senmon Gakkō), two elderly care facilities (Aikyōen and Saitama Myōhōen), three kindergartens (Kösei Ikujien, Fuchū Kösei Yōchien, Fukui Kösei Yōchien), and a Counselling Research Institute (Kösei Kaunseringu Kenkyūjo). Some of these institutions are an integrated part of the religious corporation

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44 The situation changed in the case of practitioners who, besides their involvement in informal provision of care within the congregation, engaged in social work in more formal ways e.g. serving as district commissioners or working as home-helpers. On the matter see Chapter 6.

45 Fieldnotes 27/03/2017.
while others are managed by the Kōsei Lifeplan group or have an independent status.\textsuperscript{46} The scope of the services offered by these facilities, however, remains limited, in terms of the number of recipients and its geographic reach (as they are all located in Tokyo metropolitan area or Saitama prefecture). Moreover, most of the services offered by the facilities are fee-based, which place them on a slightly different level compared to the other activities discussed in the chapter, and the main focus of the thesis, namely informal provision of welfare and care carried out by the grassroots members.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} Besides care facilities, the organisation manages several cultural and educational institutions, such as the Kōsei Library (Kōsei Toshokan), the Central Academic Research Centre (Chūō Gakujutsu Kenkyūjo), a Research Institute on Education (Kyōikusha Kyōiku Kenkyūjo), a cultural association (Kōsei Bunka Kyōkai), and a publishing company (Kōsei Shuppansha).

\textsuperscript{47} Due to the limits of the thesis, I have chosen to focus on informal service provision as privileged object of investigation. Nevertheless, institutional care undoubtedly represents a relevant dimension of Kōseikai welfare, and a worthy avenue of investigation for the future.

Figure 13. Article from Kōsei shinbun. The article describes the visits of President Niwano to a local church in occasion of the enshrinement of the statue of the Eternal Buddha. In his sermon, the president encouraged the congregation to get involved in community service as a way to implement the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and expressed his desire to ‘work toward the creation of a brighter society together with the Buddhist community (sangha)’.
As seen in Chapter 2, the importance of offering a contribution to the local community has been a constant trope in the promotion of social welfare activities within Kōseikai: alongside support for vulnerable members of the congregation, Kōseikai practitioners were earnestly exhorted to devote to social service and volunteering on a local level. This idea has been recurrently stressed in speeches and publications, as exemplified by a 1995 article reporting a sermon given by President Niwano. During a visit to a local church, he expressed a willingness to ‘work toward the creation of a brighter society alongside his religious community’ (Fig. 13). 48

Figure 14. Article from Kōsei shinbun. The article, titled ‘Contributing [to society] on the basis of a religious spirit’ reports the case of a religious youth association that had received an award from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare for the blood donation campaign that they sponsored. The association included, among others, the Youth division of a local congregation of Risshō Kōseikai, young parishioners of a Shinto institution, and members of Tenrikyō, another new religious organisation.

More generally, members were invited to ‘contribute to the local community based on their religious spirit’ (Fig. 14). 49 Social welfare specialists in particular were strongly encouraged to put the knowledge and skills acquired through the training

48 ‘Chiki he no kōken chikau’ (Pledging a contribution to the local community) in Kōsei shinbun n. 1802 (22/09/1995).
49 ‘Shūkyō seishin wo moto ni chiiki ni kōken’ (Contributing to the community on the basis of a religious spirit), in Kōsei shinbun n. 1795 (04/08/1995).
at the service of society. In general, Kōseikai publications from these years reflect a general trend toward the rise of social engagement at a grassroots level. This emerged in the mid-1990s as a result of both Kōseikai-sponsored educational initiatives and the growing interest for voluntarism within Japanese society at large. 1995 saw a mass participation in relief efforts following the Hanshin earthquake in the Osaka-Kobe area, triggered by the delay in government response to the emergency. This contributed to a boom in voluntarism on larger scale, which led the media to label 1995 as the ‘first year of voluntarism’ (boranteia gannen, Georgeou 2010:473). These developments brought about a reconsideration of the role of volunteering activities in Japan, and also fostered increasing pressures to grant public support and legal recognition to civic activities (Bestor V. 2002:37-38).50 Within Kōseikai, these developments propelled an increased participation in social service and community volunteering at a local level. This was accompanied by a growth of articles on social activism in the movement’s publications, especially in the aftermath of the earthquake (1995-1998). These articles featured stories of individual members devoting themselves to welfare counselling, support for caregivers, volunteering in welfare facilities and fundraising campaigns. The examples provided in Chapter 3 showed how these trends remain alive today, as many Kōseikai members continue to earnestly engage in social welfare activities outside the boundaries of the congregation, for example by serving in the capacity of district commissioners. The overview presented in this chapter, however, appears at odds with these dynamics. Despite constant exhortations from the leadership to extend the scope of activities for the benefit of the surrounding community, most of the social services offered by the religious organisation through

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50 The main outcome was the promulgation, in 1998, of the NPO Law (Tokutei Hierikatsudō Hōjinhō), which decentralised and simplified the process of incorporation for civil organisations and reduced bureaucratic influence over their activities, giving way to a significant increase of incorporated civil organisations (Haddad 2010; Laratta 2010; Pekkanen 2000). Although the events of these years have often been depicted as a watershed in the history of volunteering in Japan, as convincingly argued by Avenell (2010:69-70), these developments did not represent an entirely new or spontaneous trend. Even though government agencies did not have a direct role in promoting the mass mobilisation following the Hanshin earthquake, this effort had been at least partly encouraged by the effects of twenty years of state intervention directed at nurturing civic engagement. By the early 1990s, this had fostered the creation of a solid infrastructure for activism, as well as a significant growth in the number of individuals and groups registered with social welfare councils and volunteer centres.
institutionalised channels and locally-based systems of mutual support remained almost exclusively directed at Kōseikai members. We may wonder, thus, what could be the main reasons for such discrepancy between ideals promoted by the centre, and the reality of the grassroots experience? More generally, this concluding section will take stock of the data presented in the chapter, and ask whether Risshō Kōseikai is effectively addressing the deficiencies in social care provision, and what kind of gaps it thus far managed to fill.

Social welfare activities, we have seen, served to tackle some pressing organisational demands, including the need to cater for the religious and social needs of a rapidly ageing membership. As shown by the cases described in the chapter, practitioners were able to address some relevant internal gaps, related to both the decline in the caring role of the family and the limits of professional caregiving. Social welfare specialists offered support for family members struggling with caring matters. They also compensated for the shortage of kin-provided assistance in the case of members who had no close family or whose relatives were unable or unwilling to fulfil their caring responsibilities. Kōseikai practitioners were well aware of the existing limits in formal provision of care (state and market-based) and intentioned to compensate for them. They did this by targeting expressive and instrumental demands left unattended by professional caregivers, and assisting members in navigating the maze of public services, social insurance schemes and welfare programmes. We have also seen, however, how the effectiveness of members’ efforts was significantly affected by a number of variables. These often stemmed from their liminal position as neither kin nor professionals. Kōseikai practitioners were limited by practical and formal constraints set by legislation and a lack of expertise needed to perform some of the services required by recipients (notably nursing care). Interaction with other actors involved in care provision was another crucial dynamic, as practitioners were compelled to negotiate the boundaries of their role vis-à-vis formal providers and especially the family. While this negotiation could give way to cooperative initiatives, beneficial for the care recipient, in other cases Kōseikai’s involvement in domestic matters generated frictions with family members, affecting the practitioners’ capacity for intervention.
In addition to the motivations for volunteering and the circumstances fostering it, this chapter offered a glimpse into the obstacles undermining Kōseikai’s attempts to fill the gaps in social care provision. These limitations affected also services directed beyond the boundaries of the organisation. In that case, they were further exacerbated by additional constraints stemming from the religious connotation of these activities. Although – as seen in the previous chapter – religious attributes served to increase members’ commitment to social welfare activities, when it came to extra-congregational settings, they proved highly detrimental. As will be further discussed in Chapter 6, the widespread mistrust of new religions, combined with limits related to the formal exclusion of religion from the public sphere, heavily affected the initiatives of practitioners volunteering outside the congregation. Due to the hurdles encountered by practitioners when operating in the capacity of Kōseikai members, most of those willing to devote to the service of their communities chose to channel their efforts in alternative venues, principally located outside the institutional framework associated with the religious organisation. Therefore, even though grassroots members did engage in social service and volunteering for the benefit of Japanese society at large, this was seldom done under the name of Kōseikai, which questioned the potential impact that these activities could have on the public image of the organisation.

Before engaging with that discussion, however, there was another set of variables affecting Kōseikai’s attempts to ‘fill the gaps’, namely the vulnerabilities intrinsic to the religious organisation itself. Up to this point, I have primarily focused on the analysis of Kōseikai’s activities within the context of Japan’s social welfare system, looking at the influence that social circumstances and other external variables exerted on the activities promoted by the movement. In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping religiously inspired activism,

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51 Although the civic movement Meisha remained an important venue for Kōseikai’s social engagement, it was by no means the only or even the most popular option: many preferred to volunteer in care facilities or registering under the local branch of shakya, in an individual capacity or setting up a voluntary association. Many also chose to serve their communities as district commissioners or by participating in the local neighbourly associations. We will look more closely at social engagement in extra-congregational settings in Chapter 6, which also outlines the main obstacles faced by practitioners in these contexts, and the strategies adopted to circumvent them and achieve practical and spiritual goals.
however, it seems worthy to have a closer look at the role played by structural features and intra-congregational dynamics. In Chapter 5, I move the focus inside Risshō Köseikai, to discuss how practical and conceptual dimensions of welfare activities were negotiated among multiple actors operating at different levels within the religious institution. More specifically, I show how efforts from the centre to introduce innovations aimed at responding to current religious and organisational demands were partly frustrated by the dysfunctionalities in centre-periphery interaction. The distribution of authority, responsibilities and knowledge within local congregations, as well as broader issues affecting Köseikai more generally, such as the rapid ageing and declining commitment of its membership, also played their part. These issues all contributed to weaken Köseikai’s adaptive capacity, ultimately undermining its attempts to fill internal and external gaps.
Chapter 5
Constructing the Religious Significance of Social Activities
Multi-directional Negotiations and Organisational Obstacles

In February 2017, I joined a small group of newly appointed social welfare specialists (shakai fukushi senmon tantōsha), coming from Kōseikai centres spread all over Japan, to attend my first session of the training course held at the headquarters. It was the opening meeting of the second year of the programme, entitled ‘Social Welfare Research Group’. The session opened with a brief induction explaining the structure and content of the course: while we were sipping our morning coffees, a young woman called Tanaka, a representative of the Educational Division (Kyōiku Gurūpu) of the central administration of Kōseikai, gave us the gist of the social welfare training programme. She underlined that its main purpose was to equip members with the basic tools to carry out social welfare activities within their congregation and community in the spirit of Kōseikai doctrine. Practitioners were invited to make use of these activities to save and cultivate believers in the light of notions of non-duality between the material and the immaterial (busshin ichinyo) and the unity between the self and the other (jita ittai). At the same time, practitioners were to perform self-cultivation (in Kōseikai terminology, ‘cultivate the field of the heart’, shinden wo tagayasu). These statements condensed a few relevant themes that would recurrently emerge in

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1 In 1999, following the institution of the figure of the ‘social welfare specialist’, the social welfare training course was reorganised as a two-year programme: the first year, entitled ‘Social Welfare Course’ (shakai fukushi kōza), aimed at providing attendees with a basic understanding of the social welfare system and resources available at local level. The course primarily dealt with features of Japan’s welfare system – including relevant laws, state-provided social services, classification of welfare facilities and social enterprises – but also taught the basic methodology of social work and counselling, which participants were encouraged to adopt in their interaction with the recipients of assistance. The second year, labelled ‘Social Welfare Research Group’ (shakai fukushi kenkyūkai) adopted a workshop-like structure: course attendees, who by that time were expected to have started providing social services within their congregation and the surrounding community, were invited to present case-studies based on their experiences, on which they received feedback from the course instructors. Each year consisted of five two-day sessions held every two months in Kōseikai headquarters in Tokyo. While in the field I had the opportunity to attend six of them, three from Year 1 and three from Year 2 (between February and July 2017).
training sessions during the following months. They also effectively conveyed one of the crucial points of the training, which was to institute a direct correlation between welfare activities and religious practice. They did so by presenting social care provision as a potential missionary tool and a venue for the perfection of the self.\(^2\) These ideas were summarised in a document issued by the Social Contribution Group in 2009, entitled ‘Basic Principles of Kōsei Welfare’ (*Kōsei fukushi no kihon rinen*), which laid the foundation for Kōseikai’s social care, and likely constitutes the most concise articulation of the religious significance of these activities as codified by the central administration.

As shown in Fig. 15,\(^3\) the fundamental guidelines for social welfare activities were defined as follows:

1. Welfare as a bodhisattva practice (*bosatsu*shō) that venerates the Buddha-nature (*bushō*) and cultivates the ‘field of the heart’.
2. Welfare based on the compassion (*jihi*) stemming from the principles of the non-duality of the material and the spiritual (*bushin ichinyo*), and the oneness between self and others (*jiri rita ittai*).
3. Welfare that honours life and individuality.
4. Welfare that provides peace of mind and hope.

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\(^2\) Fieldnotes 11/02/2018.

\(^3\) The slide was part of the lecture ‘Introduction to Kōsei Welfare’, attended on 10/03/2017. All the slides included in the chapter were taken from the course materials.
These four principles effectively summarise the religious significance attributed to social care within Kōseikai, contained in its value as a form of bodhisattva practice. As mentioned in Chapter 2, since their introduction in the 1970s, social welfare training programmes have played a crucial role in the process of construction and transmission of religious meanings for social activities, and continue to do so still today, as the main arena for secular concepts and methods from the field of social care to be invested with religious significance in light of Kōseikai’s cosmology and soteriology. In particular, the sessions offered by representatives of the Educational Division, which integrated the lectures given by external instructors – mostly professionals from the field of social welfare and care such as teachers of vocational schools, social workers, trained nurses and counsellors – played a crucial role in this respect. While training in social care theory and methods fulfilled rather pragmatic functions, equipping members with the basic knowledge needed to tackle pressing social issues, classes led by Kōseikai representatives served to contextualise those notions within the organisation’s doctrinal framework. In other words, these sessions constituted a space for the construction of religious meanings for social welfare activities, where members were taught to re-interpret secular notions and social care practices in religious terms.

While extending the discussion on the religious connotations of social activities started in Chapter 3, this chapter further highlights the nature of religious meanings and practices as socially constructed. The analysis draws from recent developments in the field of ‘critical religion’, and especially the notion of religion as produced through historically and culturally bound processes of negotiation (Asad 1993, 2003; Dressler and Mandair 2011; Fitzgerald 2000, 2007; Masuzawa 2005). More specifically, in this chapter I build on the considerations advanced by Talal Asad (1993) in his influential critique of Geertz’s (1973) universalistic definition of religion. Asad argued that religious meanings do not exist a priori but result from a process involving individual interpretation as much as social construction, which unfolds...
through the interaction of multiple actors. Questioning Geertz’s assumption of religion as a symbolic system separated from practice, Asad stressed how, for practices to acquire religious significance, there is the need for religious theory to attach meaning to them. This, Asad contends, occurs as a ‘matter of intervention – of constructing religion in the world (not in the mind) through definitional discourses’ (Asad 1993:44). Religious meanings, thus, cannot be considered independently from the process through which they are constructed, which is marked by a specific configuration of power and knowledge (Ibid:42-45).

Based on these premises, the chapter takes into consideration the role of power dynamics and structural variables in shaping religious meanings attributed to social welfare activities in Risshō Kōseikai. The process through which religious interpretations codified by Kōseikai’s leadership were transmitted and circulated within the grassroots basis is unpacked here. The leadership communicated its interpretations through training and educational initiatives at both central and local levels. By exploring these, I aim to shed a light on the ways in which configurations of authority and intra-congregational patterns of interaction contributed to shape the significance assigned to these activities, as well as their implementation. The effects of these processes of definition and re-definition were not limited to the conceptual level, but also had practical implications for actual service provision. As seen in Chapter 3, the way in which social welfare activities were presented to and understood by grassroots members and leaders significantly influenced their planning and implementation at the local level primarily by reinforcing members’ motivations to engage in social activities. Besides strengthening practitioners’ commitment, however, the codification of religious meanings played a crucial role in relation to power dynamics and potential tensions emerging within individual congregations. In particular, the chapter will show that defining the ‘distinctiveness’ of different church roles served to mitigate tensions stemming from clashes over the division of responsibilities among local leaders and other staff members, most notably welfare specialists. Articulating the religious significance of social care provision, therefore, contributed to supporting the Kōseikai leadership’s efforts to
‘fill the gaps’ of social welfare provision and adapt religious teachings and practices to newly emerging religious, social and organisational needs.

Centre-led attempts to attach meaning to social activities and promote them through training and other channels were not, however, entirely successful. At times, notions and priorities conveyed by the centre were questioned by practitioners or met the resistance of local leaders. Contentions over the significance of social care provision for religious practice were exacerbated by power dynamics and patterns of distribution of responsibilities and information at work within local congregations, which concretely undermined the effectiveness of activity planning and implementation. The discussion thus unveils another set of obstacles to Kōseikai’s strive to ‘fill the gaps’. Chapter 4 showed how these attempts were partly frustrated by practical and formal constraints encountered in the actual service provision, as well as limitations emerging from negotiations between practitioners and other institutions involved in the economy of care. Building on this, this chapter focuses on the religious organisation, to investigate how structural variables (such as administrative configuration, centre-periphery interaction, power dynamics and intra-congregational patterns of distribution of authority and knowledge) affected the ways in which welfare activities were conceived and implemented at the local level.

Organisational obstacles are discussed together with the strategies undertaken in response to them by representatives of the central administration, local leaders and grassroots members. The contradictions that emerged in the process of construction and transmission of religious interpretations and guidelines for social activities instituted a need for negotiation. This took place in the dialogical spaces created by centre-led training programmes, and administrative and educational activities carried out at a local level. Here, members were able reconcile contrasting sets of values, obligations, and roles. In this respect, individual factors like the personal orientations of head ministers and initiatives undertaken by social welfare specialists and other representatives of the welfare staff often helped to mitigate the disrupting effects of structural issues and encourage the success of Kōseikai leadership’s efforts. By offering a glimpse into the role played by personal
experiences, opinions and preferences in shaping intra-congregational patterns of interaction, the analysis brings new insights on the multi-vocal nature of the process through which religion is negotiated in modern societies. It shows how religious interpretations for social activities and operational guidelines within Kōseikai were not one-sidedly transmitted by the centre, but rather socially constructed through an interactive process involving multiple actors within both the leadership and the grassroots base.

These multi-directional negotiations also hint at the deeper structural constraints undermining Kōseikai’s strive to ‘fill the gaps’, shedding a light on the broader conservative tendencies permeating the movement’s grassroots base. The final section discusses how attempts from the centre to foster innovation were hindered by vulnerabilities inherent in the organisational structure and deeper issues affecting the religious institution as a whole. As argued by Morioka Kiyomi (1979), the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of a religious organisation, while fostering higher efficiency and stability, can easily result in rigidity and the alienation of its membership. In the case of Kōseikai, the markedly hierarchical ties within the congregation, together with the rigidity brought about by the process of structural consolidation, were undoubtedly among the factors hindering institutional and individual attempts to introduce innovation. Ageing, declining commitment and an increasingly ‘inward-looking’ (uchimuki) attitude among the membership contributed to aggravate these issues. This resulted in a general decline of Kōseikai’s capacity to adapt in response to changing social circumstances and fill the gaps instituted by newly emerging social needs.

5.1. From Centre to Grassroots: Transmission of Religious Meanings at Local Level

How do notions codified at central level circulate within the organisation? How are they received and understood by members? In the opening section, I have highlighted the role of social welfare training courses as a venue for the codification and transmission of religious meanings for social activities. However, as centre-led training programmes involved a limited number of members, we might wonder how
religious interpretations were conveyed to the grassroots more broadly. Concepts formulated at a central level spread throughout the organisation following both vertical and horizontal pathways. Aside from centre-led training programmes, Köseikai publications played a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of doctrinal interpretations within the religious organisation. As seen in previous chapters, throughout the post-war period Köseikai’s publications proved instrumental in divulging some of the core notions presented in training. They were also another crucial medium for the codification of religious interpretations of social activities.5 Alongside this form of top-down transmission, initiatives of members, and in particular social welfare trainees, represented another fundamental channel for the circulation of contents within local congregations. Meetings of the welfare staff, study groups and educational activities, all contributed to the widespread dissemination of concepts codified in publications and centre-led training initiatives. This demonstrates how grassroots members were not merely passive receivers of these notions, but also actively contributed to their propagation and even construction.

Maeda, whom we briefly encountered in Chapter 4, was a softly spoken, elegant woman in her late 60s, who had served as missionary leader (shibuchō) for many years before being appointed as social welfare specialist by the head minister of Church A, just a couple of years before. When I met her for the first time, in the autumn of 2016, she was completing the first year of training. The meanders of social welfare still felt an unknown territory for her, a concern shared by the companions with whom she had embarked on the new task. The social welfare staff of Church A consisted of seven other members, all women in their 60s or 70s, most of whom had previous experience as representatives in missionary activities, but scarce knowledge and expertise in social care. They met once a month in one of the

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5 The previous chapters offered many examples of construction and dissemination of religious interpretations for social activities through Köseikai publications. Overall, contributions serving this purpose could be grouped in four main categories: speeches and articles authored by founder Niwano or representatives of the central administration; personal histories of members engaging in social care activities within their communities; reports of social welfare training programmes and initiatives of trainees; and theoretical discussions on the relationship between Buddhism and social welfare, or ‘Buddhist welfare’ (bukkyō fukushi).
meeting rooms of the dōjō (church premises), where they studied and shared information about activities and recipients of assistance. The meetings usually combined two main components: learning and operational aspects. The larger part of the meeting dealt with practical matters, namely updates on members’ activities and planning. Social care activities in Church A were still at a very early stage, and home visits (yūai hōmon, friendly visits) to vulnerable members of the congregation constituted the main occupation of the welfare staff. In meetings, each member would report on visits carried out in the previous month, describing the conditions of recipients of assistance and sharing possible issues or reasons for concern. While the meetings clearly fulfilled practical functions, serving to coordinate activities and foster the development of a system of social care provision within the congregation, they also played a crucial role in the articulation of religious interpretations for these activities, notably through the transmission of notions codified at a central level. The first part of the meeting, which was devoted to study, was instrumental for this process. Led by Maeda, members read about and discussed social welfare activities, and especially their connection to Kōseikai teachings. This commonly relied on the content of training courses or other materials issued by the Educational Division, such as the booklet shown below (Fig. 1). The booklet reported some of the most relevant notions conveyed through centre-led training, such as the ‘Basic Principles of Kōsei Welfare’ mentioned above.

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6 Although the basic guidelines for social welfare activities, and especially the role of welfare specialists, are defined at central level, the actual implementation of these principles could greatly vary at the local level, depending on administrative configurations or personal orientations of the head minister, as will be further discussed below. Diversity among individual congregations was fostered by the reforms of recent years which, as discussed in Chapter 4, aimed to grant a greater flexibility to the system in order to make it more responsive to the specific needs of the community.
Maeda explained these guidelines in one of the first meetings that I attended, unpacking the key doctrinal concepts associated with them, such as the Buddha-nature, bodhisattva practice, and non-duality between the material and the spiritual.\textsuperscript{7} The explanation was in part likely aimed at helping me, less familiar with Köseikai teachings, understand the connection between activities carried on by the welfare staff and their religious background. Yet, they were also clearly addressed at other staff members, as shown by the fact that similar discussions were reiterated in all the following meetings. Sometimes, especially when the meeting was held shortly after one of the sessions of the social welfare course, Maeda would offer a brief summary of the content of the lectures or share excerpts from the course material with other members. That happened for example in relation to ‘friendly visits’. Maeda had found the lecture given on the topic very helpful, and

\textsuperscript{7} Fieldnotes 17/11/2017.
decided to share its content (a copy of the presentation slides) with the rest of the staff, using it as a starting point to discuss the practicalities of home visits as well as the connection between these activities and the doctrine. Moving from the training material, Maeda instructed staff members on how to perform ‘friendly visits’ as a form of missionary practice (tedori), referring to the main points listed in the training slides about the proper attitude to adopt (yūai hōmon no kokorogamae, Fig. 17). She also commented upon excerpts from two speeches by president Niwano Nichikō included in the presentation (Fig. 18, 19), which discussed the practice of tedori and stressed the importance of a caring attitude toward others as practice of compassion (jihi no jissen). More generally, notions related to social welfare and care activities were framed within a broader discussion of Kōseikai teachings, as Maeda would often refer to the topic of the president’s monthly speech (published in Kōsei) or other themes that emerged in addresses from the head minister, testimonials and hōza.

Figure 17. Training course slide describing the proper attitude for ‘friendly visits’ (yūai hōmon no kokorogamae). The main points listed are: to revere the Buddha-nature of the recipient, to listen carefully without pressing the interlocutor, to be aware of one’s limits as non-specialist of caregiving.

8 Fieldnotes 24/04/2017.
9 See Note 42, Chapter 2.
10 Excerpt from Yakushin 10, 1990.
11 Excerpt from Kōsei 7, 2012.
12 Fieldnotes 09/12/2017, 17/01/2018.
Figure 18. Excerpt from President Niwano’s speech. The excerpt focuses on the practice of *tedori*. It explains how the main aim of *tedori* is to convey the teachings of Buddhism to people and to provide spiritual guidance. Empathy towards the other is listed as another crucial component of the practice, which can also involve ‘to cry and to rejoice with the interlocutor’.

Figure 19. Excerpt from President Niwano’s speech. The excerpt highlights the importance of cultivating ‘family ties’ rooted in compassion and gratitude. Niwano adds that such ties, however, are not circumscribed to the family, but also develop among members of the congregation and with people living in the same community. ‘Friendly visits’ (*yūai hōmon*) to people living alone provide a means to strengthen these ties and practice compassion.
My interactions with participants of the social welfare training courses, most of whom spoke of a similar setting, suggested that periodic meetings and study groups of this kind were common among local churches. Monthly meetings for the welfare staff were held in Church C as well. Compared to Church A, where Maeda was the first to occupy the position of social welfare specialist and care activities were still at their initial stage, Church C offered a very different picture. The dawn of the congregation’s engagement in social welfare dated from around 17 years before, shortly after the administrative reforms in 1999. At the time of my fieldwork, practitioners were involved in a wide range of activities directed at Köseikai members and the surrounding community alike. Similarly to other churches, Church C had set up an internal network of assistance for vulnerable members of the congregation, rooted in cooperation between the missionary line, welfare staff (offering social welfare counselling twice a month, in conjunction with religious services held on the 1st and 15th day), and also an additional group specifically devoted to home visits. Alongside intra-congregational activities, welfare staff members also volunteered at a nearby elderly care facility.13

As in Church A, members of the welfare staff met on a regular basis to plan activities and study, with the only difference being that, in this case, organisational and educational components were separated. Welfare staff meetings (fukushi kaigi), held once a month, were strictly focused on administrative and logistical matters. The meetings were led by Yoshida, head of the social welfare staff, who at the time was attending the second year of social welfare training together with Maeda. Yoshida presented a report for all the activities conducted by the welfare staff itself, as well as by other groups cooperating with them, such as those responsible for ‘friendly visits’ (yūai homon sekininsha), with whom he liaised as head welfare specialist. Meetings also served to plan future activities, for example establishing turns for the various undertakings, and discussing practical issues such as the shortage of supplies or the need to register with a volunteering insurance scheme offered by the local welfare council.14 In addition to administrative meetings, staff

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13 See Chapter 6.
14 Fieldnotes 27/03/2017.
members periodically held study sessions on social work methodology, often discussed in relation to Köseikai teachings. I took part in a session devoted to active listening (keichō), where practitioners learnt the basics of counselling from a trained counsellor and discussed how to implement them when offering advice on social welfare issues. They also outlined the main differences between this approach and guidance (michibiki) provided in the context of hōza or tedori. These events displayed dynamics similar to those in Church A, where social welfare and care practices were infused with religious meanings grounded in the teachings of Köseikai. These drew primarily from publications (references to the monthly speech by President Niwano were particularly recurrent), or notions conveyed through social welfare training, shared by those who had attended the course. Training activities directed at staff members were integrated with broader educational initiatives aimed at members of the congregation more generally, such as lectures on social care-related themes or study visits (kengaku) to welfare facilities, as well as those open to the local community. Another channel through which the welfare staff shared knowledge on social welfare and contributed to disseminating the religious meanings associated with these activities within the church and beyond was through their periodical newsletter.

The examples discussed above showcased one of the patterns through which doctrinal interpretations circulated within the organisation. Meetings of the welfare staff, study groups and educational activities all contributed to spread the notions codified in publications and centre-led training initiatives. The codification and circulation of religious interpretations, thus, occurred through a combination of top-down transmission and horizontal dissemination promoted by social welfare course trainees and local administrative staff. In general, the interplay between centre-led training programmes and educational initiatives conducted on the local level appeared instrumental to the construction of Köseikai orthopraxy. However, there

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15 Fieldnotes 07/03/2017.
16 Fieldnotes 27/03/2017.
17 In addition to intra-congregational activities, staff members also took part in training initiatives offered by external institutions, notably the local welfare council (shakyō) and care facilities, as exemplified by the episode recounted in Chapter 3.
was a further aspect making social welfare training courses and intra-congregational activities particularly noteworthy. In contrast to the uni-directional character of publications, these initiatives provided a dialogical space where directives issued by the centre were not one-sidedly communicated, but could be unpacked, re-interpreted or even challenged.

5.2. **Venues of Negotiation: Religious Change as a Dialogical Process**

The previous sections discussed how training and other educational initiatives, together with publications, contributed to the construction and disclosure of religious interpretations and guidelines for the promotion of social welfare activities at the local level. The process, however, was more complex than it might appear at first glance. Religious teachings and practices were not uni-directionally transmitted from centre to periphery, but rather socially constructed through a multi-vocal process of negotiation involving actors within both central administration and the grassroots base, shaped by a complex intermingling of structural and individual variables. Participants were not passive receivers of notions conveyed by the centre, but could also choose to question them, or develop alternative interpretations based on their personal experiences and inclinations, especially in the attempt to tackle issues not adequately addressed by the central administration. At times, members struggled to reconcile the practicalities of social care with their religious significance, or to mediate between different sets of values and obligations. The complex interplay between religious and social aspects in particular turned into a potential source of uncertainty and confusion. There was a substantial continuity between social care and religious practice, which constituted the fundamental premise for the religious value attributed to these activities.\(^{18}\) This clashed, however, with repeated attempts to articulate the alleged distinctiveness of the position of the social welfare specialists and draw a line between roles, dictated by more pressing organisational needs. Religious meanings were not delivered in a vacuum, but incorporated in a specific configuration of power. Intra-congregational dynamics significantly affected the process of construction and negotiation of

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\(^{18}\) See Chapter 3.
religious interpretations for social activities, as well as their actual implementation. Ideals promoted by the centre sometimes clashed with local realities, marked by practical limitations, imbalances in the distribution of authority and information, and conservative tendencies widespread among local hierarchies and membership, which often stemmed from deeper institutional issues.

In this respect, centre-led training programmes, as well as administrative and study meetings held at local level, provided dialogical spaces where these discrepancies could be reconciled. At social welfare courses held at the headquarters, members sought advice about the uncertainties surrounding their new role. They often brought out conceptual and practical issues in sessions led by representatives of the Educational Division, or the hōza held after classes. At local level, administrative meetings and educational activities offered further opportunities where social welfare specialists could negotiate the significance of their activities vis-à-vis other church obligations. This further served to reaffirm their role and tackle tensions emerging in the interaction with members moved by different priorities and perspectives. In local congregations, individual factors were instrumental in mitigating the disruptive effects of structural variables. Personal orientations of local leaders, independent initiatives of social welfare trainees, and additional interpretations elaborated by members played a key role in addressing the contradictions emerged in training or service provision, amortising intra-congregational tensions and fostering the successful implementation of the directives conveyed by the centre. The following sections will unpack this process by looking at the main venues where such negotiation unfolded, the different actors involved, and the main purposes that it served.


Practical implementation of notions learnt through social welfare training, probably the most basic problem faced by course attendees, may offer a good starting point for our discussion. We have seen how welfare activities were presented as a form of bodhisattva practice, and invested with missionary value as tools for the salvation
of both others and the self. Although members generally accepted these ideas on a theoretical level, when it came to practice they often struggled to understand how they could confer missionary value on these activities. How, they asked, do you turn social assistance into a means to save people? First year attendees in particular seemed to lack a clear idea of what was expected of them. These doubts, however, were seldom dispelled by the course. The prominently secular nature of notions and skills learnt in the training, which – excluding the lectures given by Kōseikai representatives – primarily drew from social welfare theory and methodology, deepened the trainees’ perplexity. They wondered what exactly made their activities ‘religious’, considering that what they learnt and did had so much in common with services offered by secular actors as home-helper and voluntary district commissioners. A practitioner from Shimane prefecture, for example, presented the case of an elderly woman she was assisting. She helped this person access services under the Long-Term Care Insurance scheme, such as a pick-up service that allowed her to attend a day care centre a few times a week. In general, she defined her role in terms of ‘watching over’ (mimamoru) the woman. The practitioner believed in the importance of the service she was providing, but struggled to understand how it could qualify as missionary practice. Similar doubts were advanced by other members dealing with strictly practical matters, such as a man from Saitama prefecture offering legal counselling to a young divorcee claiming support from her ex-husband for the maintenance of their two children. When confronted with these issues, representatives of the Educational Division commonly reiterated some of the core concepts recurring in the course, such as the two-fold conceptualisation of salvation based on the principle of non-duality of the material and the spiritual (busshin ichinyo), and the idea of social care as skilful means (hōben). The notion of busshin ichinyo was extensively used in training to reconcile the pragmatic content and substantially secular nature of social welfare activities with the religious significance attributed to these activities, especially when trainees experienced difficulties in coming to grips with this discrepancy.

19 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
20 Fieldnotes 12/02/2017.
When they asked for advice on how to turn social care provision into a salvific tool, staff members usually reiterated the notion of a ‘dual’ or ‘two-fold’ salvation (ryōmen no sukui). Defining salvation as a state of harmony encompassing material and spiritual sides allowed them to categorise all activities aimed at appeasing practical concerns and improving recipients’ well-being as missionary practice in their own right. This vague idea, however, raised doubts about the religious quality of activities promoted by Kōseikai welfare specialists: if provision of social care in itself constituted a form of missionary practice, what exactly remained to differentiate them from their secular counterparts? The topic was the subject of countless discussions during training sessions, where participants often expressed doubts about what was expected from them, and how to better perform their role. Members of the Educational Division commonly tackled this conundrum by exhorting trainees to think of social care as hōben.\textsuperscript{21} Acknowledging the importance of practical assistance did not undermine the pre-eminence of spiritual needs over material ones. Even in the context of social welfare activities, members were still expected to pursue the ultimate goal of spiritual salvation, an idea energetically emphasised by Sasaki, head of the Division. In one of the morning addresses that usually opened training sessions, he acknowledged the importance of offering help with practical issues, such as applying for social security schemes, accompanying recipients to the hospital or running some errands. At the same time, however, Sasaki exhorted trainees to remember that social assistance was not the ultimate purpose of religious practice. Their real mission was to turn that person into a bodhisattva.\textsuperscript{22} While social welfare activities were, therefore, instrumental to missionary practice, they were never thought of as end in themselves. Rather, they existed as one among many possible means that could be used to achieve a higher goal, namely spiritual salvation. When explaining the main functions of social welfare specialists, Noda, a senior representative of the Educational Division, spoke of ‘resorting to skilful means from the position of social welfare/social workers’. He encouraged attendees to think of social activities as a salvific tool, based on

\textsuperscript{21} See Note 26, Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
Kōseikai’s broad definition of *hōben* as a ‘means that bring people closer to salvation’ (quoting from *Kōsei kyōgaku*, compendium of Kōseikai doctrine, Fig. 20).

![Figure 20. *Hōben* in Kōseikai doctrine. The term is defined as ‘the means of edification most suitable for the time, place, and individual degree of understanding of Buddhist teachings’. *Hōben* are further described as ‘the tools to bring [someone] closer to an awakening (*satori*) to the truth’, and crucial to the implementation of the bodhisattva practice.](image)

In Noda’s explanation, social care was to be understood as an expedient (*hōben*) guiding others toward salvation, by bringing them closer to Kōseikai teachings and fostering their spiritual growth. At the same time, it was regarded as beneficial for the practitioner, as these activities could serve to perfect oneself. ‘As you save others’, Noda pointed out, ‘you awaken your own Buddha-nature’. Instructors generally stressed that, although the content of Kōseikai welfare was not inherently different from assistance offered by other providers, practitioners could use the interaction with recipients of care to offer spiritual guidance, encouraging the person to reflect on his faults and shortcomings, or re-interpret misfortunes through the lens of Kōseikai teachings, as an expression of a karmic debt or as a

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23 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
24 Fieldnotes 12/02/2017. Noda’s comment highlighted how, besides their missionary value, social care activities were attributed religious significance also as a means for the perfection of character (*jinkaku kansei*).
lesson (*hakarai*) given by the Buddha.\(^{25}\) For the Educational Division, it was important to tackle these dilemmas. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, religious interpretations for social activities contributed to reinforce members’ motivations to engage in welfare provision. Solving the contradictions emerging in training was, therefore, instrumental to the broader aim of promoting these activities on local level, addressing organisational demands while advancing Köseikai’s missionary goals through constant reiteration of the primacy of spiritual salvation over material comfort. Negotiating religious meanings, however, could also serve to fulfil more pragmatic functions, such as smoothing out interactions within local congregations. This function emerged with particular clarity in relation to attempts to articulate the ‘distinctiveness’ of the position of social welfare specialists vis-à-vis other roles within the church.

5.2.2. The ‘Distinctiveness’ of Social Welfare Specialists: Drawing the Line Between Church Roles

Up to this point, we have seen how Köseikai’s approach to social care was marked by a substantial continuity between social and religious commitments, which in Risshō Köseikai also found expression in a considerable overlapping of church obligations and roles, generally defined as *oyaku*.\(^{26}\) Similarly, social care provision was usually conceived as fulfilling some form of *oyaku*, especially among the social welfare specialists, but this interpretation was not limited to them.\(^{27}\) The blurred lines between roles related to social assistance and those more strictly connected to missionary practice and doctrinal propagation was further enhanced by the fact that most of those appointed as social welfare specialist had previous experience in the missionary line. Many even held both positions at the same time. *Oyaku* could also serve as motivation to get involved in social activities.\(^{28}\) Some of the members

\(^{25}\) Fieldnotes 11/03/2017. On *hakarai* see Note 31, Chapter 3.

\(^{26}\) Refer to Note 21, Chapter 3.

\(^{27}\) As seen in the case of Church C, depending on the specific configuration adopted by the congregation, other figures could be entrusted with care duties, for example appointees for ‘friendly visits’ (*yūai hōmon sekininsha*).

\(^{28}\) It should be noted that this did not apply to all informants. In other cases, it was to the contrary. They were assigned *oyaku* (chosen as social welfare specialists) because of previous experiences or knowledge in the field of social welfare and care.
interviewed, for example, had no previous experience or interest in social welfare, and undertook these activities because they were assigned to the task (oyaku wo itadaku) from their head minister. This was the case for Takeuchi, an energetic man in his 70s serving as a welfare staff specialist in Chiba prefecture. For him, social welfare was only the last of a long list of commitments undertaken in his decades-long history of church activities, which included involvement in the missionary line (shunin first, then shibuchô) as well as administrative roles, such as division leader for senior members (sōnenbuchô). He had ventured into the domain of social welfare – to which he had no previous connection – about ten years before, when his head minister recommended him for the training course. Social assistance was defined by Takeuchi in the same terms as any other role (oyaku) that he had performed within the congregation, which, despite differences in the content of activities, were regarded as akin in purpose.

These premises, however, did not imply the annihilation of any distinction between the ‘religious’ and the ‘social’. Rather, the interplay between the two dimensions was articulated in complex and ambiguous terms. There was a concerted effort to institute a differentiation between the roles and obligations belonging to each domain, which found expression in discourses articulating the ‘distinctiveness’ of the stance (tachiichi) and role (yaku, yakuwari) of social welfare specialists. These were delineated along a divide between the material and the spiritual, the social and the religious. Sasaki, in particular, recurrently mentioned the issue in his addresses, hinting at the allegedly distinctive stance that course attendees were expected to adopt when fulfilling their tasks. More generally, throughout training participants were reminded that their function, albeit in continuity with the one of the missionary leaders, was essentially different. The nature of this distinction, however, was defined in very vague terms, generating confusion among trainees. Members struggled to understand what it meant to address care recipients in their capacity as social welfare specialists (fukushi toshite). They were left unsure how to

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29 Recommendation from the head minister is necessary to access to social welfare courses and other training initiatives held at the headquarters.
30 Interview 20/05/2017.
pursue a missionary aim through the provision of social assistance, but at the same time differentiate their approach from that of missionary leaders.

Ishida, a newly appointed welfare specialist for Church B, attending the first year of training, voiced these doubts. In an informal conversation taking place after a service, she shared the difficulties that she was facing in adapting to her new role, especially due to her extensive experience as shibuchō. When engaging with recipients she would sometimes slip into the old habit of providing ‘guidance’ (michibiki), as a missionary leader would do. She knew from the training that she should adopt a different approach when providing social assistance, but the exact nature of this difference was a mystery to her.\[^{31}\] Another participant struggling with the issue was Ono, from Ibaraki prefecture. She adopted a markedly missionary approach to social care, commonly using welfare counselling sessions to discuss doctrinal matters. After one of her reports, she was gently reprimanded by the course instructors, as her attitude was not deemed in line with the methodology of social work. The comments left Ono rather perplexed and she later turned to the Educational Division for clarification, asking them what it meant to engage with members as a social welfare specialist, and how it was different from interacting with them from the perspective of fellow Kōseikai member. More generally, uncertainty about the stance of social welfare specialists vis-à-vis the recipients of care and other roles within the church frequently emerged during training sessions. This was true of Year 2 in particular, where trainees presenting the cases that they were handling in their congregations recurrently sought advice from representatives of the central administration about the proper attitude to adopt in specific situations.\[^{32}\] The attempts made by Kōseikai representatives to answer these questions, however, were hardly successful. They often left course attendants musing on the complex balance between their stance as amateur social workers on the one hand and as religious practitioners devoted to the salvation of mankind on the other. Central efforts to articulate the distinctiveness of the role of social welfare specialists were meant to clarify what was expected from them. These were

\[^{31}\] Informal conversation 07/04/2017.
\[^{32}\] Fieldnotes 11-12/02/2017.
intended to help members fulfil their specific function within their congregation and community, drawing a clear line between distinct roles and responsibilities, but also responded to more pressing demands, notably the need to solve tensions and foster cooperation within local churches.

5.2.3. Negotiating Values, Roles and Responsibilities Within Local Churches

Intra-congregational dynamics also affected the way in which social welfare activities were conceived and put into practice. Notions conveyed in training and publications met with diverging interpretations among members. Their different positions, perspectives and priorities, as well as patterns of distribution of authority, knowledge and information within local churches influenced the reception of the ideas they met with in training. The missionary connotation of social welfare activities, i.e. the idea that social care served to achieve the fundamental goal of saving people, constituted a basic premise for the definition of the role of social welfare specialists within the congregation. In organisational terms, this idea translated into the subordination of the welfare staff to missionary leaders, the latter being deemed as primarily responsible for the spiritual well-being of members. In one of the opening sessions of training, Sasaki clearly defined the function of welfare specialists as an auxiliary role (hosa yaku) in support of the missionary line. Noda further unpacked this concept in the introductory sessions for Year 1 and Year 2 where he reminded social welfare specialists that they were expected to assist the missionary efforts of shibuchō and shunin. The social welfare specialists were to intervene when the missionary line came across an issue that they were unable to tackle, and make use of the specialist knowledge acquired through the training as a bridge (hashiwatashi) between missionary leaders or Kōseikai members in distress, and other social agencies (Fig. 21).

33 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
34 Fieldnotes 12/02/2017, 11/03/2017. See also Chapter 4.
Cooperation between the missionary line and the welfare staff, then, stood as a fundamental premise for the effective functioning of the system of social care provision within local congregations. This was not only for practical reasons (e.g. information exchange), but also because of the hierarchical relationships within the church. Due to the subordination of the welfare staff to the missionary line, any lack of communication or cooperation from missionary leaders proved potentially disruptive for the activities of welfare specialists, commonly expected to operate under the directives of shunin and shibuchō. For example, in most of the churches I heard about, home visits were primarily carried out under the recommendation of missionary leaders. They would notify welfare specialists about members in need of special assistance, and often accompany them, at least initially. In most cases, even if the welfare staff knew about a member in trouble, they were not allowed to approach the person without prior consent of the responsible leader. Given these premises, it was paramount for the welfare staff to maintain a cooperative relationship with the missionary line. Interaction between the two axes, however,
did not always run smoothly, as indicated by recurrent issues emerging at both central and local level. Problems related to limited cooperation between welfare staff and missionary line came out for example in some of the meetings held in Church A and Church C. Members lamented a lack of communication with the leaders responsible for the people they were supposed to assist, which made them unsure about how to operate from their position as social welfare specialists. They added that, without recommendations from the missionary line, it was harder to detect people in need of assistance and thus define priority targets for visits.\textsuperscript{35} As frequently stressed by the welfare staff of Church A, missionary leaders, especially shunin, were the most knowledgeable about the circumstances of vulnerable members in their area. For example, they would know whether a person was being assisted from a home-helper or attending a day care centre. Likewise, they could point at lone elderly who were not receiving sufficient assistance. Social welfare specialists often lacked this detailed information, especially when it came to people belonging to a different shibu or chiku (i.e. living in a different neighbourhood) who were no longer visiting the church on a regular basis. Without the recommendation of a missionary leader, thus, they could fail to identify potential recipients within the congregation. These ideas echoed in the case-studies presented in social welfare training, most of which were opened upon request of a shibuchō or shunin.

When problems in cooperation with the missionary line were brought out in training courses, representatives of the Educational Division commonly referred to the guiding role of the head minister. In other cases they reiterated the functional differentiation between welfare staff and the missionary line over distinct dimensions of ‘salvation’. The instructors stressed that missionary leaders were in charge of the spiritual domain and should thus be left to handle cases involving more strictly religious matters. When encountering such issues, the social welfare staff was, therefore, expected to ‘lead [those people] back to the missionary line’ (fukyō rain ni modosu).\textsuperscript{36} Articulating the distinctiveness of the role of social welfare

\textsuperscript{35} Meeting in Church A (Fieldnotes 27/03/2017). Similar issues were mentioned by Yoshida (head of welfare staff in Church C) in an interview (17/04/2017).

\textsuperscript{36} Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
specialists along the religious/social divide could thus serve to avoid or resolve tensions emerging within local congregations. The implementation of these guidelines, however, met with several obstacles, which ranged from the problem of drawing a clear line between material and spiritual concerns, to more pragmatic issues, such as the unwillingness of the assisted person to seek advice from his or her missionary leader, or the obligation to maintain confidentiality. During a group discussion, one of the course attendee suggested that members may not feel comfortable with discussing certain matters with their shibuchō or shunin, possibly because they don’t have a good relationship, or they feel embarrassed about their situation. A further reason for this reticence was the alleged tendency of missionary leaders to share the information about individual members with other people under their guidance, notably in hōza. A practitioner from Ibaraki prefecture, who had assisted a mother struggling with her son’s disability, reported that the woman felt more comfortable discussing the problem with her, compared to her shibuchō, because she was from a different shibu. It was thus less likely that fellow Köseikai members living in the same area would learn about her situation. In general, problems related to the treatment of personal information emerged as a frequent source of friction between the missionary line and the welfare staff. Social welfare trainees spoke of a general uneasiness with sharing information with missionary leaders for fear that ‘it might leak’ (morete shimau). The issue was extensively discussed in the session dedicated to the role of social welfare specialists within the church, and particularly stressed by Noda. When offering support as social welfare specialists, they were expected to comply with the professional ethics of social work, which included the obligation to maintain confidentiality over information disclosed in counselling sessions. Missionary leaders, however, often attempted to breach this confidentiality by inquiring about people in their care, or even divulged personal details to other members. In this respect, Noda stressed the importance of keeping the information received

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37 Fieldnotes 12/02/2017.
38 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
39 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
40 As brought out in training sessions and also mentioned in interviews, for example by Sawada, member of the welfare staff of Church C (Interview 15/05/2017).
confidential, even when questioned by members of the missionary line. At the same
time, though, he encouraged welfare specialists to try to mediate between the
parties, notably persuading the recipient of assistance to seek advice from his
spiritual guide. Noda reminded trainees that people could not be saved by social
welfare alone, and that spiritual support offered by the missionary line was
essential.\footnote{Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.} As also pointed out by Sasaki, ‘if members don’t receive guidance, it
[social assistance] doesn’t lead to salvation’.\footnote{Fieldnotes 12/02/2017.} These exhortations were commonly
linked to the role of social welfare activities as backup for missionary practice
directed at the ultimate goal of spiritual salvation (sukui). The missionary value
attributed to these activities, thus, also provided a doctrinal justification for the
subordinate role of the welfare staff within the church administration.

Putting these principles into practice in local realities, however, was not an easy
task. In the actual implementation of social care provision, interaction with
recipients of assistance could take a variety of forms, and in many cases it was hard
for social welfare specialists to bridge them and the missionary line. When
confronted with some of the practical problems that emerged, Sasaki admitted that
their position was indeed complicated. ‘If members come to you seeking assistance,
you cannot simply turn them down, that would indeed be too cold/insensitive’, in
which case, he conceded, it was their duty to help the person. At the same time,
though, Sasaki encouraged them to keep trying to ‘lead [them] back to the
missionary line’. When one of the trainees suggested that those seeking advice
might have their reasons for not wanting to consult their responsible leader, maybe
because they are not in good terms, or would prefer to keep it a secret from other
people in their shibu, Sasaki simply reiterated the importance of following the
guidance of the head minister, without providing any further advice.\footnote{Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.} This example
was not exceptional: representatives of the Educational Division often failed to offer
satisfying answers to trainees experiencing tensions within the church. Difficulties in
tackling these issues at central level stemmed primarily from the significant

\footnote{Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.}
influence that intra-congregational factors, such as the personal orientation of the head minister or the distribution of responsibilities among subsections of the church administration, had on these dynamics. Given the huge diversity existing among congregations, it was hard for the central administration to offer solutions that applied to all cases. Rather than educational initiatives at central level, then, it was primarily through interaction within local churches that these issues were tackled.

5.2.4. Intra-congregational Negotiation: Dialogical Spaces and Personal Re-interpretations

The role of the head minister as the ultimate authority and source of guidance for the local level was one of the major issues raised in relation to intra-congregational frictions during training courses. Seeking advice from the head minister was often presented as a valid option for members dealing with doubts and uncertainties about their role or the ideas discussed in the training. In those cases, the personal orientation of the head minister became another factor influencing the dialogical process of construction of religious interpretations within the organisation. This also applied to the actual service provision. Head ministers had extensive decision-making power over all church matters, ranging from ritual practices to the appointment of administrative positions and guidelines for the church staff. As such, their choices had a huge impact on social welfare activities, the understanding and successful implementation of the same and intra-congregational dynamics more broadly. In particular, the kyōkaichō was commonly entrusted with the responsibility to mediate between welfare staff and the missionary line in order to guarantee the persistence of a collaborative relationship. One of the welfare staff meetings of Church A, marked by the exceptional participation of Reverend Fubuki, the head minister, effectively showcased this dynamic. When the issue of the limited cooperation with the missionary line was aired, Fubuki addressed members’ doubts with the decisive, straightforward approach that characterised her leadership. She exhorted them to present their requests to the administrative

44 Fieldnotes 09/02/2017.
meetings held periodically at shibu level directly. She also offered to intercede with the shibuchō to encourage them to adopt a more collaborative attitude.

Fubuki’s definition of the role of welfare specialists, repeatedly mentioned by Maeda and other staff members, offered another interesting example of the mediating role of head ministers. It also provided further insights into the ways religious interpretations and power dynamics were negotiated at the local level. In Church A, social welfare specialists were attributed a ‘shadow role’ (kage no yaku), differentiated from that of the missionary line by the fact that they did not operate on the frontline (omote/mae ni denai), but in the background, offering support to shunin and shibuchō in the fulfilment of their task. This formulation (which I deem was originally coined by Fubuki, as to my knowledge it was never mentioned in either training materials or publications) effectively reconciled the discrepancies surrounding the position of social welfare specialists. It articulated a distinction between their role and that of the missionary leaders, while also placing these roles in continuity with one another. It defined both as oyaku and thus acknowledged that they had equal relevance and dignity. At the same time, this distinction between the two roles also gave expression to the hierarchical subordination of the welfare staff to the missionary line by positioning the first in the ‘shadow’ and the latter in the ‘front’. In this sense, Reverend Fubuki’s interpretation enriched official formulations, highlighting the potential contribution that guidance offered by local leaders could give in codifying religious interpretations of social activities, but also in negotiating tensions among members of the church administration.

Fubuki generally acknowledged the missionary value of social welfare activities, and actively contributed to their promotion in the church. Yet, her supportive attitude was far from being the rule. In training sessions, course attendants often lamented the lack of support from their head minister arising from the limited understanding of the importance of welfare activities for missionary purposes among local leaders. In many cases, head ministers remained indifferent or even opposed to engagement in social care. They often preferred spiritual guidance and

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45 As professed in several informal conversations in the church and in an interview (19/04/2017).
doctrinal propagation over more practical forms of assistance. A course attendee from Chiba, for example, recounted in hōza how the kyōkaichō in her church used to strongly prioritise conventional missionary activities over social engagement. It had cost her much time and effort to convince the kyōkaichō of the significance of social assistance for the salvation of members and the life of the congregation.46

More generally, these examples showcase how religious interpretations and guidelines around social care were not univocally accepted, but required negotiation in the context of local churches. It was common for the head minister or representatives of the missionary line to refuse to acknowledge the value of social care provision as a missionary tool, or its religious significance more broadly. This considerably affected their willingness to contribute to the promotion of these activities. Diverging interpretations of the value of social welfare activities, which shaped members’ definition of priorities and boundaries of responsibilities over the well-being of the assisted, was a major source of tension between the welfare staff and the missionary line. As shown by the episode mentioned above, meetings and educational activities at a local level offered a space to address these issues.

Problems arising from the interaction between welfare staff and the missionary line were often brought out in study groups or administrative meetings, which then served to negotiate both practical and conceptual aspects of social care activities. Similar dynamics also emerged in the case of Church C, where periodic meetings among members involved in social care, and between them and other representatives of the church staff, played a crucial role in this respect. One of Yoshida’s tasks as social welfare specialist was to liaise between welfare staff and other groups, such as missionary leaders or members in charge of home visits. With the latter, he met once a month to collect updates on activities and conditions of care recipients. Interaction with missionary leaders, instead, took place primarily in the context of administrative meetings, where Yoshida was granted a space to report issues and requests as representative of the welfare staff. He explained that in those cases the presence of the head minister, who usually backed him up vis-à-

46 Fieldnotes 11/02/2017.
vis missionary leaders, was instrumental in smoothing the process, showing that in Church C the kyōkaichō also played a relevant role in fostering cooperation between the two axes.\textsuperscript{47}

Members involved in social care provision often attributed a lack of support from the local leadership to their limited knowledge of social welfare. This was believed to hinder their understanding of the relevance of these activities for higher missionary goals. Some churches tackled the problem by getting missionary leaders involved in study meetings or in other educational activities organised by the welfare staff. Sharing basic content received through training and deepening their understanding of social welfare activities often proved effective in securing the cooperation of the missionary line, as occurred in the case of Church C. I had the chance to discuss the matter with Sawada, who had been the leading figure initiating the church’s engagement in social activities. She was the first to be appointed social welfare specialist 17 years earlier. Discussing the early stages of this engagement, she mentioned some past frictions between welfare specialists and missionary leaders. The shibuchō and shunin were not happy about people in their care seeking advice through social welfare counselling instead of relying on them, which was why in the beginning many attended counselling sessions in secret (naisho de). At that point Sawada, attributing the problem to a lack of understanding about the nature and function of social welfare counselling, inaugurated a series of joint meetings between welfare specialists and missionary leaders. At these meetings they discussed issues like the difference between counselling and hōza, and the importance of confidentiality.

They [missionary leaders] didn’t really trust counselling, primarily because they didn’t really know what it was. First of all, I introduced the notion of confidentiality to the shibuchō and other leaders. I told them that things disclosed in counselling sessions cannot be shared with others. I started with the basics. [...] Then I explained how social welfare counselling was different [from spiritual guidance]. It took a few years, but in the end they understood that there are problems that cannot be discussed in hōza.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} Fieldnotes 04/04/2017; Interview 17/04/2017.  
\textsuperscript{48} Interview 15/05/2017.
Over time, thus, these meetings helped to mitigate the tension and fostered mutual understanding among the church staff. This case revealed how the individual initiatives of members, notably social welfare specialists, were also instrumental in negotiating religious interpretations and practical aspects of social care provision. Activities directed at reconciling conflicting perspectives and frictions among intra-congregational actors opened up further venues where such discrepancies could be tackled, fostering the achievement of common goals. In the case of Church C, the knowledge exchange meetings promoted by Sawada did not only help to smooth the interaction between missionary leaders and social welfare specialists. They served to articulate the distinction between social welfare counselling and the spiritual guidance received in hōza or individual meetings with missionary leaders as different (but complementary) salvific tools. The interaction between staff members, thus, contributed to shape their understanding of social welfare provision as a form of religious practice. These considerations highlighted how the reconfiguration of religious concepts and institutions unfolded also as a dialogical process taking place at grassroots level, with individual members as the protagonists. Another form of individual contribution to the process of social construction of religious meanings could be found in personal interpretations shared during training sessions. When representatives of the central administration failed to provide satisfactory answers to members’ doubts, the latter often tackled uncertainty by carrying on the discussion among themselves. During breaks or group discussions, members integrated official narratives with personal interpretations based on individual experiences of faith and social care. On one of the occasions where the topic of the position of social welfare specialists emerged during a training session, Fujikawa, a course attendee from Saitama prefecture, stressed how it was natural for each one of them (course attendees or social welfare specialists) to develop an individual approach to the task. This was, Fujikawa argued, in part influenced by the administrative configuration of the church, but primarily stemming from their different backgrounds. In his case, he believed that his long working history with the public administration (city office), as well as his more recent experience of service to the community as a guarantor (hogoshi) and district commissioner, contributed to shape his approach to social
issues. The same, Fujikawa added, could be said for other trainees: looking at those sitting around him, he pointed to a nurse, a former *shibuchō* and another commissioner, stressing how each distinctive background could be expected to impact on the way they articulated their role. Fujikawa’s comment expressed a broader tendency among members to draw from their personal experiences to fill conceptual and practical gaps left unaddressed by the course instructors. Fujikawa, for example, had developed his own understanding of the interplay between religious and social components as part of a general endeavour to help people, and of the distinction between social assistance and salvation, which we discussed some time later in our interview. While acknowledging the similarity between the activities that he performed as a social welfare specialist within Kōsei-kai, and as volunteer district commissioner for his community, he remarked upon the difference between a ‘social’ and a ‘religious’ approach to care. Adopting a social approach meant finding a practical solution to an issue troubling the recipient of care. This was an attitude that, in Fujikawa’s opinion, could lead to a temporary improvement, but did not usually achieve a complete resolution of the problem, as it often failed to reach its core. Approaching social care from a religious perspective, instead, meant to look for the true cause behind an issue. To better explain this difference, Fujikawa offered an example: ‘Imagine a person who has contracted a massive debt’, he said. There are many ways in which you could help that person in the short term, offering some form of economic relief or financial support, for example through public subsidies, social insurance schemes, tax breaks and so forth, and help him or her repay the debt. This kind of assistance, however, would only address the superficial problem. The debt could have resulted from a more serious issue, such as gambling, drug addiction, or alcoholism. In that case, it would only be a matter of time until the same problem emerged again, and perhaps to more severe consequences. In order to settle the issue for good, one needed to address its deep, original causes, which for Fujikawa were usually found in individual interiority, and could only be addressed from a religious perspective. Returning to

49 Participant observation of social welfare training course (Fieldnotes 22/04/2017).
50 Interview 09/05/2017.
the idea of a ‘dual’ salvation (*futatsu no sukuwarekata*), he identified these approaches as two possible ways of helping people. However, while the ‘social’ approach only led to a superficial and temporary solution of practical problems, a ‘religious’ approach to social care allowed a person to achieve the ‘authentic salvation’ (*honshitsu no suki*) that is mentioned in Kōseikai Members’ Vow.\(^5\) His way of putting these ideas into practice was by trying to combine practical assistance with in-depth, accurate inquiry into the reasons behind peoples’ problems. He also tried to use social welfare counselling to foster self-reflection and spiritual growth, by encouraging recipients to reflect upon what led them to their situation (e.g. debt), or to look at their misfortunes as a lesson given by the Buddha (*hotokesama no hakarai*).

Fujikawa’s example hints at the potential role played by individual members in the process of constructing religious meanings in social welfare activities and beyond. By re-elaborating or developing interpretations conveyed by the centre in the light of their own experience and discussing them among themselves, they were contributing to the production of additional interpretations that further enriched the basic guidelines formulated at central level. Moreover, what made the case of centre-led welfare courses particularly noteworthy, was that, through training sessions, re-interpretations formulated at a local or individual level could circulate on a larger scale. Trainees interacted with members coming from across Japan and their ideas could even reach the centre (in the form of representatives of the Educational Division). It could be argued, then, that training activities channelled a bottom-up process of innovation which, albeit minimally, had the potential to influence top-down dynamics of doctrinal systematisation and administrative reform. These aspects emerged with greater clarity in relation to the case of Church C. In one of the *hōza* held during the social welfare training course, Yoshida shared the church’s successful resolution of tensions between welfare staff and the missionary line through the institution of a training space for the latter. Moving

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from this experience, he advocated the importance of equipping all missionary leaders, all the way up to the head ministers, with some basic knowledge of social welfare. Yoshida argued that this would improve their own missionary practice as well as facilitating the work of the social welfare staff.\textsuperscript{52} He particularly stressed the need to enhance head ministers’ awareness of social issues, as he reiterated the following day. During Noda’s presentation on the role of welfare specialists, Yoshida asked where the social welfare specialists should turn for guidance in case of uncertainty. When Noda promptly named the head minister, Yoshida timidly replied that sometimes it might be problematic to gain the understanding of the head minister. He noted that they usually lacked the basic knowledge required to grasp the issues addressed by social welfare specialists, which made some head ministers less supportive of social welfare activities. Noda acknowledged the conundrum, commenting that it would be ideal for the missionary line, or at least head minister, to have a basic understanding of social care and welfare as well, hinting that the issue was being considered by his division.\textsuperscript{53} The case of Church C demonstrated how, at times, the additional interpretations and practical adjustments that emerged in local churches found their way back to the centre, most notably through their discussion in the context of centre-led training activities.\textsuperscript{54} These dynamics hint at the possibility for grassroots initiatives to trigger a broader process of change.

Such processes of bottom-up innovation, however, were unlikely to have a significant impact on the overall organisation. Although members of the Educational Division and other representatives appeared willing to take on suggestions coming from the grassroots and to try to implement them, the highly institutionalised nature of the religious organisation at present makes it impervious to change. In this section I have highlighted the resistance of local leaders to central attempts to introduce innovations, and practical constraints to activity implementation

\textsuperscript{52} Fieldnotes 11/02/2017.
\textsuperscript{53} Fieldnotes 12/02/2017.
\textsuperscript{54} A similar dynamic came into play with Fubuki’s definition of the role of social welfare specialists as ‘\textit{kage no yaku}’ (shadow role), mentioned above: in the \textit{hōza} held after a training session, Maeda shared the interpretation formulated by her head minister in response to doubts and concerns disclosed by some of those present, thus contributing to its circulation within the organisation.
stemming from hierarchical ties and dysfunctional distribution of authority, knowledge and information within congregations. They could be regarded as evidence hinting at the presence of deeper vulnerabilities hindering Köseikai’s capacity to renovate itself and effectively fill the gaps emerging within the religious organisation and society at large.

5.3. Institutional Vulnerabilities: The Decline in Köseikai Adaptability

Thus far, I have unpacked the process through which religious interpretations for social activities, and general guidelines issued by the centre, were transmitted and implemented at the grassroots. I have focused in particular on the multi-directional negotiations unfolding at various levels. The efforts of the Educational Division to tackle dilemmas emerging in the conceptualisation and actualisation of central directives expressed a strong concern to foster their successful implementation, and generally promote social care provision on local scale. Together with the developments discussed in Chapter 4, these examples showed that Köseikai’s central administration remained well aware of the issues faced by members and society at large. The movement was willing to address them by borrowing theoretical and methodological tools taken from various domains, notably the field of social welfare and care. We have seen, however, how these efforts clashed with multiple obstacles emerging in actual provision of services. These stemmed from intra-congregational power dynamics and dysfunctions in the distribution of authority and knowledge among members of the church administration. In general, the dynamics examined above signalled a marked resistance to change from local leaders, indicative of broader conservative tendencies permeating the grassroots base. These trends can be seen as an expression of a more general decline in Risshō Köseikai’s adaptability, i.e. the capacity to renovate its approach to religious practice and social care in response to new or growing needs. This resulted from deeper structural issues such as institutional ossification, the rapid ageing of the membership and a declining religious commitment.

The chapter unveiled some of the vulnerabilities intrinsic in Köseikai’s organisational configuration. The concentration of decision-making power in the
hands of the head minister, the subordination of the welfare staff to the missionary line, and an unbalanced distribution of authority, knowledge and information between these parties, significantly affected the planning and implementation of social welfare activities. The training system was specially devised to equip members with the knowledge they needed to tackle the pressing issues they would be confronted by and the religious justifications to motivate them. Such expertise, however, often proved useless when welfare specialists were subordinated to leaders lacking a comprehensive understanding of the said issues, or of care provision more generally. Alongside organisational configuration, the rapid ageing of Kōseikai membership, coupled with a general decline in members’ commitment, can also be regarded as both a cause and a consequence of the decline in Kōseikai’s adaptability.

The membership base of the organisation was ageing at the same pace as Japanese society overall, and perhaps even faster (Watanabe M. 2016). Demographic ageing was particularly apparent when it came to active members. As shown by examples provided throughout the thesis, those participating in church activities on a regular basis were mostly around the age of retirement. This, of course, set a limit on what could be accomplished by local congregations. It also hinted, however, at another significant issue, that is the decline in religious commitment. The majority of Kōseikai members were second, third, or even fourth generation. The organisation not only struggled to attract new members from outside existing congregations, but also to keep young people, born in the movement, committed. Failure to ‘transmit the faith’ (shinkō keishō) was frequently listed among the reasons for the current organisational decline, and emerged as a major reason for concern at various levels. The issue was often raised during meetings with representatives of the central administration, who appeared deeply concerned about the general lack of religious commitment among young members, and the limited efficacy of their attempts to address the issue. At the grassroots level, the same problem was defined in more personal terms of heartfelt regret. I had countless conversations where older

55 Despite the considerable number of practitioners that I had the chance to speak to while in the field, I encountered only a handful of new converts.
members disclosed their frustration for not having been able to pass on the faith to their children or grandchildren.\textsuperscript{56}

Institutional ossification, and more specifically Köseikai’s general inability to adjust its practices and modes of participation to new lifestyles and changing social roles (notably gender roles), contributed to exacerbate this trend. Even more than in the past,\textsuperscript{57} members struggled to reconcile church obligations with the demands emerging from multiple commitments, in both their domestic and working lives. The feminisation of labour was among the social transformations that had the greatest impact on Risshō Köseikai. The expansion of the movement in the post-war period was powered by a core component of strongly committed housewives. In contrast with a time where women were the leading force in proselytisation activities and shouldered most of the administrative tasks, at present younger female members often lacked the time (or willingness) to take part in Köseikai’s activities. More generally, most young members struggled with cutting out a space for religious practice in their busy lives, as frequently stated in conversations and interviews with members of the Youth Division.\textsuperscript{58} As newly emerging constraints were not accounted for within the established patterns of religious engagement, their feasibility in the present social context came to be seriously questioned. Dissatisfaction with Köseikai’s anachronistic approach emerged with particular clarity in an interview with Tamura, an employee of one of the welfare facilities affiliated to the organisation, and a member of Church A.\textsuperscript{59} When discussing the current disengagement of young members, she blamed the excessive demands imposed on them. They were expected to attend meetings, engage in missionary activities, and participate in the management of church premises.\textsuperscript{60} While these tasks might have been feasible when it was housewives principally supporting the organisation, nowadays it was hard for young people to reconcile religious

\textsuperscript{56} For example, interview 26/07/2017.
\textsuperscript{57} Earnest commitment to religious practice and church activities often causes tension within the family, as recurrently recounted in members’ testimonials. On the matter see Anderson 1994.
\textsuperscript{58} Interviews 15/05/2017, 09/06/2017, 22/07/2017.
\textsuperscript{59} Interview 27/07/2017.
\textsuperscript{60} Facilities are commonly managed through a system of shifts (tōban): based on their division, members take turns to clean the facility, staff the reception, perform ritual tasks and so forth.
obligations with their lifestyle. Such an approach, she stressed, was simply ‘unfit for present reality’ (genjitsu ni awanai) and undermined efforts to attract new members. According to Tamura, the organisation lacked the flexibility required to meet the needs of its followers, and she wished that they could adopt an attitude more suitable to the circumstances of the present.

The loss of innovative capacity and scarce success in attracting new converts (or even strengthening commitment of people born in the movement) is by no means exclusive to Risshō Kōseikai, but rather representative of a broader trend among new religious organisations, especially of the older generation. At present many of them appear to be struggling with issues very similar to those experienced by established religions (kisei shūkyō). In most cases, membership is in a phase of stagnation or decline. New recruits come mostly from within the families of existing devotees, rather than from conversions of people from outside the movement (McLaughlin 2009; Prohl 2012:11). These considerations could be said to question the alleged ‘newness’ of Japanese new religions, and ultimately even the usefulness of their distinction from established traditions (Prohl 2012; Staemmler and Dehn 2011). In their recent study of the Buddhist-oriented new religious organisation Agoshū, Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader (2018) drew attention to the many issues related to the blanket usage of the term ‘new religions’ (shinshūkyō) in relation to movements that emerged in Japan in the modern era. The authors pointed out several incoherencies inherent in this terminology. First of all, most of the movements included in the category are rather old, in some cases being founded nearly two centuries ago. Moreover, their membership is often aged or ‘old’ by virtue of being composed of second-, third- or even fourth-generation devotees. New religions have often been said to provide a distinctive focus of affiliation, being centred on individual conversion rather than conversion from within the household or transmission by custom, which typically defines established traditions. Yet, as Risshō Kōseikai demonstrates, this is often no longer the case (Baffelli and Reader 61

Other older new religious organisations are confronted with similar issues, as their membership shifts to a majority second and third generation. See for example McLaughlin (2009) on Sōka Gakkai, Baffelli and Reader (2018) on Agonshū. See also Prohl and Nelson 2012:11; Shimazono 2004:4, Staemmler and Dehn 2011:35.
Another view holds that new religions are movements that offer something innovative, dynamic, and alternative to the mainstream (Reader 2015; Staemmler and Dehn 2011). As Baffelli and Reader (2018:7, 14) rightly note, however, it is common for many of the new religious movements to reflect normative themes associated with Japanese customary religiosity, such as ancestor veneration or karmic beliefs. In particular, as religious movements grow, age and become institutionalised, they tend to move away from the more radical and innovative teachings advocated in earlier stages of their development, and re-orient toward social conservatism and the reproduction of traditional concepts and practices common to established religious traditions (*Ibid:* 13-14, 167).

Given these analyses, the term ‘new religions’ appears problematic, especially when used in relation to movements that are ‘clearly not new in any real temporal or structural way’ (*Ibid:*166). Does that mean, however, that the category of *shinshūkyō* has lost all its heuristic value? It could be argued that, although its original connection with innovation and the notion of being alternative to the mainstream has significantly weakened, the category remains relevant, and a potentially useful analytical tool, due to its persisting influence on the public image of these movements and their position within Japanese society. Still today, the historical legacy of controversies surrounding the rise and expansion of new religions, as well as lingering negative perceptions of these movements as deviant and potentially disruptive, continue to affect Kōseikai’s relationship with society and the everyday experiences of its practitioners. Social welfare activities, as a space where the religious organisation interacted with non-religious actors at both an institutional and an individual level, offered a means to investigate the persistence of social stigma around ‘new religions’ and the constraints emerging from it. This will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 6, which will focus on social engagement in extra-congregational contexts. In regards to the public

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63 In the case of Kōseikai, it could be argued that the Manifestation of Truth represented a watershed moment in this respect, as it fostered a marked re-orientation of the movement’s teachings and practices toward mainstream Mahayana Buddhism, and a departure from the eclecticism and emphasis on faith-healing and divination of the early years. See Chapter 2.
engagement of the movement, structural factors must be also considered. Both intra-congregational power dynamics and the general loss of adaptability stemming from institutional ossification and the ageing of the membership did not only affect inward provision of social care, but also social activities directed outside the congregation. Meisha, the civic movement started by and affiliated with Risshō Kōseikai, demonstrates this well. Its connection with the religious organisation undoubtedly constituted a major factor hindering Meisha’s efforts to implement activities and recruit participants, as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, the same issues troubling the religious organisation itself, notably the rapid ageing of the membership and a lack of young and committed members, also considerably affected the movement.

Within Meisha’s national administration, Aoki was among those who had the most comprehensive grasp of the issues faced by the movement, having worked in the association for the past sixteen years. In addition, knowing about local circumstances was an essential part of his job: he regularly visited branches across Japan to gather information for the association’s newsletter, of which he was in charge, but also to help struggling branches by offering information, advice and logistic support. The picture painted by Aoki was rather bleak. The reality for most branches of Meisha was that of small, unincorporated associations (nin’i dantai) whose members mostly belonged to the nearby Kōseikai church. Besides a minority of relatively active branches, most were in a semi-dormant state, and performing poorly in terms of cooperation with other groups and the local community. While acknowledging the negative impact that Meisha’s affiliation with Kōseikai had on its initiatives, Aoki stressed that other factors were to be taken into account. In particular, he believed that their activities were generally unattractive to the public and that this was among the main reasons Meisha failed to recruit participants outside the religious organisation. He pointed out that, since the number of volunteers in Japan was generally low, there was a fierce competition among civil groups to recruit participants. Meisha performed badly in this respect, mainly

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64 Interview 27/07/2017.
because the activities promoted by local branches were boring and disconnected from pressing needs within society. Aoki saw these issues as intimately connected with the general institutional decline of Kōseikai. Most of members were old, and increasingly unable to provide new ideas or the necessary energy. The majority of Meisha’s membership saw these activities as part of their church obligations, often because they had been asked to participate by the head minister, or as a form of practice (shugyō). Thus, they lacked the motivation to embark on new ventures, or to devise strategies to improve their activities to attract new people. Overall, members’ commitment to the cause seemed to be weakening. Aoki explained that most of the people currently involved in Meisha had started shortly after its launch, when they were young (in their 20s or 30s) and passionate. He believed that the presence of Founder Niwano, who at the time was alive, well, and earnestly devoted to spread the movement, had played a pivotal role in guaranteeing the success of Meisha in that early stage. However, with the passing of time, and as Niwano Nikkyō aged, it was almost like members lost their sense of purpose in social activism. Generational turnover in the leadership may have also played a role in this respect. The succession of a founder often represents a delicate stage for religious movements of recent formation. Yet, for Kōseikai the transmission of leadership from Niwano Nikkyō to his son Nichikō took place smoothly. Nevertheless, present leaders (both the president and his daughter Kōshō, the successor designate) seem to lack the founder’s organisational skills and capacity to rouse the movement to change.

In regards to Meisha, Aoki stressed how he, together with the rest of the administration, was trying to encourage a change in direction that the movement desperately needed. This was primarily by passing down knowledge and information about successful case-studies. The effects of these attempts, however, were often frustrated by the immobility and conservatism haunting the grassroots,

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65 In some cases, oyaku could extend also to Meisha activities: in Church A, for example, administrative positions within the local branch of Meisha were assigned by the head minister. This was the case for Miura, one of the representatives, who in her interview dismissed the existence of any substantial difference between her role in Meisha and other church obligations (kyōkai oyaku, interview 01/04/2017). The case of Meisha will be further discussed in the following chapter.
the disengagement of young members, and the lack of success in attracting non-Kōseikai people. In this respect, Aoki noted that the diffidence toward religious organisations was to blame only in part. The fault, he explained, was also with Kōseikai members, since they were frequently failing to reach out to other groups. The original call to build cooperative ties with local institutions and people outside Risshō Kōseikai was gradually being forgotten. Aoki’s comments echoed an opinion frequently heard in the field, regarding an alleged ‘inward’ (uchimuki) attitude embedded in the religious community. Several participants spoke of a common tendency, among Kōseikai members, to limit their personal relationships, as well as perceived social obligations and missionary commitments, to the boundaries of the religious organisation. This ‘inward’ attitude was highlighted for example by Kato, a member from Saitama prefecture whom we will get to know better in Chapter 6. Regarding his difficulties to recruit non-Kōseikai participants for the activities of the local Meisha branch, Kato pointed out that, in most cases, all their personal networks were limited to fellow members, and seldom included acquaintances from outside the congregation. 66 On another occasion, he noted that for many practitioners Kōseikai was basically ‘all they did’ (Kōseikai shika shite inai). He explained that they did not really engage with or care for people outside the congregation, jokingly miming blinders as he said this, to convey the narrowness of such a view. 67 Public criticism of religious organisations definitely contributed to foster a certain reticence to engage with people outside Kōseikai. However, these dynamics also bore witness to a shift in members’ commitment to pursue the organisation’s aim to ‘fill the gaps’ within social welfare. Moreover, they indicated how the religious meanings attached to social welfare, such as its missionary significance, were actually understood. More specifically, this trend hinted at a discrepancy in the value ascribed to different forms of social activities (or bodhisattva practice in Kōseikai’s understanding), and notably between social care provision directed at members of the congregation and forms of service to the community at large. Kōseikai members might acknowledge the general premise that

66 Fieldnotes 30/11/2016.
67 Fieldnotes 11/03/2017.
helping others fell within the scope of their religious obligations. However, individual practitioners and local leaders could attribute a different significance to activities directed at caring for vulnerable members of the church (often arising from strong feelings of indebtedness and reciprocity informing intra-congregational relationships) and initiatives aimed at reaching out to non-Kōseikai people and society at large. In other words, even when sharing a common concern to ‘fill the gaps’, the centre and the periphery did not necessarily agree on what were the gaps to tackle. These dynamics show that the capacity of religion to foster inward solidarity and reciprocity does not necessarily translate in the promotion of social cohesion and collective action at large.

Another dimension of ‘internal incoherence’ (Bender et al. 2013:10) within the religious organisation highlighted in this chapter can be found in the relevance of individual factors in negotiating interpretation and implementation of social welfare activities. I have shown that personal orientations and individual initiatives could play a significant role in countering the disruptive effects of power dynamics and structural unbalances. These could foster successful implementations of directives conveyed from the centre within specific congregations. These factors undoubtedly carried considerable potential. Considering the full range of structural constraints hindering Kōseikai’s capacity to renovate itself, however, it seems unlikely that bottom-up innovation could have a significant impact on Kōseikai teachings, practices and organisational configuration within the overall religious institution. As noted by Aoki, while change could not be univocally imposed by the central administration – of Kōseikai or Meisha – individuals operating at the grassroots were inevitably confronted with the issues stemming from Kōseikai’s institutional decline.\[68\] In the end, these dynamics seemed bound to result in a compromised negotiation, a trend that also emerges when we consider activities taking place outside the congregation. Chapter 6 will take us beyond the boundaries of the religious organisation, and back into the spaces of interaction informing the broader welfare system. Through the lens of Kōseikai members’ engagement in extra-

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\[68\] Interview 27/07/2017.
congregational contexts, the chapter looks at the multiple constraints faced by religious institutions and practitioners when operating in the secularised domain of social welfare and care, as well as the strategies adopted to circumvent them in the pursuit of practical and missionary goals.
On an icy morning of December 2016, I set off to D, a small city in the prefecture of Saitama, north of Tokyo, where I was to attend a lecture organised by the local social welfare council (shakyo). The lecture was part of a training course on social welfare and volunteering directed at senior citizens such as Kato, the member of Church D who had invited me to the event. He was a retired salaryman with a cheerful personality and the gift of the gab often found in Kansai-natives. Kato had enrolled in the course striving for useful knowledge and skills for his role as representative of the local branch of the Movement for a Brighter Society (Meisha). The talk was given by a lecturer from a prestigious Tokyo university. Its primary focus was community welfare (chiiki fukushi) in the context of a super-ageing society, emphasising the need to reinforce existing structures of mutual assistance and support within local communities by fostering cooperation among volunteers, care facilities, and other formal and informal providers of social care.\(^1\) The lecture reiterated many of the recurrent tropes pervading contemporary discourses on social welfare in Japan. Nationwide governmental campaigns and initiatives of local authorities alike call for cooperative approaches to social care provision. They seek to address the gaps created by the insufficiency of state-sponsored assistance and the decline in the capacity of traditional kin and community-based structures of support to take care of vulnerable members of society.\(^2\) This chapter explores the extent and nature of participation by religious actors in such practices and discourses of communal cooperation, and the position they occupy in these spaces of interaction. Drawing from ethnographic examples of social care activities carried out by Köseikai’s practitioners and affiliated associations, the chapter investigates

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1 Fieldnotes 06/12/2017.
2 See also Chapter 3.
the obstacles that they encountered when operating in extra-congregational contexts. It will examine the strategies undertaken to circumvent these obstacles in the pursuit of religious and social goals. I will demonstrate how the interstices created by present gaps in formal and informal provision of social care provided opportunities, for Kōseikai members, to perform their ‘bodhisattva practice’.

Returning to Saitama, and to the lecture room of the *shakkyō* branch of D city, Kato was sharing with other attendees his motivations for joining the course. Aside from learning more about social welfare theory and methods, there was another key aim guiding him, which Kato summarised as ‘nakama-zukuri’ (making friends, finding companions). The recruitment of participants was at present one of the most pressing issues facing Meisha D, a problem by no means exclusive to Kato’s branch, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Through the course, Kato hoped to meet likeminded people willing to get involved in their initiatives. He actively sought the opportunity in the last session, a couple of months afterwards, when, during a group activity, he invited other course attendees to join Meisha D, handing around flyers presenting their latest initiative (a combination of rubbish collecting, recycling and charitable fundraising), which made no direct reference to Kōseikai. Most of those present politely accepted the flyer, but only a couple asked for more details.

Some time later, I accompanied a group of women from Church A to a nearby elderly care facility. The visit was part of a fortnightly voluntary activity carried out by the congregation, whose members visited the facility under the name of Meisha A to help the staff with bed-making and cleaning. That day, I was paired with a *shunin* called Shimizu. As we were folding sheets and blankets, she told me about herself, and her commitments inside and outside the congregation. Despite being already quite busy with her church obligations, she willingly took part in the initiative, and was also actively involved in her neighbourly association. She saw these social undertakings in direct continuity with her missionary duties as a Kōseikai member and *shunin*. They were not only a means to help people and contribute to the improvement of society, but also provided a suitable channel for

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3 Fieldnotes 06/12/2017.
4 Fieldnotes 07/02/2017.
interacting with people outside the congregation in a relatively neutral framework, unmarked by the diffidence or hostility often met when engaging in proselytisation activities, such as door-to-door visits made periodically to distribute Kōseikai publications in the neighbourhood. The alternative avenues emerging from her social commitment, therefore, turned into potential spaces of interaction where she could convey religious values and teachings, offer spiritual guidance and potentially gain new converts. It was, in Shimizu’s opinion, perhaps the only effective way to conduct missionary activities. As she straightforwardly observed, ‘if you don’t do this, you won’t be able to carry out missionary practice [fukyō]’ (sō shinai to fukyō dekinai).5

As discussed before,6 the search for opportunities to cultivate personal relationships beyond the religious community has long represented a powerful driving force behind the development of Kōseikai activities. In line with the progressive broadening of the missionary focus of the organisation, social activities were embraced as channels to reach out to people outside the religious community. They were a means of fulfilling missionary goals, both narrowly and broadly defined. Where social care provision was directed at vulnerable members of the congregation, it primarily sought to secure their material and spiritual well-being, based on religious concerns but also ties of indebtedness and reciprocity within congregations. Initiatives projected outside Kōseikai served different religious and organisational aims. Cooperation with external actors and institutions was instrumental to Kōseikai’s core aim of helping people and creating a better society.7 It also offered, however, opportunities for interaction, emerging in the context of social care provision, and potential avenues for missionary practice more narrowly

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5 Fieldnotes 18/12/2017. The term fukyō (布教 lit. ‘to spread the teachings’) primarily refers to proselytisation and doctrinal propagation, i.e. conveying Kōseikai teachings to non-members, but was used by practitioners also in a broader sense, encompassing spiritual guidance and proselytisation (persuading people to join the movement).
6 See in particular Chapter 2.
7 Indeed, building collaborative ties and partnerships with local actors aimed at tackling pressing social issues emerged as a leitmotiv of initiatives launched by Risshō Kōseikai from the late 1960s onwards, with Meisha as the most representative example. As argued in Chapter 2, those initiatives were also part of a broader response to the crisis faced by the organisation in the 1950s, serving to smooth Kōseikai’s interaction with society and improve its public image.
defined, opening spaces where members could propagate Kōseikai teachings and potentially gain new converts. As the examples above show, these premises remain valid to this day.

Social care provision within the religious community was carried out in a context of mutual understanding and shared meanings and values. Spaces of interaction located outside the congregation, instead, were crossed by the multiplicity of formal, conventional and perceived boundaries delineating the public presence of religion in contemporary Japan. It has been discussed that public settings generally play a crucial role in determining the possibility of religious expression, and in shaping its forms through their restrictions (Lichterman 2013; Wood 2002). In the case of Kōseikai, these restrictions translated into a reticence to overtly manifest religious affiliation and sentiments when operating in public spaces. This was often conveyed through an expression recurrently used by members engaging in social activities in extra-congregational contexts: ‘shūkyōsei wo [omote ni] dashite wa ikenai’. This might be translated as ‘religiosity (shūkyōsei) cannot be brought out [in public/on the front]’ or ‘you cannot show religiosity in public’. Such reticence stemmed from a number of factors. A combination of legal constraints and regulations that structure social welfare, and a more informal but general social mistrust of religious institutions, made expressions of religiosity an obstacle to access venues, engage with non-religious actors, and implement activities. The need to comply with these limitations, combined with practitioners’ willingness to increase the effectiveness of their activities and smooth their interactions with public and private actors, elicited a tendency to deliberately remove explicit religious connotations. This could be regarded as a form of ‘reflexive secularisation’, defined by Isaac Gagnè (2017:154-55) as the process through which ‘religious organisations reflexively – that is self-consciously and purposely – transform religious elements [...] in response to external factors’. A similar dynamic can be said to unfold at the grassroots level. As the examples provided in the chapter will show, downplaying religiosity proved instrumental to boosting the impact of individual

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8 See Chapter 1.
and collective engagement. Moreover, it was sometimes a necessary precondition to gain admittance to the heart of communal action. Strategies of reflexive secularisation, however, also turned into a means to carry out missionary practice in compliance with formal, conventional and perceived limitations. Köseikai members did this by engaging the blurred divide between religious and non-religious, prohibited and accepted forms of religiosity. Despite the widespread consensus for the exclusion of religion from public spaces, the way in which the category was articulated in the field of social welfare was far from univocal. The confusion created by nebulous conceptions of religion reverberated in regulations informing social care provision, and was further enhanced by lingering discriminations in legitimacy among different religious traditions. Aside from formal constraints and widespread diffidence addressed at religious institutions in general, Köseikai members experienced further limitations stemming from negative perceptions of new religions, often framed as a dichotomy between legitimate and illegitimate, good and bad religions.

This chapter aims to unpack what it meant for practitioners to ‘not bring religiosity out’, that is how they ‘created a social space for expressing religious views and identities, and [linked] them to action’ (Lichterman 2013:131) in a context marked by ambiguous and contested definitions of religion. The issue is tackled through an analysis of various constraints and obstacles encountered by Köseikai members and related groups involved in social welfare and care activities. The first section examines the limitations faced by practitioners in regards to their affiliation with a religious institution, discussing how being a member of Risshō Kōseikai, or operating through a related organisation (notably Meisha) impacted on their experiences of social engagement. The latter half of the chapter explores the prohibitions on engaging in ‘religious activities’ (shūkyō katsudō) and ‘religious discourses’ (shūkyō hanashi) in the context of social care provision, to unravel how the distinction between prohibited and accepted forms of behaviour was negotiated by the multiple actors operating in these spaces. It discusses some of the strategies adopted by Köseikai members to reconcile existing constraints with the pursuit of religious – notably missionary – goals.
6.1. The Issue of Religious Affiliation

In November 2016, I was invited to attend an inter-generational exchange initiative, organised by the local branch of Meisha, taking place in the elementary school of the city of F, a small town located in Saitama prefecture. At the venue I was received by Goto, president of Meisha F, who enthusiastically introduced me to the head of the school, a couple of public functionaries of the city office, a professor from a nearby university who occasionally cooperated with Meisha F, and a representative of the Ministry of Education. They were all gathered there to assist to the event. Participants, including local elderly people and children at the school, as well as university students helping out, were divided in groups and sat at tables prearranged in the school gym. For a couple of hours they enjoyed games, songs, tea and snacks. The tropes of interaction, inter-generational exchange and communal bonds were repeatedly brought out during the activities, and in the speeches of institutional representatives. The episode offered a further example of the pervasiveness of narratives of mutual support and communal aid informing social care provision in contemporary Japan. Yet, it also showcased a successful example of cooperation between various institutions, encompassing public administration and private organisations alike. The fact that a local branch of Meisha had a pivotal role in organising and carrying out the initiative makes the episode particularly relevant to this discussion.

I had first met Goto a few months before, when I visited the headquarters of the association accompanied by Aoki, the representative of Meisha national administration mentioned in the previous chapter. As soon as I got out of the taxi, an elderly man cheerfully rushed toward me, shaking my hands with energy and then briskly showing us inside, hopping on the stairs while incessantly talking. In the following months, I would learn that dynamism and energy were among Goto’s distinguishing features, together with a marked outspokenness. During that first meeting, in the span of a couple of hours he flooded me with information about the history and present undertakings of Meisha F, his personal experiences and

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10 Fieldnotes 25/10/2016.
opinions on Japan’s social welfare system, as well as the relationship between Meisha and its parent organisation Risshō Kōseikai. Meisha F was set up in 1981, and obtained incorporation as an NPO (tokutei hieri katsudō dantai) shortly after the promulgation of the 1998 NPO Law. The main initiative promoted by the branch at the time of my fieldwork was a network of mutual support called ‘Sasaeai’ (literally ‘mutual support’, written with the character for ‘love’ 支え愛). Its purpose was to offer assistance to vulnerable members of the community, by offering help with everyday tasks such as small reparations, grocery shopping, cleaning, visiting the hospital or dealing with the public administration. The network was based on ‘paid volunteering’ (yūshō boranteia). Recipients were paid an hourly fee of 300 yen (about £2) – divided between volunteers and the association – using special coupons issued in cooperation with the city office, which were also accepted by many shops in town (Fig. 22).

Figure 22. Flyer promoting the ‘Sasaeai’ initiative. It says: ‘Please call if you have any problem!’ and below: ‘We will help you for 300 yen per hour’. At the bottom is a list of the main services offered, e.g. cleaning, small repairs, cooking.

The initiative cannot be regarded as especially ground-breaking, as in recent years similar networks have mushroomed in local communities all over the country, but it

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11 See Note 50, Chapter 4.
12 See Note 48, Chapter 3.
was undoubtedly a successful one. As Goto mentioned, visibly beaming with pride, the office received frequent visits by representatives of other associations looking for advice. The association had been recently mentioned in a morning programme on the national television, and also shortlisted for an award reserved for civic groups that had offered an exceptional contribution to their community. The support network was part of a broader set of initiatives encouraging mutual support and community service. This included a volunteering course for senior citizens held monthly and organised in partnership with the city office and a nearby university. Other activities sponsored by Meisha F stemmed from similar concerns for the conditions of the local elderly population. A cooking class for residents over 65 years old, for example, sought to teach them to cook tasty and healthy meals within the limits of their financial constraints, while also offering an opportunity for social interaction. Together with the inter-generational exchange initiative mentioned above, this brief overview offers a sense of the significant scope of the collaborative ties that Meisha F had built with private and public actors, on local and national scale alike. The group cooperated with public administration on various levels (city office, prefecture, Ministry of Education), public and private educational institutions (the elementary school and university respectively) and local organisations (the social welfare council and other NPOs). In other words, the branch could be said to have accomplished the mission that Founder Niwano had attributed to Meisha; namely to foster the creation of a ‘brighter society’ by building collaborative ties with people and institutions beyond Köseikai. There are, however, two relevant observations to make regarding the idyllic picture offered by Meisha F. Firstly, it was an exception among local branches of Meisha, and secondly, it was one of those which had most decisively distanced itself from Risshō Köseikai. In the opinion of members, the latter had been instrumental to its success.

6.1.1. Present Circumstances of Köseikai-Meisha Relations

As discussed in Chapter 2, Meisha originally started as a loose network gathering different actors with the purpose of promoting the social development of local communities. During the following decades, the movement consolidated its
organisational configuration, and at present, it is structured on three main levels: national, prefectural and local. The national organisation (Zenkoku Meisha), which acquired NPO status in 2001, mainly carries out activities of information exchange, coordination, research on social welfare, publications and media production, and educational initiatives and training courses for social workers, volunteers and counsellors. The prefectural offices (Ken Meisha) perform similar functions, while also serving to coordinate activities at the local level and mediate between national administration and local branches (Chiku Meisha). It is, however, at local level that most of the activities are planned and implemented. Offering a comprehensive picture of the movement is a challenging task, due to the heterogeneity of size, the degree of institutionalisation, and the diversity in the relationship with the parent organisation among individual branches. Content and targets of activities varied significantly depending on community needs and available (financial, logistic and human) resources. Overall, the main areas of action were found in: fundraising and charitable initiatives (e.g. bazaars); volunteering in welfare facilities; community service (cleaning, rubbish collection, greening campaigns and environmental activities, security patrols and traffic safety campaigns); educational activities and training; relief and preparations in case of natural disasters; support for vulnerable members of the community, e.g. mimamori networks, home-care services, meal delivery, counselling on social welfare schemes; and activities directed at fostering social interaction and reinforcing interpersonal ties (fureai) within the community, e.g. luncheons, festivals, salons.\[^{13}\]

Even though on national level Meisha had obtained the status of NPO this did not extend to local branches, most of which preferred to maintain the more informal status of civic group or ‘unincorporated association’ (nin’i dantai). Partially related

\[^{13}\] Although Meisha remains to this day an important venue of intervention for Kōseikai members, it is by no means the only or even the most popular one. On-the-ground observation revealed that many practitioners chose other channels to participate in the life of their communities (see Chapter 3). As seen in Chapter 5, the declining relevance of Meisha as a privileged venue of engagement was also related to its institutional decline. The initiatives taking place beyond the religious organisation, its affiliated civic movement and other Kōseikai-related institutions (e.g. welfare facilities) proved an extremely valuable venue of investigation, as they offered a more comprehensive picture of members’ social engagement, but also of the ways in which they dealt with the boundaries informing secularised spaces. As noted in Chapter 1, what made these initiatives even more noteworthy was the scarcity of scholarly investigation on the topic.
to legal status and degrees of institutionalisation were also differences in the relationship between Meisha and its parent organisation. Since its launch, Meisha was presented as a strictly civic undertaking, independent from Risshō Kōseikai. Founder Niwano himself had been well aware of the potential limitations that direct association with the religious institution could have on the activities of the movement. He expressly stated that the initiative was by no means limited to Kōseikai members, but rather open to everyone willing to contribute to the creation of a ‘brighter’ society, beyond differences of religion and politics.¹⁴ This remained the official line of Meisha, as explained on the occasion of the 2016 national conference.¹⁵ Before the start of the conference, I was introduced to a Kōseikai representative acting as mediator between the religious organisation and Meisha’s national administration. He stressed that, although the movement had originally started as an initiative of Niwano Nikkyō, and Risshō Kōseikai remained among its leading sponsors (kyōryoku dantai), the two organisations were formally separated and independent from each other. In contrast with the official narrative promoted by Kōseikai and Meisha leaderships, however, the accounts of grassroots members attending the conference drew a significantly different picture, which was marked by a complex interplay between nominal separation and tight inter-relation on the ground. Although no open mention of Kōseikai was made in speeches and presentations, once the audience divided into groups for a session of workshop activities, the themes of religious affiliation, relationships between branches and nearby churches, and its implications for activities began to circulate around the tables. Several local representatives noted that Kōseikai members represented the near totality of volunteers taking part in the initiatives of their branches, and church

¹⁴ Niwano Nikkyō’s decision to put some distance between the religious organisation and its social undertakings was probably dictated by the scarce success of a similar initiative implemented shortly before, labelled ‘Spiritual Cultural Improvement Movement’, whose more explicit religious connotation and direct association with Kōseikai had discouraged participation from society more broadly (Niwano 1978:252-53). Meisha’s tendency to set itself apart from the parent religious association can hardly be seen as exceptional, but rather exemplified a common trend, among Japanese religiously inspired organisations, to distance themselves from their religious roots, primarily due to the negative image of religion, as discussed for example by Chika Watanabe (2015) in relation to the non-governmental organisation OISCA, derived from the Shinto-based new religion Ananaikyō. See also Gagné 2017.

¹⁵ Fieldnotes 05-06/11/2016.
The difficulties faced by Meisha branches in their interaction with local actors and recruitment of participants hinted at a broader issue, namely the potential hurdles stemming from religious affiliation (understood in broad terms as encompassing nominal affiliation with a religious institution and less formal kinds of association) in the context of social engagement. Recent works on public religion and religiously inspired social engagement have been marked by an optimistic view of the potential role that religious groups can play in strengthening social ties (Putnam 1995, 2000; Putnam 2002; Wuthnow 1991, 2004). Paul Lichterman (2007), however, has challenged these assumptions by arguing that religion does not necessarily help

6.1.2. Limitations Affecting the Engagement of Religious Actors

Although there were undoubtedly many factors behind the failures and successes of individual branches, the connection with Kōseikai was thought to undermine the movement’s efforts to recruit participants and set up partnerships with other institutions.
building connections, and may also hinder them. Depending on the setting, ‘congregational identities can bring respect or social mistrust’, and that significantly affects the strategies adopted by different groups in ‘communicating religion’, notably the choice to use or avoid religious language to articulate their identity and relationships with other groups. In the case of Risshō Kōseikai, religious connotations proved detrimental, hindering activity implementation and cooperation with public and private actors operating the field. Far from boosting members’ ability to contribute to their community, religiosity undermined it. Goto appeared well aware of the issue, probably even more so since he was not himself a member of Kōseikai. He had been asked to take the role of president of Meisha F by one of the directors, an acquaintance of his whom he deeply respected, and a member of Kōseikai. Knowing this person’s affiliation to Risshō Kōseikai, he was, in the beginning, categorically opposed to the idea, as he personally ‘despised both political and religious activities’. He finally decided to accept only out of his personal relationship with her, and because it was specified that the purpose of the organisation was to make citizens happy, beyond distinctions of religious and political affiliation. In our meetings, he repeatedly stressed that a group showing a marked religious character would never have been able to achieve what Meisha F did, in terms of activities and collaborative ties with local actors and public institutions. ‘Why do you think we can have so many connections with the prefecture, the city office, the Ministry of Education and the school? Do you think that a religious organisation could engage with the authorities in the same way? It couldn’t!’ Religion, in Goto’s view, became a barrier (kakine) separating religious actors from the rest of society, and preventing them from extending their activities and personal interaction beyond the borders of the organisation. This was attributed to formal boundaries emerging from the constitutional principle of separation between religion and politics, but also to negative public perceptions of religious institutions.

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18 Interview 16/05/2017.
19 Informal conversation 25/10/2016.
Despite the present idyllic condition of cooperation between Meisha F and the public administration, things had not always looked so good for them. The first few years of Goto’s presidency were marked by stormy relationships between the association and the city office. He mentioned in particular a ‘squabble’ over the rental of a space for the cooking class – to which the city office systematically refused permission – which dragged on for nearly three years. It was then that Goto realised that the reason the city office was being particularly strict with them was their association with Kōseikai. Engaging with a religiously inspired group, he explained, could be problematic for public functionaries, as it risked sparking controversy or even legal charges of violating the constitutional principle of separation. This explained the hesitancy of the city office to support Meisha, despite the potential value of their activities. Such reticence emerged clearly in a visit to the city office shortly before the launch of the ‘Sasaeai’ initiative. Goto was personally called into the mayor’s office and bluntly asked whether ‘they planned to conduct any religious or political activity’. More generally, formal limitations stemming from legal constraints were frequently mentioned by participants as a major factor affecting Kōseikai-inspired social engagement. Interaction with the public administration was the main arena where these limitations emerged. Recurrent issues included problems with renting venues or securing permission to conduct specific activities, as well as difficulties in obtaining financial or logistic support, in the form of subsidies, publicity and promotion of initiatives through official channels (e.g. bulletin of the city office). Although these constraints were supposedly aimed at restraining the public engagement of religious organisations (shūkyō hōjin), the case of Meisha F showed how similar restrictions often extended to affiliated institutions as well.

Another example was offered by Kato, the jolly Kansai-native with whom I attended the volunteering training course offered by Shakyō D. After the event, he accompanied me to visit Church D, where we had a tea with Reverend Murata, the head minister mentioned in Chapter 4. During the meeting, Kato sought his advice.

20 Interview 16/05/2017.
over the same initiative he had been promoting at shakkyō headquarters earlier that day. He had recently applied for approval from local authorities and the social welfare council, but his request had been rejected. Presenting the flyer distributed during the training event, Kato stressed that he had purposely avoided any direct reference to Risshō Kōseikai. However, given that Niwano Nikkyō was mentioned as the initiator of the Movement for a Brighter Society, Kato guessed that someone in the local administration must have looked up the name, assumed that the activity possessed a religious connotation, and could be a pretext for proselytising. These issues were not limited to Meisha, but frequently experienced by Kōseikai members volunteering outside the congregation, especially when operating in collective capacity, as shown by the case of Church C discussed later in the chapter. Widespread diffidence toward religious institutions, and particularly the fear that social welfare and care activities might constitute a pretext for proselytisation, was a recurrent trope emerging in conversations with both Kōseikai members and professionals of the field. As Goto put it, since religion is ‘scary’ (kowai), if an organisation was to manifest an overt religious connotation it would unlikely succeed. People would not use its services, the public administration would not support it and other associations would refuse to cooperate with it. In the case of Kōseikai, the general mistrust was further strengthened by lingering negative perceptions of new religions. Kato, for example, often complained about the unequal treatment reserved to the various religious actors involved in social care and community welfare, lamenting that while ‘Buddhist priests could easily walk in hospitals or welfare facilities in their monk robes’, new religions (shinkōshūkyō) were generally treated with greater caution and wariness. In general, he felt that people were more likely to keep their distance when the name of Kōseikai was

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21 Fieldnotes 07/02/2017.
22 Fieldnotes 25/10/2016.
23 Shinshūkyō (new religions) or shinkōshūkyō (newly arisen religions) are both terms used to refer to Japanese new religions. The latter is commonly avoided in the academic debate due to its negative connotations, related to the alleged shallowness attributed to new religions because of their relatively shorter history. The expression, however, remains widespread in the public discourse, and was generally used by Kōseikai members, especially when talking about the general perception of their organisation and other new religious movements.
mentioned. While Kato’s depiction might have been slightly exaggerated, it reflected a common perception. Several members spoke of having felt discriminated (sabetsu) against because of their affiliation to a new religion. More specifically in relation to social engagement, some lamented that, in their capacity as Köseikai members, they faced stronger suspicions compared to groups associated with more established religious traditions. As was to be expected, the crimes perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyō cast a particularly long shadow on the social engagement of practitioners. As lamented by Kato, ‘For those who don’t know, Risshō Köseikai and Aum Shinrikyō are the same (yahari ikōru ne. Aum Shinrikyō ikōru Rissho Koseikai), that is why they wouldn’t listen to us’. More generally, negative public perceptions of new religions as problematic groups emerged as a major factor affecting Köseikai’s interaction with society, as Aoki pointed out. As one of the reasons behind Meisha’s difficulties with recruitment among non-Köseikai people, he listed the widespread suspicion toward religious organisations as potential ‘cults’ (karuto). Besides violent groups like Aum, for Aoki, this generally indicated ‘movements that had caused social problems’, such as fraudulent sales of sacred objects, or the abduction of children. In the past, Aoki noted, Risshō Köseikai was seen in a marked ‘cultish light’, and people shied away from its activities fearing that they might be a pretext to persuade people to join the movement or a form of propaganda. Compared to established religious traditions which had existed in Japan for hundreds of years, Aoki observed that organisations with a relatively shorter history were looked at with suspicion. He attributed this primarily to their different approach to proselytisation: in his opinion, one of the reasons why a Buddhist temple or a shrine promoting social activities were unlikely to raise terror was that these institutions seldom engaged in active or aggressive proselytisation (hageshii kan’yū). They were, at that point, ‘blended in[to] society’ (mō shakai ni tokekonde iru). In Japan, Aoki stressed, religion was not seen

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24 Conversation 30/11/2016.
25 Other religious practitioners, including Buddhist priests, also face controversies and limitations when operating in public or secularised spaces, as mentioned for example by Nishimura Akira (2016) in relation to post 3.11 activities. See also Fujiyama 2011.
26 Conversation 30/11/2016.
as problematic in itself: it was when it became institutionalised that it turned into a source of public concern.\textsuperscript{27}

For Aoki, however, the widespread suspicion against Risshō Kōseikai, and new religions in general, went beyond simple associations with controversial groups and aggressive proselytisation strategies. He identified their distinctive approach to religious belonging and practice as another reason for these suspicions. Aoki observed that, while ‘in Europe [personal] religiosity was almost taken for granted’, in Japan historically there had been a very different ‘way of participating’ in religion. Although it was common for people to be nominally affiliated with two or three religious institutions, most of them would not profess religious beliefs, or regularly engage in ritual practice. Which was why, in the eyes of society, people like him, ‘who had faith in Risshō Kōseikai and earnestly committed to the activities of one such small and specific group’, looked strange and scary. Aoki’s testimony was representative of a broader tendency, among Kōseikai members, to outline a discontinuity between two different ways of conceiving and experiencing religiosity.

A fluid, inclusive approach to religious affiliation was opposed to devotion to a specific religious institution or set of beliefs and practices, generally regarded by society as deviant and scary. This idea echoed the fundamental discrepancy between the conventional understanding of ‘religion’ (\textit{shūkyō}) and general attitudes toward religious affiliation, beliefs and practices. It has been argued (Josephson 2012; Isomae 2014) that the present widespread tendency of Japanese people to define themselves as ‘non-religious’ (\textit{mushūkyō})\textsuperscript{28} may stem from the discrepancy existing between Japanese common religiosity and the well-rooted conception of

\textsuperscript{27} Interview 27/07/2017. The growing diffidence toward institutionalised religion or religious organisation in Japan has been widely discussed in scholarly research, especially in relation to the negative impact of the Aum affair on the public image of religion. As seen in Chapter 1, although there had been a certain degree of diffidence toward organised religion in previous eras, the Aum affair dramatically reinforced these sentiments (Baffelli and Reader 2012; Kisala and Mullins 2001).

\textsuperscript{28} In relation to the apparent contradiction between Japanese self-identified secularity and the high degree of participation in religious practices, Ama Toshimaro (1996) argued that being ‘non-religious’ (\textit{mushūkyō}) is not conceived as a complete rejection of religion or absence of religious beliefs. The same people would often acknowledge the importance of ‘religious feelings’ (\textit{shūkyōshin}) or claim to possess some kind of supernatural belief in gods (\textit{kami}) or ancestors. Rather, they lacked any formal affiliation or commitment to a specific denomination. Non-religiousness, thus, primarily refers to the non-exclusiveness marking the religious outlook of the average Japanese person (Lefebvre 2015).
'religion' (shūkyō) that emerged from the modern period. The former is marked by inclusivity of affiliation, situational approaches to ritual practice, and primacy of action over belief (Reader 1991; Reader and Tanabe 1998). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the category of religion instead was originally defined in relation to Christianity in the context of diplomatic negotiations with Western powers in the latter half of nineteenth century. It was modelled on the modern Western notion centred on belief, and characterised by exclusive affiliation and earnest commitment to a specific system of teachings and practices (Fitzgerald 2003; Josephson 2012; Reader 1991). As further discussed below, such an understanding of religion was gradually consolidated in the course of Japan's modernisation, laying the foundation for the ‘prototype of religion as Japanese understand it today’ (Isomae 2014:66).

Imai, a social welfare specialist from Saitama prefecture, shared similar perceptions of new religious organisations as characterised by exclusive commitment or ‘abnormal’ religious behaviour. Imai was a 66 years old woman of brisk pace, hearty manners, and a quick laugh, who besides her church commitments also served her community as district commissioner. In addition, she participated in various volunteering initiatives, including luncheons and salon activities for local elderly people and childrearing women. She also pointed out that the kind of steady dedication to religious practice seen as characteristic, for example, of Christianity, was not common among Japanese people, who tended to have a looser approach:

That [kind of commitment] is only for those who practice a specific religion (tokubetsu na shūkyō), isn’t it? [Others would have] a rougher approach (ozappana yarikata), where they would celebrate obon or kigan, engage in religious functions a few times a year, or perform a Buddhist funeral when one dies. Everyone is fine with that.

With ‘those who practice a specific religion’, she meant people like herself, devoted members of Kōseikai. Just like Aoki, Imai outlined a discontinuity between the inclusiveness and low degree of commitment that marked Japanese customary religiosity, and the specific way of experiencing and practicing religion distinctive of

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29 Buddhist calendric events associated with the memorialisation of the ancestors.
30 Interview 08/05/2017.
new religions, which she attributed to their very novelty. She too believed that the unconventional attitude among practitioners of new religions was among the causes of the discrimination they faced:

There is still prejudice among common people (mada ippan no hito kara henken sareru) [...] against new religions, against religious institutions [...] In the past there have been religious groups that have caused troubles, and people tend to equate those with religion. However, originally the land of Japan... Christians take for granted that everyone would say the established prayers, and go to mass on Sundays, right? That is not part of the Japanese national character (kokuminsei). As I said, one might participate in a function a few times a year... but things like chanting the sutra on mornings and evenings, like we do in Kōseikai... we do that because we belong to Kōseikai. That’s how people see it. That is why there is a sense of discrimination (sabetsukan) regarding that aspect.

These accounts hinted at the existence of a further dimension of discrimination against new religions, based on assumptions of religious normalcy. Deviation from socially accepted patterns of religious affiliation and behaviour rooted in national character and customs strengthened public perceptions of these movements as illegitimate and dangerous sects. They reinforced the limitations faced by Kōseikai members operating beyond the boundaries of the congregation. In general, this section has outlined a series of hurdles stemming from religious affiliation and association with Risshō Kōseikai, which ranged from legal constraints to social mistrust and diffidence toward religious institutions, and new religious more specifically. These issues significantly impacted on practitioners’ engagement, hindering the implementation of their activities, recruitment of participants, cooperation with the public administration and local providers, and fuelled a general tendency to conceal or tone down their religious affiliation in the context of social activities, as discussed in the following section.

6.1.3. Coping Strategies and Patterns of Legitimation

In an attempt to circumvent the various limitations faced in the domain of social welfare and care, Kōseikai members adopted several strategies aimed at smoothing implementation of activities and interaction with non-religious actors. These strategies commonly involved the removal of explicit markers of religious identity and association with Kōseikai, and sought to institute a neat demarcation between
social and religious undertakings and increase their trustworthiness in the eyes of the community. They did so by combining two main courses of action. Firstly, patterns of legitimation aimed at formalising the separation from the parent religious organisation by acquiring legal, professional or publicly recognised statuses. Secondly, they relied on non-religious actors (individuals and institutions) to act as mediators with other providers and community at large.

One of the first initiatives taken by Goto after he became president of Meisha F was applying for incorporation as an NPO. This choice was dictated by the difficulties that the group was experiencing in dealing with the public administration. Together with the board of directors, he drafted a statute, where he purposely included a clause stating the goal of the association in very clear terms. This measure, he explained, served to establish a clean-cut separation from Kōseikai and testified to the legitimacy of their intentions toward the local community. The strategy proved successful: after incorporation, their relationship with the city office improved drastically. They were able to initiate a partnership and began receiving logistic support (e.g. venues, publicity) and even financial aid (in form of subsidies). When, some time afterwards, the city mayor confided to him that seeking incorporation had been the right choice, Goto saw that as a confirmation of his initial suspicions. Gaining official recognition not only served to secure the support of the city office, but also facilitated cooperation with other institutions, such as the school. Moreover it benefited Meisha F’s public relations and image overall. The shift in legal status had not substantially changed the relationship with the religious organisation, as Kōseikai members still constituted the core of the association, especially at administrative level. At the time of my fieldwork, the board of directors still counted only three non-Kōseikai people, Goto included. Incorporation did, however, allow Meisha F to formally sever ties with the religious organisation, which increased their trustworthiness in the eyes of the community. Before this, Goto pointed out, regardless of how good the initiatives promoted by Meisha F were, society (seken) would still look at them as an emanation of Kōseikai.31

31 Interview 16/05/2017.
Similar dynamics emerged in the case of Meisha B, a further exception in the general landscape of Meisha, and another among the very few which had applied for incorporation as an NPO. Kojima was the only non-Kōseikai member on the administrative board. He had become interested in volunteering after his retirement, and decided to join Meisha B because it looked like a promising venue to start his civic engagement. This was primarily due to its size, at the time amounting to nearly 800 registered members. With a large membership, he explained, came two valuable assets for the success of an NPO, namely financial resources (through membership fees), and human resources, in terms of labour force, qualifications and skills. He knew from the beginning that Meisha B was associated with Risshō Kōseikai, and was also aware that such affiliation was the source of the assets that had attracted him. Most of Meisha B’s membership belonged to the nearby Kōseikai church, where contributing to Meisha activities – even if only nominally and financially – was strongly encouraged. Association with Kōseikai, however, was a double-edged sword, as it hindered recruitment outside the congregation and cooperation with local actors. In this respect, the choice to seek incorporation in 2011 had represented a crucial step in the development of the association. To acquire the status of an NPO (or generally juridical persons, hōjin), Kojima explained, an association had to meet stricter legal requirements compared to the ones observed by unincorporated associations (nin’i dantai). Although limitations related to the constitutional principles of individual freedom of belief and separation between religion and the state applied to all organisations, their enforcement was significantly stricter in the case of NPOs.\textsuperscript{32} The fact that incorporated associations were bound by various conditions and subject to tighter control from the public administration, in Kojima’s opinion, served as a guarantee of reliability in the eyes of citizens. Although the association still maintained a strong relationship with the religious organisation, not only in terms of memberships but also in its use of resources and facilities, Kojima stressed that the change in legal status was helpful to mitigate negative perceptions of Meisha B as a ‘Kōseikai

\textsuperscript{32} As also confirmed by the president of the branch, a member of Church B, who added that the absence of religious connotations was expressively mentioned in the statute (Interview 12/06/2017).
volunteering group’ (Kōseikai boranteia dantai). In the case of Meisha B, therefore, securing legal recognition had greatly improved its interaction with public bodies, local actors and the community at large. Kojima himself had joined the group shortly after its incorporation, and revealed that he had felt reassured by its status as an NPO, and probably would not have joined otherwise.  

These examples show that, for religiously inspired associations, incorporation represented a viable pattern of legitimation, serving to attest their trustworthiness and help boost recruitment beyond the boundaries of the congregation. This, however, was not the dominant trend. In most cases, Kōseikai members operated through unincorporated associations – either within Meisha or setting up an independent group – or in an individual capacity. In those cases, there were other pathways available to practitioners seeking to formally legitimise their status in the eyes of public functionaries, social care providers and community members. In particular, social welfare councils offered a major channel of engagement for Kōseikai members willing to participate in social activities outside the congregation, as occurred in the case of Church C. Alongside intra-congregational activities, members of the welfare staff also volunteered at a nearby elderly care facility, assisting care workers with small tasks (e.g. helping recipients blow dry and comb their hair after the bath), or entertaining recipients with a calligraphy course and ‘salon’ activities, where they chatted with them over coffee and snacks. Their cooperation with the facility had started with the creation of a voluntary association, named ‘Tsubaki’ after the camellia flower, which was enrolled under the local social welfare council (Shakyō C). Registering as individual volunteers or as a voluntary group granted access to many useful resources, including training, logistic support, publicity for activities. It also offered access to volunteering opportunities, since social welfare councils commonly acted as intermediaries between aspiring

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33 The branch’s success in establishing collaborative ties with a range of institutions found expression in one of their leading initiatives, an annual festival called the ‘Family Festival’ (Famiri matsuri), organised in cooperation with the ward office, the local social welfare council, Tokyo Metropolitan Police, and involving several other NPOs and voluntary associations (Fieldnotes 20/05/2017).

34 Interview 06/07/2017.

35 The name used here is a pseudonymous, but the original name was also the one of a flower, and bore no direct connection with Kōseikai.
volunteers and individual and organisations seeking assistance. Besides practical support, registration under shakyō also offered a means of legitimation, serving to guarantee the practitioners’ reliability and facilitate their interaction with providers and recipients of care, through a combination of preliminary assessment and subsequent surveillance. As explained by Ito, a representative of Shakyō B, welfare councils conducted preliminary screenings of aspiring volunteers, directed at assessing their motivations, psychological steadiness, and determining the venue or activity most suitable for them. Since they were accountable for the behaviour of the people and groups they vouched for, they would usually deny approval at the slightest suspicion of ulterior motives for volunteering, and reacted promptly in case of inappropriate behaviour.36 These ideas were reiterated by a representative of the volunteer centre associated with Shakyō C, who recounted that, in the past, they had to revoke access to the activities to some volunteers who had used home visits to elderly people living alone for electoral campaigning or proselytising.37 The quasi-public nature of social welfare councils38 played a role in fostering this sense of reliability, as remarked for example by a staff member of the elderly care facility where Church A members volunteered.39

It should be noted, however, that for unincorporated associations it was harder to escape the suspicions stemming from their affiliation with Risshō Kōseikai. Going back to the case of Tsubaki, I had the chance to talk about the group with Nagakawa, a young employee of the social welfare council I met through Yoshida, the head of Church C’s welfare staff. When we discussed the beginning of their cooperation with Tsubaki, Nagakawa timidly revealed that initially, when the group applied for registration, they had been unsure about how to handle the matter. This, he explained, was the first time that his branch received an application from ‘one such group’, meaning a group connected with a religious organisation. Although Tsubaki was not officially associated with Risshō Kōseikai, members’ affiliation to the nearby

36 Interview 12/06/2017.
37 Interview 21/06/2017.
38 Albeit remaining a private association, social welfare councils are formally supported by the government. See Note 47, Chapter 2.
39 Interview 13/06/2017.
congregation was known, and raised concerns among the staff of the welfare council. They sought advice to the ward office, and only after receiving their approval agreed to the request. That was not part of the standard procedure, Nagakawa clarified. In the case of Tsubaki, however, even though the application had been made under a neutral name, the knowledge that volunteers were part of a religious association made shakyō representatives wary about granting them access to training activities and initiatives sponsored by them or other local associations. Religion, he explained, was a delicate matter, something that should not enter public space. Nakagawa himself was not certain about the reasons behind such prohibition, but suggested that one could be the existence of ‘suspicious groups’ (ayashii dantai) using social activities as a pretext to conduct proselytisation and forcefully drag people in their ranks. Even in the absence of overt discrimination specifically directed at new religions as a category, there was still a general trend to outline a dichotomy between legitimate and illegitimate forms of religiosity, between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religious institutions. Nagakawa testimony in this regard was revealing. He condemned ‘suspicious groups’ using social activities duplicitously to gain converts. Yet, he recognised the existence of many ‘good groups’ behaving properly, such as ‘the organisation to which Yoshida belonged’. The latter sort of groups, he believed, should not only be allowed to take part in social activities, but also to be more open about their religious nature. In order to benefit from the legitimising influence of social welfare councils, then, at times further negotiations or expedients could be needed, aimed at gaining recognition as a ‘safe’ religious group.

Besides registration under shakyō, other public and quasi-public roles, including the one of voluntary district commissioner (minsei’in) or positions in local associations, could also turn into tokens of legitimacy, countering potential issues related to religious affiliation. It was pointed out by various participants, notably those serving as minsei’in, that non-religious markers of status of official or professional (e.g. certified caregivers, trained counsellors, home-helpers) nature proved effective in

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40 Interview 29/05/2017.
facilitating access to relevant information, services and resources, and paving the way for cooperation with public and private actors involved in social care provision. Formal qualifications came in handy when visiting public offices, community support centres (chiiki hōkatsu sentā) or care facilities. They were also advantageous for dealing with other providers and volunteers, and could open doors that might be barred to them as private individuals (and Kōseikai practitioners). As such, public and professional statuses allowed members to overcome some of the practical limitations to social engagement mentioned in Chapter 4.

Another strategy that could be employed to legitimate one status and smooth interaction with local institutions and the community was reliance on non-Kōseikai actors as intermediaries and guarantors of trustworthiness. The Meisha leadership system, as shown by the case of Meisha F, was a particularly representative example in this regard. As later confirmed by Aoki, besides Goto’s personal qualities, his choice had been motivated by his high profile within the community, where he was already actively engaged on several fronts, such as the local PTA association. His case was far from exceptional. Aoki explained that having an influential member of the community (erai hito) assume the leadership role in Meisha branches, rather than someone affiliated with Kōseikai, was a well-rooted pattern.\(^41\) I had the chance to discuss the matter with Fujikawa, the social welfare specialist and minsei’in mentioned in Chapter 5. From his long experience as a civil servant, Fujikawa stressed how gaining the support of influential members of the community could greatly help acquire trustworthiness and prestige. It also provided more practical advantages in terms of access to useful information, services and resources. As with other strategies discussed in this section, it also served to create some distance from Kōseikai and thus circumvent the potential hurdles stemming from religious affiliation. In this respect, Fujikawa argued that the long-standing practice of recruiting local notables as Meisha leaders, which he saw as an expression of Founder Niwano’s organisational skills, had been instrumental to foster the

\(^{41}\) Interview 27/07/2017.
movement’s development. At present, however, Fujikawa felt that this trend was declining. Kōseikai members tended to increasingly circumscribe activities to the boundaries of the congregation.\footnote{Interview 09/05/2017.} His comments offered another glimpse of the growing ‘inward-oriented’ \textit{(uchimuki)} attitude hindering Kōseikai’s social engagement, mentioned in the previous chapter.

In sum, Kōseikai members and affiliated actors generally responded to the limitations encountered by downplaying their religious affiliation and distancing themselves from the religious organisation. In this respect, another aspect emerging from the interaction between religious and non-religious actors was the substantially formal (or nominal) nature of practitioners’ separation from Risshō Kōseikai. While using a non-religious name or status proved helpful to facilitate Kōseikai members’ engagement in the public space, this did not imply a complete rejection or denial of religious affiliation. Regarding Tsubaki, for example, both Yoshida and Sawada explained that, although they were using a different name \textit{(chigau meisho)}, the staff of the elderly care facility knew that they were all members of Kōseikai. In this regard, Sawada spoke of an ‘implicit’ understanding between them, where neither volunteer nor care specialist discussed the topic openly. Similar premises marked her involvement in the community in her capacity as district commissioner. ‘I believe they know that I am a member of Kōseikai,’ she noted ‘we live in the same neighbourhood after all. Nevertheless, I never mention that. That is also implicit’.\footnote{Interview 15/05/2017.} Imai had a similar take on the matter. Even though she had never explicitly disclosed her religious affiliation with fellow \textit{minsei’in} and other volunteers with whom she collaborated, she assumed that they knew about it. What she felt was important, however, was to discern the contexts where disclosing it could be problematic, and be careful to avoid that. For example, she would never mention Kōseikai when visiting the homes of recipients of assistance while she was acting as a district commissioner. In such cases the prohibition to refer to any specific form of religiosity was set as a basic rule.\footnote{Interview 08/05/2017.} Analogous ideas echoed in
several accounts of members operating in public spaces through Meisha, other groups or in an individual capacity.

These considerations suggest that, while belonging to or being associated with a religious organisation remained a source of formal limitations and suspicion, the problem did not lie singularly with religious affiliation itself, but rather with the timing and form of its disclosure. Attitudes toward sectarian belonging stemmed from a broader framework regulating the presence of religion in secularised spaces in Japan. This was structured along a private/public divide grounded in the interplay between individual freedom of belief and separation between religion and the state. Within this context, religious affiliation, beliefs and practices were deemed acceptable as long as they remained confined to the domain of private interiority, while their outward expression was condemned. In other words, what needed to be negotiated was not religious identity, but rather the way in which it was expressed, or ‘brought out’. While these principles may appear, at a first glance, quite straightforward, the ambiguous distinction between accepted and prohibited forms of religious expression became a source of uncertainty, concern and criticism. At the same time, however, this very blurriness turned into an opportunity for members, who could take advantage of the interstices between multiple and contested conceptions of religion and religious activities to pursue their missionary goals in compliance with existing limitations. These dynamics emerge with greater clarity when we look at how other facets of religiosity, namely religious beliefs and practices, were negotiated in secularised contexts.

6.2. Private Beliefs in Public Manifestations: Religious Expression in the Domain of Social Welfare and Care

_Shakkyō_ regulations probably offered the simplest, most concise articulation of the formal exclusion of religion from the public sphere in the domain of social welfare and care. There were very few conditions required for registration at social welfare councils – in either an individual capacity or as part of a group – but abstention from ‘religious activities’ (_shūkyō katsudō_) and ‘religious discourses’ (_shūkyō_
hanashi) was invariably included. The rule was unanimously voiced by all shakyō representatives I had the chance to speak with, and often expressly stated on the association’s pamphlets. These ideas were echoed by staff members of care facilities and social enterprises, which mostly followed the guidelines issued by the social welfare councils. The prohibition to practice and discuss religion was articulated along the interplay between internal and external, private and public dimensions of religiosity. When discussing these regulations with Ito, from Shakyō B, she stressed how religious beliefs did not represent an issue in themselves. The social welfare council would not see any problem in supporting someone volunteering on the basis of his or her faith, provided that the person accepted the fundamental premise that those religious sentiments could not be expressed in the activities they undertook. Discussing religious matters in public spaces, Ito explained, was strictly forbidden, as it constituted a violation of individual freedom of belief and a potential cause of discomfort for recipients and caregivers:

For example, if [someone] went to a welfare facility and started inviting people to join his or her religion, that would be a problem [...] Since religion is a matter of individual freedom, it’s not relevant whether a person believes in a certain religion. But if someone in a care facility started to discuss, let’s say, Christianity, people would feel uncomfortable, wouldn’t they? Even if it’s not direct proselytisation (kan’yū)... In general, I don’t think it is appropriate to openly talk about religion (shūkyō no hanashi [...] ōpun ni suru mono dewanai).

In a similar fashion Noguchi, a representative of the volunteer centre affiliated with Shakyō C, pointed out how social engagement rooted in a religious ethic was not inherently problematic. It became so when one tried to use volunteering as a pretext to promote one’s faith. In her opinion, that was what excluding religion from social care provision meant. As she put it:

There are absolutely no problems with participating in social activities because of one’s individual ethic (kojin rinrikan). However, [...] if while volunteering you were to

45 Among the other conditions included were the prohibition to seek profit or to take undue initiative in cases requiring specialised knowledge and expertise.
46 As explained for example by the staff member responsible for liaising with volunteers (boranteia čōdinētā) at the elderly care facility where Church A members volunteered (Interview 13/06/2017).
47 Interview 12/06/2017.
tell recipients ‘I am a Christian/I believe in Christ... that kind of religious talk (shūkyō no hanashi) would be unacceptable.’

As these examples suggest, the formal exclusion of religion from the public sphere resulted in the institution of a differentiation between religion as private beliefs and sentiments – usually referred to as shinkō, shinkōshin – and their external expression, the shūkyōsei that ‘could not be brought out’. This discontinuity was frequently reiterated in interviews with representatives of social welfare councils, volunteer centres and care facilities, who unanimously stressed the prohibition to overtly disclose one’s faith or conduct activities that could be regarded as ‘religious’ (shūkyōtekina). These regulations also applied in the case of members serving as voluntary district commissioners. As recounted by Hirayama, the shibuchō from Church D met in Chapter 3, the person who asked her to undertake the role, the chief of a local association, knowing that she was a member of Kōseikai, warned her against disclosing her religiosity while acting in her social care role. This was why she avoided making direct references to Risshō Kōseikai, its teachings and practices, when interacting with recipients of assistance.

The need to maintain a separation between religion as a private belief and sentiment, and its public expression, was generally accepted, and at times actively supported by practitioners, as in the case of Amano, from Church A. Few among my informants could boast a longer history of social engagement than him, who at 69 years of age had been involved in volunteering and community service for about 40 years. At the time of our encounter, he was serving as a voluntary district commissioner, president of his neighbourly association, and cooperating with the local social welfare council. While he regarded Kōseikai’s teachings and practices as the foundation (shitaji) of his social engagement, Amano was conscious that his religiosity was not to be overtly expressed in his public undertakings. When, after a visit to the social welfare council to which he was affiliated, we discussed the matter over lunch, he spoke in defence of these regulations, arguing that there were people who used social care and volunteering as a tactic (kakehiki) for

48 Interview 21/06/2017.
49 Interview 06/07/2017. See also Chapter 3.
proselytising, which he felt was unjust and disrespectful of individual rights.\textsuperscript{50} Not all Kōseikai members had the same attitude toward formal constraints over public expressions of religiosity and some of them did not entirely agree with or understand the reason behind them. Nekoda, for example, had a slightly different take on the matter. She was well-known in Church A due to her long-standing commitment to educational activities, particularly in the field of ‘domestic education’ (\textit{katei kyōiku}), both inside and outside the congregation. Besides her involvement in educational activities, together with a few friends from the church, she had set up a voluntary association offering ‘active listening volunteering’, which consisted of visiting elderly care facilities to provide companionship and emotional support to residents. Nekoda knew that she could not discuss religious matters or the teachings of Kōseikai in this context. While she could try to somehow convey the sentiments instilled by the doctrine to recipients, she could not ‘impose’ those teachings on them. That was the rule, and although she acknowledged the importance of defending the principle of individual freedom of belief, she did not entirely agree with the general ban over religion in the public space. She believed that religion, and faith, were important things to convey, essential to the construction of a better society. However, as Japan was ‘that kind of country’ and that was the law, she had little choice but to abide to it.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite divergences in opinion, therefore, Kōseikai members generally acknowledged existing constraints over religious expression, and tried to comply with them. The perceived need to adapt to the normative principles permeating public spaces was further strengthened by the additional factors affecting practitioners’ engagement and interaction with non-religious actors, notably mistrust and discrimination toward religious institutions and especially new religions. In order to avoid accusations of inappropriate behaviour, or simply facilitate their involvement in social care and welfare activities, Kōseikai members commonly responded to the existing constraints by consciously removing overt religious connotations from their discourses and practices, i.e. engaging in a form of

\textsuperscript{50} Fieldnotes 18/05/2017.
\textsuperscript{51} Interview 06/06/2017.
‘reflexive secularisation’ (Gagnè 2017). The choice to refrain from explicit manifestations of religiosity was primarily dictated by the limitations faced by members. Yet, reflexive secularisation could also serve as a strategy to pursue their missionary goals within the boundaries governing the domain of social welfare and care. They could do this by taking advantage of the ambiguous distinction between prohibited and accepted forms of religious expression.


In principle, the prohibition on overt religious connotations during social activities was commonly acknowledged by both Kōseikai members and external actors. In practice, however, when one inquired what these regulations actually meant, the picture became decisively more complex. Religious and non-religious actors alike struggled to articulate what constituted a ‘religious activity’ or ‘religious discourse’, or to establish in clear terms what forms of religious expression could not be tolerated in public spaces. The issue appeared tightly intertwined with problems of definition and interpretation inherent in the notion of ‘religion’ (shūkyō) itself. As mentioned above, the conception of religion as an internal belief and an exclusive commitment emerged in the context of diplomatic negotiations with the Western powers from mid-nineteenth century. It was further consolidated in parallel with Japan’s modernisation, when policymakers defined it primarily in terms of private belief (Josephson 2012; Krämer 2015; Maxey 2014; Teuween 2017). The religious policy adopted by the Allied Occupation after end of the Pacific War ultimately formalised the separation between religion and the public sphere, condensed in particular in Articles 20 and 89 of the Post-war Constitution, promulgated in 1947. However, as noted for example by Mark Mullins (2012), these developments did not translate into a complete exclusion of religion from secular domains, primarily due to the breadth and vagueness of the definition of religion itself, which left ample space for disputations over what could be included in the category. The conventional understanding of ‘religion’ modelled on the Western Christian conception influenced the implementation of the constitutional principle of separation. This has been commonly interpreted as prohibiting the promotion of a
particular religious institution or tradition in the public sphere, thus creating a space where non-sectarian or ‘diffused’ forms of religiosity could be partially admitted (Nishimura 2016; Tsukada 2015). Besides the divide between private (internal) and public (external) religious expressions, then, secularisation in Japan produced a further differentiation between ‘religion’ as commitment to a specific institution and system of beliefs and practices, and a form of non-denominational religiosity whose presence in the public space is, to a certain extent, tolerated. Rather than a clean-cut separation between religious and secular domains, these dynamics produced a multi-layered fragmentation of this conceptual field, which still affects the way religion is experienced and negotiated in present day Japan (Mullins 2012).

Among the blurred divides circumscribing the presence of religion in public spaces, professionals in the field of social welfare and care at times invoked the thin line between religion and ethic to articulate the differentiation between acceptable and unacceptable manifestations of religiosity. Noguchi, for example, suggested that while missionary practice (fukyō) – which she equated with promoting one’s faith or religious organisation and trying to persuade others to join – was absolutely prohibited, it could be acceptable to discuss one’s faith from an ethical perspective:

Volunteering cannot be directed at proselytising [...] but discussing things like one’s ethical principles (rinrikan) may be acceptable. Anything like ‘I belong to this organisation, would you like to join?’, that is going too far. [Di Febo: So, for example mentioning God(s), or the Buddha would be saying too much?] That would still be alright, it’s promoting (susumete) your religion that you cannot do. For example, if in the middle of a conversation, [...] the recipient was to ask you why you devoted to volunteering, it would be okay to reply ‘I do this because I am a Christian and I believe in loving the neighbour (jiai)’ or something like that. But to try to convert the person, to convince him or her to join your organisation and become a believer, that cannot be allowed.52

Discussing religious concepts was not necessarily seen as breaching the norm on abstaining from religious activities. However, there seemed to be a differentiation in evaluation depending on modes, circumstances and perspectives. Although the terms of this differentiation often remained ambiguous, as the example above shows, there was one activity which was unanimously condemned, namely

52 Interview 21/06/2017.
proselytisation (kan’yū, fukyō). In the opening section of the chapter, I have discussed how Köseikai members saw social care activities as creating potential venues of interaction in which to conduct missionary practice. We might wonder, then, how they reconciled their religious aims with the need to comply with the restrictions regulating the domain of social welfare and care. For practitioners, compliance with existing constraints did not imply a rejection or denial of the religious connotation attributed to these activities. Rather, they adapted to such circumstances by adjusting their interpretation of missionary practice, shifting the focus from open proselytism directed at gaining new converts, to doctrinal propagation and provision of spiritual guidance. Subtler forms of missionary practice, in fact, became possible in the ‘non-religious interstices’ instituted by ambiguous differentiations between accepted and prohibited forms of religious expression.

In interviews with professionals in the field of social welfare and care, evangelical practice often turned into a metonymy for religious activities at large, while other dimensions of religious behaviour remained suspended in a grey zone between ‘unacceptable’ religion and ‘safe’ non-religiousness/secularity. These dynamics emerged with greater clarity when looking at another boundary fragmenting the conceptual field of ‘religion’, namely the differentiation between sectarian religion (i.e. affiliation or commitment to a specific religious institution) and non-denominational forms of religiosity, mentioned above. When discussing prohibitions on engaging in religious activities, representatives of social welfare councils and care facilities would commonly frame them as promoting a specific religion or religious institution, especially in the form of direct proselytisation attempts. At the same time, mentioning well-rooted beliefs and practices not circumscribed to a certain denomination (e.g. ancestor veneration, visit to a temple or shrine) was generally read in terms of cultural traditions and customs. It was thus not regarded as equally problematic. Such distinction contributed to shape the ways in which members articulated their religiosity in their attempts to comply with social norms. This involved mediating the divide between Köseikai-specific teachings and practices and conventional forms of religious behaviour or widely
accepted values. Imai, for example, explained that when interacting with people outside the religious community, she would differentiate between religious notions and practices that were consistent with Japanese customs (*nihon no fūdo*), such as occasional participation in seasonal rituals or practices related to the life cycle (e.g. Buddhist funerals), and those that were peculiar to Risshō Kōseikai. The latter were conceived by Imai as part of her own practice, belonging to the private domain. They were, therefore, not to be openly discussed or promoted when volunteering, to avoid imposing them on recipients of assistance. These considerations, however, did not result in the utter surrender of missionary intents. Missionary practice, Imai pointed out, ‘had to be carried out’, which was why, even though she refrained from directly referring to Kōseikai’s teachings and practices, she would still resort to ‘religious components’ (*shūkyō no bubun*) to help people in distress tackle their problems, and offer spiritual guidance (*michibiki*) so that they could be saved.53

In sum, the restraint of religiosity (*shūkyōsei*) in social welfare and care activities did not necessarily imply a complete negation of the religious, encompassing all forms of belief, practice and affiliation. It rather translated into a removal of ‘religious specificity’, related to sectarian commitment or patterns of religious behaviour deviating from socially accepted parameters of religious normalcy. Strategies of reflexive secularisation adopted by members, therefore, did not apply to religious connotations *in toto*, but more were limited to Kōseikai-specific teachings and practices, or reference to Risshō Kōseikai as a religious organisation. Going back to the dynamics discussed in the previous section, we could reread them in the light of these considerations, framing the act of downplaying religious affiliation or association with Kōseikai within a broader process of removal of religious specificity in the context of social engagement. These dynamics, in turn, can be regarded as part of a wide range of practices of negotiation. Through these practices, religious practitioners adapted and responded to the constraints encountered in the public sphere, in order to – at least partially – fulfil their religious and practical aims.

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53 Interview 08/05/2017.
6.2.2. Negotiating Religion in Public Spaces

In his work on the pro-life movement in the United States, Ziad Munson (2007) highlighted how the emergence of ‘polysemy’ produced by the constant overlapping of religious and secular domains, could turn into a potential site of human agency and social change. The mobility and adaptability of symbols between the two spheres open up new possibilities for meaning and action (Ibid:121). In the case of Japan, the blurring of boundaries between the religious and the non-religious created potential avenues for negotiation. Multi-layered and ambiguous definitions of religion, as well as the unclear divide between acceptable and prohibited forms of religious expression, provided individuals and institutions with opportunities to negotiate concepts and practices by re-formulating them in non-religious terms. Chika Watanabe (2015), in her study on the NGO OISCA, derived from the Shinto-based new religion Ananaikyō, spoke of ‘techniques of obfuscation’ in relation to the strategies employed by OISCA aid actors. These techniques were employed to blur the line between religious and secular categories, creating a non-religious approach to sustainable development where Japanese values of harmonious coexistence with nature were presented as a universal environmental ethic. OISCA actors, Watanabe contended, participated in the ‘boundary-making exercise’ negotiating the divide between the religious and the secular. Rather than positioning themselves within one or the other conceptual field, however, they sought distance from both (Ibid:227). Benjamin Dorman (2012a) has also dealt with patterns of negotiation and re-definition along the religious/non-religious divide in his study of the fortune-teller Hosoki Kazuko. Hosoki, Dorman argued, managed to become a media celebrity and a successful spiritual entrepreneur in the post-Aum years, marked by a mounting diffidence toward religion, by formulating her practices in terms of ‘common sense’ and ‘national identity’. Hosoki incorporated markedly religious themes in her books and television programmes, primarily related to divination, kami worship and memorialisation of the ancestors. Yet, she denied any connection between these traditions and religion, conceived as ‘practices and philosophies associated with organised religious groups’. Instead,

54 See also Chapter 3.
Hosoki presented them as conventional knowledge or an inherent part of Japanese identity (Ibid:518).

Similar dynamics surfaced in Köseikai members’ involvement in social care and welfare activities. The tendency, widespread in the field, to define religious activities as commitment to and promotion of a certain institution or set of beliefs and practices, resulted in the emergence of non-religious interstices suspended between the ‘secular’ and ‘religion’ as conventionally understood. Here non-specific forms of religious expression could become acceptable, paving the way to readapted forms of missionary practice. As seen in the case of Imai, the need or willingness to comply with the various formal and conventional constrains limiting religious expression in the field of social welfare and care did not completely abate the missionary efforts of practitioners. As pointed out by Aoki:

Vehement proselytisation (hageshii kan’yū) [...] leads people to look at the movement in a ‘cultish light’ (karutotekina fū). But after all, if one achieved happiness thanks to his faith in the teachings of Risshō Köseikai, it would be only natural to want to spread them. I also feel this way. You want to invite people to join the movement, telling them that they can become happy too. That is because [in Köseikai’s faith] you have found happiness. It’s like when you drink a very good coffee; wouldn’t you want to recommend the shop? I think that it cannot be helped.

For Aoki, missionary practice was rooted in a desire to bring happiness to all people; the same happiness that he, as other members, had found in the teachings of Risshō Köseikai. To spread the faith and make the world a better place, he added, was the most important lesson left to them by Founder Niwano. This, however, was also the most difficult to implement, given the challenges that they faced in the public space. In this respect, non-religious interstices provided them with a potential venue to exploit the blurred boundaries of the public sphere to mediate religious concepts and practices. Existing restrictions prevented practitioners from

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55 These works echo a wider debate on the negotiation of the public presence of religion in secularised spaces and societies, discussed earlier in the thesis. Several recent studies (Beckford 2005; Cadge 2013; Sullivan 2009), examined ways in which religion is negotiated in various institutional settings. Other scholars (Engelke 2013; Hirschkind 2006; Meyer 2009), instead, chose to concentrate on the strategies adopted by religious institutions and practitioners to carve a space for religious expression in the public sphere.

56 Interview 27/07/2017.
conducting overt proselytisation. They could not use social activities to explicitly promote Kōseikai teachings and practices or persuade people to join the organisation. The ‘polysemous’ interstices instituted by nebulous definitions of acceptable and unacceptable forms of religious expression, however, created the possibility for subtler forms of missionary practice. These were centred on conveying religious teachings and values and providing spiritual guidance, thus allowing members to partially reconcile their religious aims with the constraints informing public spaces. Nekoda, for example, was conscious that Kōseikai beliefs, such as the idea that we receive life from the Buddha, and that everything happens thanks to his benevolence, could not be discussed in the context of her social undertakings. Nevertheless, she still believed in the need to transmit at least the ethical principles stemming from this religious worldview, such as the preciousness of life, or the importance of gratitude and mutual support among human beings. Teaching these values was, for Nekoda, the great merit of religion, and of Kōseikai doctrine more specifically, but since religious expressions could not be used, it was necessary to find other ways to convey these concepts. She did so by re-formulating doctrinal content in common terms, terms that everyone could understand and agree with, in a way that ‘created no sense of estrangement or discomfort, regardless of who the interlocutor was’. This involved avoiding Buddhist lexicon (butsugo) and direct references to Kōseikai-specific teachings. Although the notions and values she shared with recipients of assistance were expressed in non-religious terms, they maintained a marked – albeit implicit – religious connotation. These were often rooted in the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence and the law of karma, as well as the fundamental notions of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of all life.\(^{57}\) What Nekoda carried out could be regarded as an act of re-categorisation, which removed Kōseikai values from the domain of religion by separating its ethical components from their religious foundations, and relocated them into the secular field of morality (dōtoku).

\(^{57}\) Interview 06/06/2017.
Similar strategies were implemented by Amano. He was aware of and agreed with the prohibition on engaging in religious activities in his social undertakings. Amano seemed, nonetheless, to limit this definition to active proselytization, i.e. trying to persuade someone to join a religious organisation. He saw other manifestations of religiosity in a different light. Doctrinal propagation in particular was attributed crucial relevance as a means to save people and create a better world. Amano firmly believed in the importance of transmitting the teachings, which he regarded as an essential part of his bodhisattva practice. He was motivated to do so through social care activities. Sharing religious notions, he argued, became possible if one resorted to ‘expedients’ (kufū), which in his case consisted in translating religious content in more neutral forms, such as ‘life advice’ (ikikata sōdan). These ideas resonated with the experience of Fujikawa who, like Amano, strove to convey Kōseikai teachings to society but faced the constraints related to his public and quasi-public roles, as a (retired) civil servant and government-sponsored community volunteer. He tackled the conundrum by approaching religious values ‘in a roundabout way’ (tōi mawari), condensing the key aspects of the teachings into forms of advice, formulated in non-religious terms. This approach allowed him to take advantage of the many opportunities for propagation provided by both volunteering and work. Alongside the possibility to offer spiritual guidance to the people he assisted in the community, Fujikawa’s role as a civil servant gave him access to further suitable channels for spreading Kōseikai teachings. The bulletin issued by the city office, for example, was a missionary tool for Fujikawa. As he explained while browsing the scrapbook where he had collected the many articles written during his long career, throughout the years those pages had offered him a means to convey what he believed were the values most needed by society, even though to do so he had to severe them from the religious beliefs from which they stemmed.  

Hirayama echoed these ideas. When discussing more in detail what, in her opinion, the prohibition of disclosing religiosity implied, Hirayama also singled out overt proselytisation (kan’yū) attempts. For that reason, she restrained from doing things like inviting people to church events, or handing Kōseikai publications

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58 Interview 09/05/2017.
when engaging in community volunteering as district commissioner. However, leaving aside ‘religious activities’ narrowly defined, more subtle ways of expressing religiosity were deemed acceptable, as they did not entail proselytisation. Hirayama did not see any particular issue in using her role as district commissioner to discuss religious teachings in the form of ‘worldviews’ or ‘approaches to life’ without making explicit reference to Kōseikai.\(^{59}\)

These examples demonstrated how Kōseikai members took advantage of the blurred definitions of religious expression to negotiate the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. In so doing they were able to pursue their religious aims in compliance with the limitations informing their avenues of intervention. We have seen how the removal of religious specificity in the context of social activities did not necessarily imply a complete denial of their missionary value. As pointed out by Nekoda, ‘you can conduct missionary practice even without mentioning Kōseikai’.\(^ {60}\) It could be argued, however, that for members to reconcile the religious significance of social activities with the constraints imposed on their religious expression, a further level of negotiation was required. The need to comply with existing limitations led members to revise their own conception of missionary practice, and adopt a looser interpretation centred on doctrinal propagation and moral guidance through the transmission of religious values. This required a shift from the goal of gaining converts to the importance of spreading Kōseikai values and ‘teach a way of living’, which, as pointed out by Amano, could be done even without directly referring to Kōseikai.\(^{61}\) These dynamics highlight the multi-directional nature of the process of negotiating religion in public space, which was not limited to the transmission of religious concepts and practices in non-religious terms, but also contributed to shape members’ own understanding and implementation of religious practice.

More broadly, through an analysis of Kōseikai members’ engagement in extra-congregational contexts, this chapter has highlighted the crucial role played by

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\(^{59}\) Interview 26/07/2017.
\(^{60}\) Interview 06/06/2017.
\(^{61}\) Interview 06/07/2017.
environmental factors in shaping the ways in which religious groups and practitioners tried to tackle existing societal needs and articulated their religiosity in public spaces. Legal constraints, as well as less formal limitations stemming from the social mistrust against religious organisations, and new religions more specifically presented obstacles for implementing activities and spreading the message of Kōseikai via social care. I have discussed how, for Kōseikai members and related associations, the connection with a religious institution could be a hindrance to service provision, recruitment and participation in cooperative initiatives. The multiple constraints faced by members fostered a general tendency to remove markers of religious identity and resort to strategies of legitimation aimed at establishing a clean-cut separation between religious and social commitments. Through these efforts, they sought to increase their trustworthiness in the eyes of non-religious institutions and service recipients. Community-based networks of cooperation were presented as the foundation stone of social care provision in Japan. For religious groups and practitioners, however, access to these networks was subject to the renunciation of their religious status, at least on a formal level. The removal of markers of religious identity and affiliation, even when not mandatory, emerged as a de facto precondition to access cooperative initiatives and opportunities for social engagement at a local level. In sum, rather than reinforcing communal ties of cooperation, religion constituted an impediment to social interaction. Another aspect affected by the multiple boundaries circumscribing religion was the possibility of expressing religiosity in public spaces. The latter half of the chapter discussed how formal restrictions, social conventions and negative public perceptions of religion all contributed to drawing a line between the forms of religious expression that could not be admitted into public spaces, and those that could be tolerated. Within this context, however, religious practitioners were not passively subject to the constraints framing their social engagement. Rather, they creatively engaged with the blurred boundaries informing the field to pursue their goals, transmitting to their interlocutors, and to society at large, what they felt was important to convey. In the interstices created by ambiguous definitions of acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour, Kōseikai members found a venue where they could pursue their missionary goals.
Spaces of interaction, then, turned into spaces of negotiation, where religious concepts and values could be mediated. As argued above, the process implied an additional dimension of negotiation, where beliefs and practices were re-defined in order to adapt to the constraints informing secularised domains.

To conclude, the outcomes of this process, for the actors involved and society at large, need to be unpacked. What did these multi-directional negotiations really entail? The strategies adopted by Kōseikai members did not challenge the constraints limiting the presence of religion in society. Instead, they worked through them, downplaying religious affiliation and re-formulating doctrinal content in non-religious terms. For members to convey religious notions, it was still necessary to relocate them under a secular label (such as ethics), or at least in a space that was not expressively or exclusively religious. These dynamics recall practices of ‘discursive secularisation’ currently carried out by Shinto institutional actors, who, as argued by Aike Rots (2017), instead of challenging the category of religion per se, or its exclusion from the public sphere, rather question the inclusion of certain traditions, practices, and beliefs within this category. The case of Kōseikai members, however, appeared different still. The re-categorisation of religious values within secular fields was not meant to deny the intrinsic religious nature of the concepts and practices that Kōseikai members strove to promote. Rather, it qualified as an adaptive response to the constraints met in the domain of social welfare and care.

These strategies, however, seemed bound to result in a compromised negotiation. Practitioners were able to partially fulfil their goals by spreading Kōseikai teachings in the form of ethical norms of behaviour or customary practices. The need to detach these values from their religious foundations, however, undermined the perceived effectiveness of missionary practice, even in its looser formulation. Nekoda in particular offered some precious insights in this respect. She believed that, between religion and morality (dōtoku), there was a ‘difference in depth’ (fukasa no chigai). Morality was what defined the appropriate behaviour to maintain in society, but in the end it merely established a set of rules for everyone to respect. In order to understand the reasons behind ethical principles, one had to
go deeper. This was something that only religion could do, as it dealt with the innermost concerns of the heart, and with what was invisible to the eye. Morality, for example, might teach you the importance of gratitude, or compassion. Through Kōseikai instead you could learn the reasons behind those values, namely the fundamental truth that we all receive life from the Buddha and exist in state of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence among each other and with the entire cosmos. By learning that, one would naturally be filled with a deep thankfulness and caring sentiments toward others, without the need to impose them as norms of civic behaviour. Morality, Nekoda stressed, lacked such depth, and that was why, in her opinion, religion had a social role to fulfil in order to support the development of humanity and the creation of a better world:

When you think about what religiosity (shūkyōsei) is, in broad terms, isn’t it about the preciousness of life, and caring sentiments toward living beings? And aren’t those the most important values for a human being? That is why the fact that [those values/concepts] cannot be taught is extremely sad.\(^{62}\)

These views were by no means exclusive to Nekoda. Many informants within the grassroots base and central administration alike made the claim that religion had a role to play in society.\(^{63}\) More broadly, in this thesis I have suggested that social activities could offer the religious organisation and its practitioners the opportunity to carve a space for themselves and renegotiate the relevance of religion in contemporary Japanese society. In the end, however, we have seen how Kōseikai’s attempts to fill the gaps in social welfare provision, and use those gaps to pursue religious, organisational and social goals, were only partially successful. A varied range of environmental and structural obstacles frustrated these attempts. In the next section, thus, I will take stock of the outcomes of the multiple and diverse processes discussed in the thesis, in order to draw some conclusions and put forward hypothesis on future developments.

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\(^{62}\) Interview 06/06/2017.

\(^{63}\) See in particular the conversation with Reverend Murata reported at the beginning of Chapter 4.
Conclusion

This thesis discussed the social care activities of Risshō Kōseikai, which were articulated as attempts to ‘fill the gaps’ in Japan’s welfare system. I have suggested that gaps in social care provision opened potential venues of intervention where practitioners could negotiate religion, i.e. mediate religious values and practices and re-define the position of religion within contemporary Japanese society. The thesis opened with an analysis of the multiple factors fostering Kōseikai’s concern with ‘filling the gaps’, stemming from a complex intermingling of missionary aims, organisational demands and environmental circumstances. In Chapter 2, we have seen how Kōseikai’s increasing involvement in social service provision from the late 1950s qualified as an adaptive response to societal changes and newly emerging needs, but also to a major crisis triggered by a combination of media attacks, legal charges, internal power imbalances, and dynamics at work within the Japanese religious landscape. Social activities fulfilled various functions, ranging from the need to adapt missionary practice in order to address shifting religious and social demands, to the requirement to rehabilitate the public image of the movement and escape mounting criticisms of new religious organisations. Social transformations occurred from the 1990s encouraged further developments. In particular, as seen in Chapter 4, the rapid demographic ageing of Kōseikai membership and Japanese population at large instituted additional challenges for the organisation. These included an obligation to cater to the needs of a growing number of frail elderly people within the movement, while also offering new roles for older practitioners who were still healthy and willing to contribute to the life of the congregation. In addition, I have argued that filling existing gaps within social welfare provision could serve to re-define a public role for religious actors, articulated in terms of continuity and complementarity with the functions fulfilled by other care providers. As such they could re-negotiate the position of religious institutions within contemporary Japanese society. Moving from the ethnographic examples provided in the chapters,
here I would like to draw some conclusions regarding Kōseikai’s efforts to ‘fill the gaps’. Did the religious organisation succeed in its attempts? Did social care activities help carve a space for Risshō Kōseikai or reaffirm the public relevance of religion?

Based on the overview of the social services currently promoted by Kōseikai, outlined in Chapter 4, the organisation can be said to have succeeded in addressing some of its internal gaps, responding to the caring demands of its vulnerable members and creating alternative roles to keep older practitioners involved. The effectiveness of these efforts, however, was to a certain extent undermined by a set of obstacles that emerged in the context of activity planning and implementation. These ranged from environmental factors – including legal constraints, practical limitations and tensions with other care providers – to institutional vulnerabilities. As discussed in Chapter 5, structural features like power relationships, dysfunctionalities in the distribution of authority, information and knowledge within local congregations, coupled with the progressive ageing and declining commitment of members, all contributed to undermine the effective transmission and implementation of the guidelines issued by the centre. These same limitations also affected attempts to fill external gaps and to offer a contribution to local communities and Japanese society at large. In this respect, the success of Kōseikai’s efforts appeared rather limited. The services offered through the locally-based system of care provision centred on Kōseikai churches targeted almost exclusively members. This was also due to the additional obstacles faced by activities directed outside the congregation. Legal constraints associated with the formal exclusion of religion from the public space and the widespread mistrust of religious organisations hindered their attempts to expand the scope of institutional initiatives to non-Kōseikai people. Similar limitations applied to Kōseikai’s positioning vis-à-vis the state. In Chapter 3, which dealt with the religious connotations of social welfare activities, we have seen how religious values and actors could represent a valuable asset for the Japanese government. Religion, by providing rhetorical tools and willing volunteers instrumental to the continuation of established patterns of informal provision of care on the local level, could
contribute to support its recent attempts to promote a progressive privatisation and de-centralisation of care responsibilities. Nevertheless, the constitutional regime of separation between religion and the public sphere, combined with lingering negative perceptions of religious organisations, made the direct mobilisation of these resources by the state problematic. Independent initiatives undertaken by individual members or groups, taking place outside the institutional frameworks of Risshō Kōseikai and affiliated organisations (notably Meisha), appeared more successful in terms of filling gaps emerging in the broader social context. The greater effectiveness of these activities, however, was often bound to a renunciation of explicit religious connotations. Chapter 6 illustrated how the strategies adopted by members to improve activity implementation and smooth cooperation with public bodies and local institutions commonly implied a removal of markers of religious identity and the avoidance of overt expressions of religiosity. Some Kōseikai members operating on an individual or collective basis managed to tackle pressing societal issues, and even fulfil part of their missionary goals in the process. Nonetheless, these initiatives were unlikely to significantly alter public perception of Risshō Kōseikai as a religious organisation, or help practitioners reaffirm the value of religion in the eyes of society.

Overall, this thesis highlighted how Kōseikai’s attempts to ‘negotiate religion’ by filling the gaps in social welfare provision remained substantially unfulfilled. I have illustrated this by unpacking the multi-directional processes of negotiation through which Kōseikai members addressed the obstacles encountered in their undertakings, both within and without the religious organisation. Despite the declared intention to offer a contribution to society, the gaps that the religious organisation managed to fill were primarily the ones affecting their own membership. In terms of social contribution, I have demonstrated that religious values contributed to reinforce notions of solidarity and reciprocity among practitioners, and to some extent enhanced their commitment to the service of their communities. This, however, was not necessarily linked to the promotion of social cohesion more broadly. Firstly, the ‘inward’ (uchimuki) attitude shown by Kōseikai members suggested a tendency to prioritise assistance to members as opposed to activities benefitting society at
large. Secondly, we have seen how religion (in the form of religious affiliation of members or religious connotations of activities) often became a hindrance to collective action, undermining practitioners’ attempts to establish cooperative ties with other local actors, or supplement the services offered by formal and informal providers of care. Rather than serving to carve out a space for Risshō Kōseikai within contemporary Japanese society, social welfare activities often served to aggravate its marginality. Instead of ‘filling a gap’ by occupying an existing space of need, Kōseikai risked ‘falling into a gap’ dug by both environmental constraints of religious organisations and its own structural vulnerabilities. Regarding the changing presence of religion in modern societies more broadly, the case-study showed that, although social welfare activities offer a suitable venue to renegotiate the relevance of religion within secularised contexts, the involvement of religious organisations and practitioners in the field does not necessarily translate in a resurgence of religion in the public sphere, nor in a substantial re-definition of its relationship with the state and other social agencies.

We may wonder how these dynamics may develop from now onwards. What does the future hold for Risshō Kōseikai? On the one hand, some of the pressing challenges at present faced by the organisation will likely worsen in the next few years. Demographic ageing is rapidly increasing among its membership and this is combined with a general failure to attract new converts and secure the commitment of young people born into the movement. This can be expected to reduce the availability of financial and human resources, and further exacerbate the structural limitations already undermining Kōseikai’s efforts to address congregational and societal demands. On the other hand, however, the potential impact of recent developments related to the public presence of religion within contemporary Japan must be taken into account. In particular, the extensive mobilisation of religious actors in the relief and recovery efforts following the earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku has significant implications. It affected the position of religious organisations within Japanese society, and in the near future could institute unprecedented opportunities for action.
In March 2017, I attended a symposium held at Waseda University, Tokyo, focusing on the relief and recovery activities undertaken in Kamaishi.¹ This was one of areas most seriously affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011. I had been invited by Reverend Murata, who was also part of the panel. Risshō Köseikai had been among the several institutions involved in a salon activity called ‘Ochakko salon’, organised in cooperation with the local social welfare council. Murata, who at the time was still part of the Social Contribution Group (Shakai Köken Gurūpu) within Köseikai’s central administration, had played a pivotal role in the planning and implementation of the initiative. All the panellists were representatives of other support groups which had taken part, mostly having been invited by the welfare council, and members of the coordinating committee managing it. Excluding a representative of the city office staff, they were all members of religious or religiously inspired organisations.² The religious affiliation of the groups involved in the initiative was not directly mentioned in the event programme, nor presented as the core theme of the panel, but nevertheless became the leitmotiv of the discussion. Besides stressing the relevant role played by the coordinating committee in securing harmonious and collaborative relations between the different religious groups involved, the panellists spoke of the ‘Ochakko salon’ as a space where volunteers were able to provide assistance ‘in the capacity of religious practitioners’ (shūkyōsha toshite). The idyllic picture of cooperation portrayed by the panel appeared to be in contrast with the points raised in the last chapter. There I argued that the removal of religious connotations (or, at least, of ‘religious specificity’) represented a de facto precondition to access the field of social welfare and care, due to the diffidence toward religious institutions harboured by social welfare councils, public bodies and private organisations. More generally, the initiative appeared at odds with the multiple boundaries limiting the public presence of religion in Japan.

¹ Fieldnotes 04/03/2017.
² Besides Murata, the other panellists included the head priest of a Buddhist temple, the representatives of two Christian organisations, and a protestant pastor currently employed within the social welfare council.
Religious institutions and practitioners mounted a prompt response on a large scale in the wake of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear incident that struck the Tohoku region (North-East Japan) in March 2011, which has come to be referred to simply as the ‘3.11’. This has rekindled academic interest in the social engagement of Japanese religions (Inaba 2011; McLaughlin 2013a, 2013b; Shimazono 2012; Shimazono and Isomae 2014; Takahashi 2016), and had a notable impact on their public image. Scholarly accounts and media reports highlighted the pivotal contribution offered by religious organisations and practitioners to post-disaster relief and reconstruction. More generally, they also promoted a new, positive narrative of religion as a beneficial social force. As noted by Levi McLaughlin (2016), the combined efforts of a large coalition of ‘religion-supporting advocates’, including religious activists, sympathetic scholars and journalists, played a crucial role in fostering this new trend. It did so primarily by offering media-appealing depictions of religiously inspired aid activities as essentially altruistic and ecumenical. Alongside the material support and physical resources mobilised by religious groups, this narrative also drew attention to the ‘distinctively religious’ contribution offered, which found particular expression in counselling and emotional care (kokoro no kea) services. The aftermath of the disaster saw the emergence of many new challenges and demands, primarily related to survivors’ struggles to overcome grief and revitalise disrupted communities, which could not always be satisfactorily addressed by secular institutions. These circumstances, thus, can be said to have instituted a new ‘space of need’ that religious actors were called upon to tackle.

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3 The programmes sponsored by the Department of Practical Religious Studies of the University of Tohoku, rooted in the cooperation between religious specialists, academics, healthcare professionals and social workers for the purpose of addressing the needs of survivors, offer a representative example. Among the most relevant initiatives was the Cafe de Monk (a mobile cafe managed by Buddhist monks, organising gatherings in community centres and temporary housing complexes to allow survivors to get together, chat, benefitting from the emotional and spiritual support offered by religious practitioners), and training programmes for ‘clinical religious professionals’ (rinshō shūkyōshi), i.e. religious specialists trained in grief care, counselling and suicide prevention techniques. See McLaughlin 2013a, 2013b, 2016.

4 Such as the rise in cases of people experiencing encounters with ghosts, discussed by Takahashi Hara (2016).
Besides opening up a new gap in social service provision for religious institutions and practitioners to fill, 3.11 had a significant impact on the environment in which they operated. Signs of a change of direction in the perception of religion and its presence in contemporary Japanese society also emerged as a result of this incident. In the ‘Ochakko salon’, religious practitioners were primarily devoted to providing emotional comfort and spiritual support to survivors residing in temporary housing complexes. Two aspects of the initiative were particularly noteworthy. First, disaster relief and recovery activities created the possibility for the social engagement of religious organisations in their institutional capacity. This ostensibly paved the way for collaborative initiatives with public and private actors alike, and even to challenge ingrained taboos over the cooperation between religion and the state. Second, religion turned from a potential liability to an asset that could be actively mobilised in the context of social activities, allowing practitioners to capitalise on their religious identities and expertise to offer a contribution to society.

As noted by Takahashi Hara (2016:194-95), the social circumstances emerging after 3.11 instituted new roles that religious actors, whether groups or individuals, could play in secular contexts, offering suitable channels to re-enter the public sphere. The case of the ‘Ochakko salon’ was representative of these trends. Not only was the initiative built on the active cooperation between religious organisations and public, quasi-public and private institutions, but it also saw the emergence of a social space where a ‘distinctively religious’ approach to care could develop. As such, it provided new opportunities to renegotiate the significance of religion within contemporary Japan. In particular, media and scholarly accounts of the services offered in the disaster area by religious specialists contributed to creating an alternative image of religion, articulated in modern terms as a form of post-grief therapy or ‘spiritual care’ (supirichuaru kea, McLaughlin 2016:120-21). Presented in these terms, post-3.11 mobilisation appeared likely to accomplish what social welfare activities on the local level could not, or at least not entirely. Namely, this was the articulation of a legitimate public role for religious actors suited to the present times and social circumstances. These developments were once again the product of a negotiation. They were the conscious efforts of religious activists, backed by sympathetic academics and other advocates. These considerations open
some interesting avenues of investigation, pointing to the potential role of social activities as a pathway to re-define the position of religious institutions within Japanese society. This is also particularly noteworthy when contextualised in a broader trend toward the renegotiation of the public presence of religion. Recent years have been marked by multiple attempts, made by both political and religious actors, to bring religious elements back into politics. These efforts have often sought to rebrand them in non-religious terms such as ‘culture’ (bunka) or ‘tradition’ (dentō) (Rots 2017; Tsukada 2015; Watanabe 2015). Similar to the strategies adopted by Köseikai members,5 these attempts take advantage of the blurredness of boundaries between religion and the ‘secular’, as well as the ambiguity surrounding the definition of ‘religion’, especially regarding religiously-connoted practices invested of historical, cultural or social significance. Based on the considerations advanced in Chapter 3, we may wonder whether such attempts could extend to the field of social welfare. Political actors may be interested in mobilising religious values and actors in an attempt to revitalise declining patterns of mutual assistance, or implement neoliberal approaches to care provision. Although these trends undoubtedly carry intriguing implications for the social significance of religion in Japan, there are still some aspects which demand careful consideration. While the signs of an ongoing change in the media representation and general perception of religion and religious institutions cannot be denied, it should be noted that post-3.11 trends did not imply a complete annihilation of the boundaries limiting their public presence.

Going back to Waseda University, as the forum went on and we dug deeper into the discussion over religion and social engagement, the rosy image of openness, mutual understanding and harmonious cooperation among religious groups, and between them and non-religious actors, gave way to more complex dynamics. The panellists appeared visibly uneasy when talking about their religious affiliation. At the very least they felt compelled to justify their position as religious specialists or practitioners in relation to their involvement in the ‘Ochakko’ initiative. In particular,

5 See Chapter 6.
some of their comments unveiled a marked awareness of the negative perception of religious organisations in contemporary Japan. When introducing Risshō Kōseikai, Murata half-jokingly added that ‘they were not a suspicious group’ (*ayashii mono dewanai*). His words were echoed in a comment made shortly afterwards by another panellist, who also clarified that all the groups involved in the initiative were ‘unsuspicious groups’ (*ayashikunai dantai*). The earnest participation of religious institutions in the disaster relief and recovery activities at Tohoku contributed to an improvement in their public image and status. As these statements suggest, however, these developments were still insufficient to eradicate the strong diffidence toward religion and religious groups deeply ingrained within Japanese society. The panellists’ remarks also illustrated how these sentiments continued to be articulated along a dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ groups. This binary was rooted in discrimination in legitimacy among different religious organisations and traditions. It was a dichotomy to which religious actors (to some extent) contributed in their attempts to set themselves apart from groups deemed dangerous and socially disruptive. Emerging initiatives of cooperation between religious institutions, public bodies and private associations, therefore, did not signal a rehabilitation of religious organisations overall. Rather, they were qualified as a special concession granted to those particular groups, which were able to build a reputation as safe and collaborative interlocutors. Further negotiations might be required to be admitted into these cooperative efforts, and more generally gain social recognition.

Another crucial aspect of the newly emerged media narrative on religious activism in Tohoku, as pointed out for example by McLaughlin (2016:127), was a marked emphasis on trans-sectarian initiatives and the ecumenical nature of aid activities. He read this as a conscious attempt to shift the focus from the efforts of religious ‘groups’ to those of religious ‘people’. The current tendency to promote religion beyond sectarian boundaries brings us back to another differentiation outlined by the thesis, that between ‘religion in general’, and religion as commitment to a specific institution or set of practices and beliefs. As seen in the case of Köseikai, that latter was the true target of suspicion, criticism and exclusion. Like the
strategies adopted by practitioners in their negotiation of religion in public spaces, recent efforts to rehabilitate religion were also tied to the removal of religious specificity. Instead, there has been a trend towards the promotion of diffuse, nondenominational forms of religiosity, cutting across sectarian affiliations. The same considerations apply to the renewed public role of religion as a form of spiritual therapy. Although *kokoro no kea* activities carried out by religious specialists tend to incorporate elements of ‘spiritual care’, these services were still set apart from ‘proper religious care’ (Takahashi 2016:177). They were positioned as supposedly neutral and not directly related to any particular faith or denomination. Even when more distinctively religious responses were required, they tended to fall within the domain of customary rites and beliefs, e.g. traditional practices of memorialisation of the dead. Therefore, the change that occurred in the public image and media representation of religion did not annihilate the fundamental constraints limiting its presence in Japan. The blurred divides between religion as internal and external, generalised or specific, legitimate or less legitimate, remain in place, and continue to shape the way in which it is perceived and portrayed. These considerations are significant in relation to the debate on public religion, most notably the tendency of recent scholarship to link religious mobilisation with a resurgence of religion in modern contexts. The character of the religion being negotiated must be addressed. As illustrated by the case of Kōseikai, and suggested by the developments following the disaster in Tohoku, the re-emergence of some forms of religiosity or religious actors in the public sphere does not correspond to a general re-evaluation of religion.

Nevertheless, the post-3.11 dynamics hint at the possibility for deeper and more substantial changes in the near future. In particular, the new image of religion as a form of emotional therapy or ‘spiritual care’ emerging in the context of relief and recovery initiatives is worthy of attention. It addresses one of the limits marking Kōseikai’s attempts to fill the gaps, namely the failure to articulate a distinctive social function for religion within contemporary Japanese society. This trend could thus encourage future shifts in the public perception of religion in Japan and in religious organisations’ interaction with the state, other social institutions and the
general public. While this possibility remains open to further investigation, what we can conclude, based on the considerations advanced in this thesis, is that such a process will be shaped by the multiple negotiations taking place both inside and outside religious organisations. This also applies to the image of religion as ‘spiritual care’. As this discourse emerged chiefly through top-down initiatives, promoted by a minority of highly influential and well-educated religious leaders and practitioners (McLaughlin 2016:108), it remains to be seen whether this narrative will take root within congregations, trickling from the centre to the grassroots base, and spread within Japanese society at large.

Besides the specific domain of kokoro no kea, however, social care provision more generally is likely to remain a relevant area of intervention for Japanese religious organisations, due to the many pressing issues and deficiencies emerging in the field. Those gaps will continue to represent a potential venue of negotiation that religious actors could use to pursue missionary and organisational goals, and maybe try to create new public roles for themselves. In terms of future avenues of investigation, two dimensions, which could not be comprehensively addressed in this thesis, are particularly worthy of attention. The first is religion’s interaction with the state and the second is its interaction with the market. As mentioned above, the ongoing trends toward the re-emergence of religion in politics have opened new fascinating avenues for further research on the public engagement of religious organisations. On the other hand, an in-depth investigation of the economic dimension of religiously inspired welfare, especially in the field of institutional care and social insurance schemes, could also provide some precious insights. It would further illuminate the ways in which religious institutions operate within the social world we inhabit, the hurdles that they face, and the strategies that they adopt to circumvent them and address religious, organisational and societal demands.


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In this appendix I shall provide the information sheet and consent forms used to recruit participants and obtain a signed record of consent at the beginning of their involvement in the research project. Both English and Japanese language versions are included. A list of interview topics is also provided below. As previously stated in the Methodology, I have conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews. Therefore, I didn’t rely on a set of established interview questions, but rather employed the list of topics here attached as a guideline.
Participant Information Sheet

The social welfare activities of Risshō Kōseikai

You are being invited to take part in a research study on the social welfare activities promoted by new religious movements in Japan. Before you decide, it is important that you understand the research aims and activities. Please, take time to read the following information carefully, discuss with others if you wish and do not hesitate to ask if anything is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to participate in the project. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

The research will be conducted by Aura Di Febo, PhD student at the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures of the University of Manchester. The research project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in UK and by the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester. For my fieldwork I obtained further funding from the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation. The project has been approved by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee on May 11, 2016.

The research project investigates the social welfare activities promoted by Japanese new religious movements, taking Risshō Kōseikai as a case-study. The research aims at deepening our understanding of the role of new religious movements, and more generally of religion, in contemporary Japanese society. I want to find out more about what kind of activities the movement promotes, how they relate to the broader framework of social security in Japan, how are these activities perceived by Kōseikai members. The research will address also associations related with Risshō Kōseikai and involved in social activities. In particular, I am interested in the civic movement ‘Movement for a Brighter Society’ (Akarui shakai-zukuri undō, in short Meisha).

The data collection will take place in the following locations: Risshō Kōseikai's headquarters and local congregations in Tokyo metropolitan area and the prefectures of Saitama and Chiba; Meisha branches; Social welfare facilities in which members carry out social activities. The project will involve members of Risshō Kōseikai and Meisha who engage in social welfare activities. I am hoping to spend time with you, and participate in the daily life of local congregations as much as possible. In addition, I would like to observe some of the social welfare and volunteering activities you are involved in, and to participate in them when possible.

Also, you will be asked to take part in an interview about the social activities you perform, with questions regarding the kind of activities, their recipients, and the relation between these activities and your religious affiliation. The interviews will take no more than two hours, and you will be allowed to take a break or to stop in in any moment. With your
permission, I would like to record the interviews. Any identifying information will be removed and you will remain anonymous. All information given will be confidential.

The information I collect from you will be used to write a PhD dissertation and other academic publications.

Participation in the research project is completely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. The safety of participants is my priority. Even if you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

If you have any questions or issues regarding the project, please do not hesitate to contact:

Aura Di Febo, PhD Candidate in Japanese Studies - aura.difebo@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, The University of Manchester
Manchester M13 9PL +44(0)161 275-3158

Or my host academic institution in Japan:

College of Intercultural Communication,
Rikkyo University
Ikebukuro Campus, 3-34-1 Nishi-Ikebukuro,Toshima-ku,
Tokyo Japan 171-8501

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you can contact a Research Governance and Integrity Manager, at the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning +44(0)1612752674 or +44(0)1612758093.
Consent Form

The social welfare activities of Risshō Kōseikai

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to my treatment.

3. I understand that my data will remain confidential.

4. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.

5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of participant    Date    Signature

Name of researcher    Date    Signature

This Project has been approved by the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics Committee on May 11, 2016.
あなたは日本の新宗教によって促進される社会福祉活動に関する調査に参加するように招待されています。決定する前に、調査の目的や活動を理解しておくと幸いです。次の情報を慎重に読んで、より多く情報をほしいか不明な点があれば、お気軽にご相談ください。または他人と話したりごゆっくり考えて、調査に参加したいか否か時間をかけて決定してください。ご時間をいただき、誠にありがとうございます。

この調査はマンチェスター大学で博士課程の学生でディフェボ・アウラを行われています。私の研究プロジェクトは、Arts and Humanities Research Council（AHRC）、マンチェスター大学のSchool of Arts, Languages and Cultures（SALC）によって提供されています。現地調査を行うために私はGreat Britain Sasakawa Foundationからさらに資金をいただきました。このプロジェクトは、2016年5月11日にマンチェスター大学の研究倫理委員会（Research Ethics Committee）によって承認されました。

この調査は、立正佼成会を事例として宗教団体に提供された社会福祉活動の特徴を検討することを目指しています。この研究は、現在日本における新宗教団体や宗教の公共役目を理解しようとしています。立正佼成会はどのような社会活動を提供しているのか、この活動が日本福祉制度にどんな関係があるのか、会員がそういう活動はどう思うのか、このような質問を答えるつもりです。この研究は立正佼成会の関連団体も対象しています。特に、「明るい社会づくり運動」（明社）という市民運動に興味があります。

データ収集は、次の場所で行われます：立正佼成会の本部、地域教会（東京都、埼玉県、千葉県）、立正佼成会の福祉施設、明るい社会づくり運動の拠点、会員さんが社会活動を行う福祉施設。インタビューは同じ場所で、または参加者の合意で決めた公共の場所で行われます。調査対象といえば、社会福祉活動を行う会員さんや明るい社会づくり運動のメンバーを調査に参加していただきたいと思います。まずは、会員さんと一緒に時間を過ごさせていただき、できるかぎり地域教会の日常生活に参加させていただきたいです。そして、会員さん
に提供された社会福祉活動・ボランティア活動を観察し、可能ならば参加させていただければ幸いです。

また、インタビューに参加するように招待するつもりです。このインタビューの主なテーマは社会活動の内容や対象、社会活動との信仰です。特定人数の会員が全員の個人的な許可を得てから、私はインタビューを録音したいと思います。調査に参加してくれる全員の名前と機密情報が削除され、あなたは匿名のままになります。与えられたすべての情報は機密になります。

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調査に参加するか否かを判断するのはあなた次第です。この情報シートの内容のもとで調査に参加したいと決定した場合は、以下の同意書に署名していただきます。ただし、同意しても、もし気が変わって参加したくなくなる場合には、理由を与える必要もなく、いつでも自由に撤回することが出来ます。

調査についてご質問や疑問があれば、遠慮なくご連絡してください。

Di Febo Aura (デイフェボ・アウラ)

日本学科 博士課程 - aura.difebo@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

それとも、私が在籍している大学も連絡するのは可能です。

イギリスの方は以下のようになります:

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School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

Oxford Road M13 9PL, Manchester, UK

(+44) 0161 275-3158

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立教大学

異文化コミュニケーション学部、池袋キャンパス

3-34-1 西新宿池袋、豊島区、東京日本 171-8501
調査の実施に関する正式な苦情を唱えたかったら、電話で+44（0）161 275 275 2674
又はメールで research.complaints@manchester で研究室のリサーチマネージャーを連絡
することができます。
あなたが参加するのに同意する場合、この同意書を記入し、サインしてください。

以下のポイントに○を付けてください。

1. 上記の参加情報シートを読み、情報を検討し、質問をする機会を持ち、調査の内容を承知しました。

2. 理由を与える必要もなく、いつでも撤回すること可能であるということを理解して調査に参加するように決定しました。

3. 私の個人情報は機密のままになると理解します。

4. インタビューが音声記録されることを理解しています。

5. 匿名の引用符の使用に同意します。

6. 上記の調査に参加することに同意します。

参加者の名前
日付
署名

研究者の名前
日付
署名

この調査は、2016年5月11日にマンチェスター大学の研究倫理委員会によって承認されています。
Interview Topics

Members of Risshō Kōseikai and Meisha

1. Background
   - Age, sex, occupation
   - Religious Background
     - E.g. When/how did you join Risshō Kōseikai?

2. Social welfare activities
   - Content of activities
   - Targets and participants
   - Frequency/time and setting (e.g. care facility, recipients’ house)
   - Similarities and differences between services offered by Risshō Kōseikai
     and those provided by other actors (e.g. home-helpers)

3. Motivations and meaning of social engagement
   - Motivations for engaging in social activities
   - Original motivation for getting involved in these activities
   - Previous experiences of social service and community volunteering
   - Meaning/interpretation
     - E.g. What do you think of social welfare activities?
     - What do these activities mean to you?
     - What makes these activities worthy?

4. Lived experience of Religious beliefs and practices
   - Religious practice and church obligations on everyday basis
   - Personal experiences of faith and understanding of Kōseikai teachings
     - E.g. Personal interpretation of key doctrinal concepts such as ‘bodhisattva
       practice’

5. Religious aspects of social care
   - Relation between social welfare activities and religious practice/church
     obligations
   - Connection between social welfare and faith, religious connotations of social
     care provision
   - Possible differences and/or contradiction between social activities and
     religious practice
6. **Interaction with local actors and surrounding community**
   - Cooperation with external groups or local institutions (e.g. social welfare councils)
   - Interaction with non-Kōseikai volunteers
   - Interaction with the public administration (e.g. city office)
   - Collaboration with/service at care facilities
   - Social contribution of Risshō Kōseikai, and role within the community

7. **Training and human resources development**
   - Experience of training in social welfare (Kōseikai-provided or external)
   - Content of training
   - Comparison between social welfare theory and Kōseikai doctrine

**Staff of Care Facilities and Social Welfare Councils**

1. **Social services**
   - Content and features of services promoted
   - Target recipients
   - Challenges in social service provision

2. **Social welfare provision in Japan**
   - Major social issues (e.g. demographic ageing) and possible responses
   - Recent developments and present circumstances of locally-based social welfare provision in Japan

3. **Voluntarism**
   - Role of volunteers/voluntary associations in social welfare provision
   - Religiously inspired activism
     - Public perception
     - Individual opinions
### Appendix II

**Glossary of Key Japanese Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boranteia</strong></td>
<td>Volunteering, voluntarism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bosatsu</strong></td>
<td>Bodhisattva way, bodhisattva practice. Expression commonly used to refer to religious practice in Risshō Kōseikai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Busshin ichin</strong></td>
<td>Non-duality of the material and the spiritual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Busshō</strong></td>
<td>Buddha-nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chiku</strong></td>
<td>Sub-unit of the shibu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fukushi suta</strong></td>
<td>Welfare staff. Personnel in charge of social welfare within local congregations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fukyō</strong></td>
<td>Proselytisation, doctrinal propagation (lit. ‘spreading the teachings’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fukyō rain</strong></td>
<td>Vertical line following the hierarchy of local leaders within the church, also referred to as ‘missionary leaders’. They specifically entrusted with the responsibility to provide spiritual guidance and secure the well-being of the members of the congregation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gokuyō</strong></td>
<td>Ritual service. In Kōseikai it primarily consists in chanting excerpts of the Lotus Sutra and practices of ancestor memorialisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hakarai</strong></td>
<td>Benevolence, good offices. The notion was linked to the idea that everything is arranged by the Buddha. Members saw any event, even misfortunes, as a conscious act of the Buddha, aimed at teaching people something about themselves or their actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hōben</strong></td>
<td>Skilful means, expedients used to convey Buddhist teachings to a range of diverse audiences and lead people to salvation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hōza</strong></td>
<td>Core activity of Kōseikai religious practice. It primarily consists in a small group discussion where practitioners are invited to share personal problems and experiences. The person leading the discussion (<em>hozashu</em>), commonly a missionary leader, helps them to re-interpret these in the light of the movement’s doctrine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jiri rita enman</strong></td>
<td>Perfect integration of self and other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jita ittai</strong></td>
<td>Non-duality between self and other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kyōkai</strong></td>
<td>Church, congregation. Basic unit of Kōseikai’s organisational structure, it is further divided in sub-groups on a geographical basis (in descending order shibu, chiku and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Term</strong></td>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyōkaichō</td>
<td>Head minister of a church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kudoku</td>
<td>Merit, beneficial effects of religious practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumi</td>
<td>Sub-unit of the chiku.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumichō</td>
<td>Missionary leader in charge of a kumi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimamori</td>
<td>‘Watching over’. Expression commonly used in social care provision to refer to the act of taking care of vulnerable members of local communities (e.g. lone elderly), most notably by performing regular home visits to check on their safety and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minsei’in</td>
<td>Voluntary district commissioner, government-appointed community volunteer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyaku</td>
<td>Role, task. It is used to indicate administrative positions, ritual service, church commitments and other kinds of religious obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seinenbu</td>
<td>Youth Division (within Risshō Kōseikai).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakai fukushi</td>
<td>Social welfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakai fukushi kyōgikai (Shakyō)</td>
<td>Social welfare councils, government-sponsored association promoting social welfare and community service on local scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakai fukushi senmon tantōsha</td>
<td>Social welfare specialists, responsible for social care activities within local churches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shibu</td>
<td>Sub-unit of the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shibuchō</td>
<td>Missionary leader in charge of a shibu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinshūkyō, shinkō shūkyō</td>
<td>Japanese New religions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shūkyō</td>
<td>Religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shūkyō dantai</td>
<td>Religious group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shunin</td>
<td>Missionary leader in charge of a chiku.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sōdan</td>
<td>Advice, Counselling. E.g. Social welfare counselling (fukushi sōdan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tedori</td>
<td>Lit. ‘taking the hands’. It refers to a form of missionary practice performed in Risshō Kōseikai. It is primarily carried out by missionary leaders, and involves providing guidance and spiritual support for members, commonly by visiting them at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yūai hōmon</td>
<td>‘Friendly visits’. It commonly refers to home visits to vulnerable members of the congregation or community. The expression is not exclusive to Risshō Kōseikai, but widely used among locally-based providers of social care such as neighbourly associations and voluntary organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>