

**TRANSFORMATION OF A JAPANESE NEW RELIGION
IN AMERICAN SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY
OF GEDATSU CHURCH OF AMERICA**

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This report presents the example of the Gedatsu Church of America in an effort to show the ways in which the contents of a Japanese new religion may change with the passage of time as well as the change in generations. The Gedatsu Church of America is the overseas wing of the Gedatsukai of Japan, one of the new religious groups based on Shugendô. The church was founded in 1929 by Seiken Okano, and although it is centered in the Tokyo area, it is also spreading its influence to local areas. Soon after the end of World War II, Okano died, and the management of church affairs passed into the hands of Takeo (Eizan) Kishida. For personal reasons, Kishida decided to move to America in 1950, and thereafter, the church was governed by the individual congregations.

This Gedatsukai emphasizes the lay status of its members, and stresses its own supra-sectarian nature. The church worships ancestor spirits and local ujigami (tutelary deities of the uji or "clan"), and emphasizes a lifestyle in which thanks are given for divine grace (hôn kansha). Its worship includes the esoteric "holy tea mass" (amacha kuyô), purification (o-kiyome), and "five Dharma exercise" (gohô shugyô). In Japan its membership includes 222,560 members (as of December 31, 1980), in 380 branches (as of January 1, 1982). Its overseas wing includes branches in Hawaii and Brazil in addition to the continental United States. The church's headquarters are in the Shinjuku ward of Tokyo, and a goreichi ("Land of Departed Spirits") is located in Kitamoto City, Saitama Prefecture.

I. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH

The first person to transmit the teachings of Gedatsukai to America was a first generation immigrant, Ine Kiyota. Kiyota became a believer on the occasion of her return to

Japan in 1937, 28 years after she had first gone to America. After spending six months in Japan, Kiyota returned to America, but relations between the two countries at that time were already bad, and as a result of the Japanese Navy's attack on Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, the two countries were at war.

With the opening of the war, Japanese immigrants in America were viewed as enemy aliens, and the 110,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants living on the West Coast were forcibly ordered into relocation camps; but, as a result of their refusal to take the loyalty oath to the United States, some were transferred to the Tule Lake, a uniquely isolated camp. The Japanese-Americans in the other camps professed their loyalty to the United States, and tried hard to adapt to their situation, but those detained in the Tule Lake camp turned their backs on American society, and remained determinedly bound to Japan. As a result, the wartime Tule Lake camp might be called a uniquely closed Japanese society within America.

Kiyota began her first genuine religious activity in the camp, and her life in the camp gave her sufficient time to proselytize, and so help release the immigrants from their dreary everyday life. While other religious groups were struggling to survive, Kiyota intensified her teaching efforts, and succeeded in gathering over 100 converts.

A majority of the people who came to Kiyota were seeking healing from some or another ailment. One of Gedatsukai's practices is called the gohô-shugyô (exercise of the five Dharmas), which believers claimed allows the practitioner to discern the causes of illness by means of communicating with the spirits of the dead, and they also practice a form of memorial service, or mass (kuyô) for the dead, in order to placate the spirit which is causing the illness. As a result,

Marvin Opler, a community analyst for the Tule Lake camp, called the Gedatsukai a "healing cult."¹

But the Gedatsukai life in the relocation camp had another aspect which should not be overlooked. That aspect was its emphasis on what might be called traditional Japanese religious practices, as evidenced by the fact that a small (Shinto) shrine was built. This small shrine was dedicated to an ujigami (uji or "clan" tutelary deity); but, at New Years, many Japanese people came to pay their respects at the shrine, without regard to whether they were members of Gedatsukai. In the Gedatsukai, a special significance is given to the ujigami, but virtually any Japanese will participate in the simple worship of the "clan" deity. The Gedatsukai recognized and encouraged the worship not only of the ujigami, but also of many other religious objects commonly venerated by the Japanese. Thus the relocation camp shrine--particularly in such a strongly Japanese-oriented camp as Tule Lake--evoked the kind of religious spirit that any Japanese could feel, and the quick growth of the Gedatsukai in the camp heightened the pro-Japanese feelings.

Following the war, Kiyota returned again to San Francisco, but her busy days did not allow her to be as active as she wanted.

In 1950 Takeo Kishida, the most prominent member of the Gedatsukai in Japan, came to the United States, and thus began the second stage of Gedatsukai proselytization in America. Kishida had been the central pillar of the Gedatsukai in Japan since the death of the church's founder Seiken Okano in 1948. However, the printing company which Kishida managed had gone bankrupt, and he decided to withdraw from all secular work in Japan and attempt proselytization in America. As a result of Kishida's influence, the ranks of believers rapidly grew. Just two months after arriving in California, he moved into a

church building on San Francisco's Cley Street, and obtained a permit to engage in religious activities as the Gedatsu Hōon Kansha-kai Amerika Shibu ("The American Branch of the Association for Giving Thanks in Return for the Grace of Deliverance"). The same year, he purchased 20 acres of land in Sacramento and called it the goreichi, built a church there, and also began proselytizing in Los Angeles. Kishida's first teaching activities focused on Japanese-Americans, and in response to their requests, he actively incorporated many objects of worship, not all of which were originally part of Gedatsukai doctrine. In this way, the Gedatsu Church of America, incorporating at that time a membership of 30 households with a total of 60 to 70 members, firmly began extending its strength (Table 1). In the course of events, Kishida had adopted a miscellany of rituals and practices, and with his publication of The Character and Doctrine of Gedatsu Kongō in 1959, he began to form these teachings into a systematic doctrine based on the Japanese mountain religion known as Shugendō.

Due to dissension within the Gedatsukai in Japan, Kishida returned to the top post of the church in 1964, and thereafter he spent six months of each year in Japan, and the other six months in America. This arrangement of living alternately in Japan and America was severely exhausting for Kishida, and it seems to have dampened his teaching activities in America, activities which until then had been on a steady track.²

II. PRESENT STATE OF THE CHURCH

At present, the Gedatsu Church of America is active primarily in California, with branches in Los Angeles and Sacramento in addition to the headquarters in San Francisco. The number of members is not entirely clear, but according to

Kishida it totals about 2000 in all of North America. Of these, the number that can be considered active are those listed in the "New Year Greeting" of the January issue of the church organ, Gedatsu Companion. In 1980 this number included 245 families for a total of 394 members, and in 1981 the numbers were 242 families, 380 members--totals which seem to be in approximate agreement with the number of members participating in church activities. When one further considers the number of "fervent" members supporting the church financially, to the degree evidenced by the list of contributors to a current building project, the number falls to 134. These individuals can then be surmised to be the nucleus of members actively participating in a broad range of church functions.

Of the three congregations in California, the Los Angeles church is the largest, having begun its activities in earnest in 1952 with the purchase of a church building. From an early date, the church proselytized English speakers, and in 1969 a second-generation Japanese-American, Gerry Shiroishi, was ordained as a minister. From the end of the 1960's into the 1970's the church in Los Angeles increased its membership, but it reached a peak of 100 families, and has shown little change in membership since then.

The point that sets off the Los Angeles church clearly from the other congregations is the language utilized in its activities. Whereas the San Francisco and Sacramento churches are primarily Japanese speaking, the Los Angeles church contrasts strongly by its use of English in its ceremonies. The two former churches have the character of small-scale Japanese communities, but the Los Angeles church, while still functioning in part as an ethnic church, is less restricted, and has the potential of reaching the English speaking generation of Japanese-Americans, and even non-Japanese. In

what follows I will focus my analysis on the Los Angeles church, not only because it is the largest congregation of the Gedatsu Church of America, but also because it has succeeded, to a certain degree, in adapting itself to American society.

1. Make-up of Members

With respect to the distribution of members by sex, the Gedatsukai in Japan has one man for every two women members. In contrast, the Los Angeles church has a much more even ratio of 75 males (43.9%) to 96 females (56.1%). This fact is a direct result of the practice of married couples joining the church together -- such couples in fact making up 71.6% of the entire membership. Couples make up a large proportion of members not only in terms of numbers on paper, but also with respect to those actually involved actively in the church, and this fact is not limited to the Los Angeles church, but seems to be a characteristic of the entire Gedatsu Church of America. When membership is analyzed in terms of generation and race, it can be seen that a large proportion are second generation Japanese, including those born in Japan and coming to America as children with their parents (Table 2). Next in proportion are the numbers of third generation Japanese-Americans; and together, these two groups account for nearly 80% of the membership. The number of first generation Japanese, who formerly made up the main stream of the church, is steadily decreasing, and at present only 7.3% (12 members) fall into this category.

Next, the membership can be analyzed in terms of language of daily use. Members who use Japanese as their primary language of communication can be considered to have a continuing background of Japanese culture, in spite of their living in America and otherwise adopting American ways of life. On the

other hand, native English speakers can be thought to have a thorough background in American culture, inspite of the fact that they continue to how an inclination to things Japanese by virtue of their participation in a Japanese religion. Table 3 shows a cross totaling of the membership on the basis of language of daily use, generation, and race. Although it is natural that first generation Japanese members speak Japanese, and non-Japanese members speak English, the results also show that there are some second and third generation Japanese-Americans who continue to speak Japanese. A comparison of the language of daily use, with the level of participation in church activities is shown in Table 4, and the comparison shows here that Japanese speakers participate actively in church functions, while there is a tendency toward non-participation among English speakers.

2. Reasons for Joining

Next, the Los Angeles church can be considered in the context of what members expect from the church, and what the church has provided to the members. In each issue of the monthly church organ, Gedatsu Companion, a section is included entitled "Appreciation and Gratitude," in which members can express their thanks for various blessings received. Both the American and Japanese Gedatsu churches emphasize "giving thanks in return for grace" (hōon kansha), and as a result, this monthly column is quite significant. The significance lies in the fact that the changes which can be seen in the contents of members' thanks indicate changes in their awareness. A year-by-year breakdown of the contents of their "thanks" is shown in Table 5.

The Gedatsu Companion was first published in April, 1955, and until 1961 little was listed in the paper. However, after

1961 several striking changes can be noted. One reason for these changes was the mere fact that membership was increasing; but, a more important reason was the fact that doctrinal texts were now being published. The first appearance of a clear doctrinal system had two purposes. On the side of church leaders, such a written doctrine helped to clarify and establish the direction their teaching activities should take, and on the side of members, printed doctrinal texts were a means of learning the reasons for the appearance of illness and trouble, and instructions of what to do in response to such misfortunes. It is for this reason that changes begin to appear around 1962, when it can be assumed that the contents of doctrinal texts first published in 1959 were starting to influence the membership.

New developments can be seen in three areas. First, more expressions of thanks are seen directed to objects of worship such as Jizô and Fudô. This seems to be because with the establishment of doctrine, the objects of thanks also became more fixed. Second, an increase can be seen in thanks for "mundane blessings" (genzeriyaku). More and more entries are seen in which a member gives thanks for the fulfillment of a wish for mundane blessings such as "purchase of a new car," or "raise in salary," and this incidence is especially striking in the case of English-speaking members.

Third, and most important, is the change seen in the "memorial service for ancestors" (senzo kuyô). From the notations listed in the "Appreciation and Gratitude" column, memorial services can be divided into three types. The first is a general "memorial service for ancestors." The second, services for specific individuals, such as the "funeral mass for the repose of John Doe" (bodai kuyô) or memorial on the "annual date of death of Jane Doe" (meinichi). The third type is the nenki kuyô, memorial services observed according to

Buddhist practice on the date of death in specific years (1st, 3rd, 7th, 13th, etc.) following an individual's death. Of these three types, the general "memorial service for ancestors" saw a dramatic increase in the years following 1962, while the other two types of service saw their fortunes wax and wane from year to year, with no definitive change one way or the other. The senzo kuyô is an extremely important part of Japanese religiosity, and in order to grasp in more detail the changes which occurred in the Gedatsukai practice of this memorial service, I have divided the church membership into four groups in accordance with their expressions regarding the memorial service, as is evidenced by the "Appreciation and Gratitude" column.

A: Members who observed the first, 13th, or other specific years of the nenki kuyô.

B: Members who regularly observed the senzo kuyô, or those who observed a generalized "memorial service for all the ancestors of the family," or observed the "funeral mass for the repose of John Doe" (bodai kuyô).

C: Members who irregularly observed the senzo kuyô, that is, they did not observe the nenki kuyô or the bodai kuyô.

D: Members who did not observe any memorial service, but gave thanks for the fulfillment of some wish for mundane blessings.

First of all it should be noted that in the Gedatsu Church of America, unlike its Japanese counterpart, the church participates not only in members' funerals, but in an entire range of other social-ceremonial occasions as well. Thus although the nenki kuyô in Japan would normally be held at a Buddhist temple, in America it is held by the Gedatsu church. It should also be noted that, while entirely natural, the first members to request this kind of memorial service were

first generation immigrants born in the Meiji period (ca. 1868-1912). It is further not at all surprising that by the first generation members' observance of the nenki kuyô, their attitudes toward ancestors and spirits were brought into, and influenced the church.

Next, with regard to the "memorial service for ancestors," the "ancestors" spoken of here are given a special significance within the Gedatsu Church of America. In short, the ancestor refers to the departed spirit of the ancestor, but it is not the spirit that looks after the fortunes of its descendants, as is common in Japan, but an ancestor which is suffering, and in search of release, and thus as a result brings misfortune to its descendants. The method used to "purify" (jôka) the spirit, and release the descendant from his or her misfortune (usually illness), is called the "memorial service for ancestors."

The "memorial service for all the ancestors of the family" (B above), is close in meaning to a combination of A (nenki kuyô) and C (the senzo kuyô directed to the malevolent spirit of an ancestor), but I have chosen here to treat them separately.

Table 6 is an expression of the four groups A, B, C, and D, in relation to generation and race. Group B was the most numerous, with 27 entries (34.6%), followed by group A, and groups C and D showing equal numbers after group A. It is of course natural that first generation members are the most numerous practitioners of the nenki kuyô, while third generation or non-Japanese members do not perform it at all; but the problem, both in terms of numbers and activity, is the group of second generation members, who make up the nucleus of the church.

The breakdown of these groups in terms of language of daily use is shown in Table 7. If one assumes that the nenki kuyô

is the memorial service that exhibits most strongly an inclination toward Japanese culture, it appears that this inclination is expressed most clearly by the Japanese speakers in these two groups. The nenki kuyô is performed by some English speakers in the two groups as well, but the length of time (the nenki, or cycle of mourning years) in which it is performed appears extremely short. And as a result, it is likely that these nenki kuyô are a kind of simple memorial³ kuyô largely detached from their cyclic significance, and thus similar in nature to the numerous bodai kuyô (class B). From these facts, it seems clear that in contrast to the nenki kuyô, which is performed by one part of the membership -- in particular those who speak Japanese -- the senzo kuyô, with its unique significance for the church, is performed widely by members, without regard to generation, race, or language of daily use.

It must be remembered that there are a considerable number of members who perform no memorial services at all for ancestors. These members obviously look to the church for something unrelated to ancestor worship, and that "something," appears to be "mundane blessings." Limited to an analysis of the contents of the "Appreciation and Gratitude" columns, this tendency is to be especially marked among English speakers.

III. WEAKENING OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RELIGION

When considering the transformation of the Gedatsu Church of America, the first substantial change one notices is the lack of traditional Japanese customs. The Japanese customs which first generation immigrants held in common naturally grew weaker with the change in generation and the appropriation of English as the native language. The annual memorial service

for the dead (nenki kuyô), for example, had as its background the Japanese culture held in common by church members; but with the transformation of the cultural base in America, the memorial service gradually stopped being observed. In the period when the Gedatsu Church of America first began proselytizing, however, it was a religion whose success was proportional to its background ties to Japanese culture.

Especially noteworthy among the various objects of worship in the G.C.A. is the ujigami. I noted earlier that an ujigami shrine was constructed in the Tule Lake relocation camp, but soon after the war, in 1951, the church enshrined one of the deities of the Ise Grand Shrine, Toyouke-no-Okami. It is said that in North America, shrines existed before the war, but in contrast to Hawaii, they were not revived after the war. In order to rebuild and revive the shrines, it was necessary to renew the activities on the part of the priests who were there before the war, and also work on the part of the ujiko, or shrine parishoners.⁴ However, even without this kind of self conscious activity, there is a simple kind of faith among Japanese people according to which they will continue to make pilgrimages to a shrine as long as a shrine exists. Eizan Kishida, by building a shrine, appealed to this simple faith -- the latent religious spirit held by virtually all first generation Japanese born in the Meiji period.

The members of the church in Kishida's time were almost all first generation Japanese, and so when talking with them, very often details about their home towns and villages in Japan are revealed:

"Do you send offerings to the ujigami each year?"

"No. After leaving Japan, we've been busy with our lives here, raising our children, and so I've never even thought about that kind of thing."

This kind of answer comes from almost all informants.

"When you left Japan, did you visit the ujigami and make any requests?"

"I don't know whether the gods listen or not, but I guess I asked to be able to live my life safely."

This kind of answer, too, was typical of the majority of informants. When a child is born in Japan, he or she is taken to the ujigami to make a report of the birth. Going to the ujigami on the festival of "7,5,3", too, is a custom long present in Japan, but when you speak to people about the idea of being protected by the deity even if you don't know about the deity, they almost all respond as though that's the first time they heard of that idea, which points out that no matter how well they may know of their home town or village, they have completely forgotten about their ujigami.⁵

And so Kishida decided to bring an ujigami to America. Since the main deities worshipped differ according to the place of birth, Kishida decided on enshrining the deity of the outer shrine of Ise, since the Ise Grand Shrine was the ujigami for all the deities of Japan. After this, by means of the practice of the five Dharmas, he received an inspiration from the deity, and together with Toyouke-no-Okami who presided over the harvest of the five grains, he enshrined the father of America, George Washington, and the spirit of the ancestor of the indigenous Americans, the Indians.⁶ In San Francisco, which had no shrines at that time, the deity Toyouke-no-Okami which the G.C.A. worshipped seems to have drawn a great deal of popularity.⁷ At New Years, the shrine was opened to the public, and it is said that the place was full of pilgrims.⁸ Such emphasis on traditional culture can be noted in other areas as well. In the autumn of 1950, when Kishida went to America, the first taisai, or "great festival" was held in the Sacramento goreichi. From that time on, a taisai has been held twice a year, once each in spring and

autumn -- spring being the time of regeneration of all life, while fall of course being the time of harvest. In the goreichi there was a shrine called Tenjin Chigi-sha, in front of which a service was performed, and in the meeting hall, dedicatory performances were held. Among the performances presented were of course items of American origin; but also, there were a number of things which would have been reminiscent of Japan to first generation immigrants. There were Chinese poetry recitals, Japanese folk dances, masu sukui (dipping for small fish with tiny paper nets, a festival activity for children in Japan), and a comedy pantomime -- with the participants enjoying themselves as though at a year end festival in Japan.⁹ The Sacramento goreichi was in a flat pasture, and apparently the afforestation was not very advanced at that time, so there was no sacred grove like those common to Shinto shrines in Japan; but even so, the first generation Japanese immigrants who snacked on Japanese foods while watching the various performances must have been reminded of the festivals at the village tutelary shrines and countryside woods in their home villages in Japan.

Within this kind of atmosphere, the latent religious spirit which the members held as Japanese took root, and from that point, the New Years festival, the higan observances (Buddhist festivals of the equinox), bon services (the autumn festival celebrating the return of dead spirits), and other Japanese annual festivals and events began to be held. Not only events, but the objects of worship too, steadily increased. Many objects of devotion were those commonly encountered in Japan and which, while not central to the church itself, might be worshipped privately by Gedatsu members in Japan. In America, however, many of these objects of devotion, including the Six Jizô, Fudô, Benzaiten, water deity, and Batô-Kannon,

were dedicated by members, and came to have a much more important role than in the Japanese church.

Beginning in May of 1956, Jizô kô (confraternities) were started in San Francisco, and other areas. Jizô kô were not formally organized by the church, but were irregular gatherings of members in response to their own wishes. It was said that these Jizô kô, with Kiyota at their center, "caused flowers to bloom in tales of faith,"¹⁰ and "many people received marvelous blessings."¹¹ Jizô kô had the character of church sponsored family gatherings, but they didn't begin with the name "family gatherings," but the designation kô, and in that fact alone one can catch a glimpse of the religious atmosphere of the times.

In a decade or so from 1950, when Kishida formally began proselytizing, until doctrine was formalized and had penetrated the community a decade or so later, the G.C.A. hungrily imbibed the religious spirit held by the first generation immigrants, and began a process of active proselytizing that was in its turn to stimulate religious faith. This was made possible largely because the majority of the members were first generation Japanese born in the Meiji period, and because the G.C.A. was a close-knit community of people of Japanese ancestry. Unlike Japanese-Americans today, they were not "Japanese" merely because they had blood lines running back to Japan, but because they were people who held the same cultural tradition.¹²

However, the community of Japanese-Americans -- even though possessing the same cultural traditions and orientation -- could not avoid the weakening of the cultural base that accompanied the change in generations and adoption of English as the native language. As a result, the tie between the community and Japan grew steadily weaker. There was a distinct difference in levels of faith between, on the one

hand, the simple faith of the first generation Japanese seen in their worship of the ujigami, observance of New Years pilgrimage, spring and autumn festivals, etc., and on the other, the faith demanded by the G.C.A., based as it was on the personal acceptance of the doctrines of the church. As a result, as the doctrines of the church became established and interpenetrated the membership, the teachings and rituals inculcated by the church began to change. It must be remembered that the construction of the doctrines itself was something that demanded an explanation. The second generation, even if they could speak Japanese, did not automatically carry on the same cultural tradition as the first generation. Even the Tenjin Chigi Shrine had previously never been given any explicit doctrinal explanation; yet it had served none the less as the symbol of community unity, since it was the meeting place for the taisai held by the first generation members. But now it was given a new explanation by the church:

The Great Universe is full of the power of life, without beginning and without end, without birth and without death. That life power gives life to all living beings, and when it is worshipped as deity, that power of life is Tenjin Chigi. We come to know the truth that we are given continued life by that power of life of the Great Universe, and the sincerity which gives unconditional, absolute thanks to the root of that life, this is the meaning of worshipping Tenjin Chigi. In our daily worship, we offer our sincerity morning and evening to Tenjin Chigi, and this worship works in us the spirit of absolute thanks. Without our knowing it, that spirit develops the divine nature given to mankind. This divine nature brings out all our individual natures, and becomes the power for achieving true happiness.

Another change is evidenced by the fact that the performances dedicated at the taisai -- performances which had evoked the nostalgia of first generation members -- ceased to be performed.

Each branch of the church in North America had an ujigami shrine, as a branch shrine of the Guardian Deity of America which was enshrined by the San Francisco church. This Guardian Deity of America was Toyouke-no-Okami, a deity said to "protect all the people born in this country, and enable them to live peaceful and prosperous lives."¹⁴ Likewise, the ujigami worshipped by each branch was to protect all the people in its locality, and to promote territorial cohesion. However, as is evidenced by the example of the Los Angeles church, in America the Japanese-American members live quite dispersed from each other, and the neighbors of the church itself are blacks and hispanics. Thus it isn't considered desirable to have territorial affinities, and it is hard to think that the ujigami plays the role of binding together the members of the Los Angeles church at all. The ujigami is enshrined in the back garden of the church, and can't be seen at all from the outside. When the members come to the church, they first proceed to the divinity enshrined inside, and pour holy tea over the holy tea memorial tower. They then go into the back garden, and worship in order from left to right the ujigami, Batô-Kannon, and Jizô. To the ujigami they give their thanks for daily protection, to the Kannon thanks for safety in travel, and to Jizô they address prayers for some personal request, or thanks for some prayer answered. In short, the ujigami is simply one of three objects of worship enshrined in the back garden.

This kind of change is not limited to the Tenjin Chigi and ujigami. The Six Jizô, in the form of the "Six Jizô Bazaar," has become a fund raising activity open to the public, and the Jizô kô, which formerly was a meeting that alternated between the homes of members, is now a regular activity sponsored by the church, although recently the number of members that gather has fallen off and it seems to have largely lost its

significance. The large number of deities and Buddhas which were enshrined originally at the request of members, and which acted as spurs to their faith, have now also become the object of doubt. "Why," it is asked, "is it necessary to have so many objects of worship?"

This religion formerly appealed to the identity of Japanese-Americans and functioned to strengthen their ties.

This function is largely not sought any more, and the reason seems simply to be that the Japanese customs and traditions which had supported the religion have been lost. As a result, the ties binding together the Japanese-American community have been weakened, and the Gedatsu Church of America has come to play a role different from that which it formerly played. It is with regard to this changing function that the role of ancestor worship is discussed in the following section.

IV. TRANSFORMATION OF THE "ANCESTOR"

According to Kunio Yanagita, an ancestor "is usually thought to be a single person, the very first person of a family lineage (ie), and even if not precisely that, then at least a person who lived and was active at a very ancient time." Again, "the ancestor is the spirit of someone who should be venerated, and someone who will not be venerated if not within his own family, namely, the ancestor is something that goes together with each individual family lineage (ie)."¹⁵ Regardless of whether the ancestor is the direct founder of an ie, the "ancestor" was always considered to be tied together to the concept of ie. The ie in this case did not refer only to the dwelling, the house, or merely to the individual nuclear family, but was "what might be called a direct lineage body tracing unbroken descent from the past by means of the concept of a self-identity passing through each generation,

irrespective of changes in family members wrought by such things as birth, death, and marriage."¹⁶ Ancestor worship is based on this concept of the ie, and Chôshu Takeda notes the characteristics of this ancestor worship in the following terms:

The existence of ancestors who have the prosperity and continuity of the ie at heart, from the standpoint of the successive generations of families, is as self-evident as the existence of the ie itself, and the norm of ie continuity is expressed intensively in the refusal to let the worship of the ancestor die out. From the standpoint of the descendants, the ancestor's existence itself is the self-evident, supreme principle that gives a normative basis to the perpetuity of the ie, and to this end, neither the memory of the name and personality of the ancestor, nor the social status of the ancestor during his lifetime, are indispensable conditions. The necessary and sufficient characteristics for an ancestor were to be an object of reverence who watched over the prosperity of continuing generations.¹⁷

Following the war, when proselytization had just begun, funerals and other religious services were held by the Gedatsu Church of America at the request of first generation immigrants. At that time it was the general custom in America to follow the Japanese practice of holding funerals and memorial services in accordance with the customs of an individual Buddhist sect. And so when funerals were held by the G.C.A., they were held according to the practices of the Shingon sect. At the request of the surviving family, a posthumous Buddhist name would be given the deceased, and a memorial tablet would be issued to the family. This seems to have been observed particularly often among first generation families.¹⁸ Members would enshrine the memorial tablet in their family Buddhist altar (or if they had no altar, in their bedroom, or some other place), but they did not enshrine the tablets in the altar of the church. At the time of bon, the family could visit the church, and the minister would read the name of the deceased and perform a memorial service, and the

same could be done on the occasion of the annual memorial of the date of death.

However, with the change in generation and the adoption of English, the customs which had been held by the first generation changed, as did the world view that had formed a background to those customs. In contrast to the first generation members who had attended temple and church, hardly any of the second and third generation members go to the temple anymore.¹⁹ From their standpoint, there is no particular reason to necessitate a temple in addition to the Gedatsu church. If they are members of the church, they can have the minister sign their marriage certificate; in case of death the funeral and burial are taken care of by the church, in case of personal trouble, the minister is available for counseling. And to them, the memorial service for the date of death seems strange. If it is a matter of a memorial service for an individual following death, they can hold a special service for them, or pray for them at the time of the monthly holy tea service; but why does a memorial service have to be held during some particular year?

In response to this kind of questioning, the church gets by without any clear cut answer, mainly because funerals and memorial services for the dead were not originally part of the function of the church. For the church, it is sufficient to emphasize the importance of memorial services for ancestors, and thus there is no need to be strict on details about the annual memorial service on the date of death. The same can be said with respect to Buddhist altars and memorial tablets, since these items were not implements originally used by the church. As long as there is no specific request from members, the church gives no particular instructions to revere them.

The change in cultural traditions which were held by the first generation, such as memorial services for ancestors, was

brought about not only by the change in generations and the interpenetration of American culture which accompanied adoption of the English language. The direction of proselytization of the church also played a role; but more fundamentally, it was the individualistic way of life in American society, and the relation of religion and the individual. In the case of the Los Angeles church, the basis of ancestor worship is not the lineage family (ie), but the nuclear family, and in the extreme, the individual. Ancestor veneration is not passed down successively from parent to child. And even in the event it is passed down, it is not a matter of passing on a customary, habitual practice, but a conscious one. In a society where the unit of religion is the nuclear family or the individual, it is very difficult to accept a religion of the Japanese type that makes the lineage family the unit of religious practice.

In 1970, a Gedatsu Memorial was erected in the Sacramento goreichi, and from the next year, the spirit tablets of Gedatsu members were enshrined together there. These "spirit tablets" are a kind of memorial tablet presented by the church, upon which the name and dates of birth and death of immediate relatives of church members are written. These spirit tablets came into use for the following reason:

According to what I've heard, when children move away on account of their occupation, they naturally cease to have much relation with the family. In a society that manages cemeteries, a grave is maintained for a certain contracted period, but if the time goes beyond that period, the grave is done away with. Only people converted to Gedatsu, or their relatives, reverse the spirits of the deceased. At the time of the two taisai in Spring and Autumn, a great memorial service is held, so that for the spirits who are enshrined in the memorial, even if they have no children, or if their children have moved far away, on each taisai, Gedatsu members will gather here and perform a memorial service,

so they will never have to be a spirit without someone to remember them.²⁰

As Yanagita said, an ancestor is a spirit which, if not enshrined by one's own family, will not be enshrined by any other. But in American society, ancestors are not particularly revered. It is the normal state of affairs to move numerous times in search of employment. As a result, the sense of being bound to a particular locality is weak, and just because one is born in a certain place, once one leaves it doesn't mean at all that one will someday return. Add to that the fact that religion is to the last a personal matter, and if, for example, the children become Christians, naturally no more memorial services will be held. It is here that the difference in attitude toward ancestors between Americans and Japanese can be seen. There is a substantial gap between the first generation, who, in the same way that they enshrined their ancestors, expect their children to enshrine them, and the second and third generations, who have no such custom, since, although outwardly Japanese, they were born and raised in American society. It is because of this fact that the church has come to perform the memorial service in place of the children and descendants. At present, some church members still observe the annual date of death and bon services, but generally, the memorial service for ancestors, and its accompanying basis of worship in the ie, is rapidly disappearing from the practice of Japanese-Americans.

In contrast, the memorial services for ancestors held by the G.C.A., are widely accepted, inspite of the difference in generation and language. The ancestor according to the Gedatsu Church of America is not a spirit which protects its descendants, but a spirit that desires its own peaceful spiritual existence, and thus desires memorial services from its descendants. Kishida explains this by the following:

Of the spirits of people who left this life with animosities or grievances which they could not dispel while living, almost all become wandering ghosts. And on occasion individuals of families which the spirit relied on, or people who had a close relation with the spirit, are approached by the spirit in hopes of gaining release from its torments. But in a time like that, the person relied on becomes sick. But this does not mean at all that the ancestor spirit is deliberately causing the descendants or other related person to suffer. This is just like the person who becomes fatigued while swimming and grabs for help to the nearest person, no matter whom he or she may be. In the same way, the spirit is relying for help ^{on} the nearest descendant or person with a deep affinity.

In order to point out what this means in practice, let me present a brief example:

In the H family, a married couple both born in Hawaii, was a single son, aged seven, who suffered from asthma. He had received treatment from doctors all over Hawaii, but got no better. The couple did everything they could for their beloved son, using the money they earned each month to buy medicines, but the son did not recover. The doctors finally threw up their hands and said, "If you take him to America (the continent), he might recover." Since they were told this, they moved to Los Angeles, California, but their son's asthma got no better than before. However, by chance they were directed to the Los Angeles branch of the Gedatsu church. Regarding the cause of the illness, I discovered that in Mr. H's body were many people who had died in the midst of extreme suffering, and the suffering of these spirits had been revealed as the asthma of his son. When I inquired (by means of the practice of gohô), sure enough this was the and sisters, eight people in all, had been buried alive in a landslide in Japan. Since I knew that in this case it was the primary cause of the asthma, I quickly arranged for a special memorial service for the spirits so that they might achieve Buddhahood. Accordingly, Mr. and Mrs. H devoutly performed the memorial services for the spirits, and in no time the asthma was healed as, ²² though it had merely been a matter of forgetting it.

According to Japanese views of ancestors, spirits which are purified by memorial services become ancestral spirits able to protect their descendants. In the Gedatsu Church of America, spirits which are pacified by means of memorial services do

not protect their descendants; rather, ancestral spirits trouble their descendants because they want release from their own suffering. They are thus spirits that reveal themselves to their descendants by causing problems.

The deity that protects descendants is said to be the tutelary deity, or the guardian spirit. Tutelary deities are gods related to one's religious faith since the time of ancestors, and they become the guardians of the family. But in this case, the family refers precisely to the house, or the immediate nuclear family, not the "lineage family" (ie) mentioned earlier. The ancestors appealed to protect descendants and guard the fortunes of the ie, here become spirits that bring troubles to their descendants, and the role of protector is transferred to various gods and Buddhas. Perhaps partly for that reason, the concept of the ie as "a direct lineage body tracing unbroken descent from the past by means of the concept of a self-identity passing through each generation..."²³ was allowed to drop away. While the annual memorial service for the date of death is virtually limited to speakers of Japanese, by contrast the "memorial service for ancestors" and the enshrining of protective deities, are practiced irrespective of generation or language. That is because the latter do not incorporate the concept of the ie, and thus are tied together closely with the sufferings of individual members. The other deity, the "guardian spirit," is a designation unique to the Gedatsu church. The character for "deity" (kami) is appended to it, but this is not the kami normally thought of. It is "that with which one is equipped from birth, namely one's life when it has been divided into spirit, and it is that which expresses one's own character." This, too, is unrelated to ancestors and the ie, and it is merely emphasized as the fulfillment of an individual's character in his everyday life.

NOTES

1. Marvin K. Opler, "Two Japanese Religious Sects," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 6, 1950.
2. Kishida's childhood, conversion, and details relating to his move to America are recounted in his autobiographical study Hatô wo koete (Asunaro-sha, 1976).
3. The meaning of "memorial" in this case is to keep in mind or cherish the memory of the spirit of a person to whom one has been close.
4. Nobutaka Inoue, "Ibunka-nai jôkyô to jinja Shinto," in Keiichi Yanagawa and Kiyomi Morioka, eds., Hawaii nikkeijin shakai to Nihon shûkyô -- Hawaii Nikkeijin shûkyô chôsa hôkokusho, (Tokyo Daigaku Shûkyôgaku Kenkyûshitsu, 1981).
5. Hatô wo koete, pp. 123-4.
6. In 1965, after the first International Conference on the Study of Shinto was held in Claremont, a demonstration was given by a Shinto priest of Shinto ceremony. The gods entreated on that occasion were "George Washington no Mikoto," and "Blaisedale no Mikoto," (the founder of the Claremont Institute of Religious Studies). See Ichirô Hori, Sei to zoku no kattô, (Heibonsha, 1975), pp. 166-7.
7. Kiyota correspondence (October 17, 1981).
8. Gedatsu Companion, (October, 1956).
9. Ibid, (May, 1955).
10. Ibid, (May, 1965).
11. Ibid, (December, 1956).
12. A few examples may help illustrate the character of the Japanese-American community at that time, and the orientation of first generation members toward Japan. In the five years between 1955 and 1960, a substantial number of first generation Japanese visited their Japanese homelands. Their reasons for visiting Japan were varied, but among those who

returned were some women who were returning the remains of their dead husbands to Japan, in response to the husbands' last requests (see Gedatsu Companion, April, 1958). In September of 1959, when a large typhoon in Ise Bay caused much damage in Nagoya and other areas, the church decided to take up a collection for aid to victims of the typhoon, and was able to gather nearly 700 dollars. Movement toward preservation of members' identities as Japanese can be seen as well in activities within the church. A comparison of the activities of church youth then and now shows a clear difference. The youth groups in Sacramento and San Francisco in those days were quite active, using church gatherings not only as opportunities for receiving church instruction, but as occasions for social interaction as well. The nucleus of the San Francisco youth division was a group of about 20 young men, who organized Christmas parties, picnics, and dance parties in which many young people could participate, including those who normally did not attend church. Young men and women had a chance to meet at these activities, and in the eight years from 1955 on, about 30 couples were married as a result. First generation Japanese wanted their children to marry within the Japanese-American community, and the majority of second-generation members who remained in the church were of this class of young people who married others of Japanese ancestry. As a result, one is struck by the unexpectedly large number of family relations within the church.

13. The explanation given before the Tenjin Chigi shrine in the Sacramento goreichi.

14. Eizan Kishida, The Character and Doctrine of Gedatsu Kongô, (Gedatsu Church of America, 1969).

15. Kunio Yanagita, "Senzo no hanashi," Shinpen Yanagita Kunio shû, volume 5, (Chikuma Shobô, 1978), p. 207.

16. Chôshû Takeda, Nihonjin no ie to shûkyô, (Hyôronsha, 1976), p. 15.
17. Ibid, pp. 16-17.
18. Interview with Tsunezô Yamadera, (former minister of the Los Angeles church, presently head of the Ichikawa branch), November 9, 1981.
19. Ibid.
20. Gedatsu Companion, (November, 1971).
21. Eizan Kishida, Jinsei gedatsu issho byô gen'in kaimei no maki, (Gedatsukai, 1963), p. 35.
22. Ibid, pp. 36-7. Other "spirit causes" include the "unrelated spirits" (those for which proper funeral services have not been performed) of miscarried fetuses, spirits related to a specific locality, unrelated spirits of the Dharma realm (hôkai), etc. Of these, spirits which can be seen as particularly American are the spirits of Indians who formerly lived in a particular locality. Spirits of the native Indians are considered to be wandering spirits, and thus cause illnesses such as hay fever when their lands are brought under cultivation. Aside from the Indians, the spirits of both white and black men who died unmourned in the progress of pioneer settlement, are also believed to become the cause of illnesses. (See *ibid*, pp. 61-2).
23. Chôshû Takeda, *op.cit.*, p.16.

Table 1. Number of Church Members

	San Francisco Area		Sacramento Area	
	San Francisco	San Jose	Sacramento	Stockton
1969	47	18	59	23
1970	47	18	59	22
1971	45	16	56	22
1972	56	16	60	22
1973	47	16	64	22
1974	48	16	60	21
1975	37	21	63	3
1976	39	27	62	2
1977	42	27	60	2
1980	42	29	75	2
1981	43	29	72	2

	Los Angeles Area				Total
	Los Angels	Pasadena	Montley	Hawaii	
1969	144	17		6	314
1970	178	29	2	24	399
1971	162	23		31	355
1972	166	21		24	365
1973	164	22		10	345
1974	164	21		11	341
1975		20	6	35	(185) *
1976	198	20	6	38	392
1977	198	20		40	389
1980	183	12	9	42	394
1981	186	12	9	27	380

* Data of Los Angels Branch is missing

Table 2. Generation and Race

issei	12 (7.3)
nisei	46 (27.9)
kibei nisei	62 (37.6)
sansei	36 (21.8)
white	2 (1.2)
black	2 (1.2)
Mexican	5 (3.0)
Total	165(100.0)

Table 3. Generation, Race and Language

	Japanese	English	Bylingal
issei	12		
nisei	8	26	7
kibei nisei	47	7	7
sansei	3	31	2
white		2	
black		2	
Mexican		5	
Total	70	73	16

Table 4. Language and Commitment to church

	very active	active	not so active
Japanese	41	18	11
English	19	28	26
Bylingual	9	5	2
Total	69	51	39

Table 5. Change of member's intention in Gedatsu Companion (Los Angels)

	Kuyō		
	Nenki kuyō	Bodai kuyō	Senzo kuyō
1956		2	
1957	1	4	1
1958	5		
1959	1	4	1
1960	2	9	1
1961	13	14	2
1962	12	20	84
1964	2	44	79
1970	2	14	145
1972	2	15	129
1974	2	18	145
1975	22	70	73
1976	10	58	45
1977	21	46	72
1978	19	32	47
1980	16	31	48

Appreciation for---							
	New car or house	Travel	Raise in wages	child- birth	Entrance or graduation	Enlistment of or discharge	Marriage
1956		1			2	1	1
1957	4	1	1		1	1	5
1958	2	3	2			1	4
1959	3	2	2	1	1	5	5
1960	1	5	1	8	3	2	12
1961		2	1	5	2		6
1962	9	9		2	1		9
1964	8	3	2	8		1	8
1970	4	31	14	11	15		5
1972	20	17	12	8	24	5	11
1974	13	24	13	10	10	7	6
1975	25	33	35	16	15		14
1976	13	19	33	7	21		7
1977	6	39	34	12	13		9
1978	14	26	48	6	16		2
1980	5	11	25	6	8		5

Dissolving of the request made to---								
	Jizō	Fudō	Batō	Benzaiten	Ujigami	Gardian Angel	Gedatsu Kongo	Church
1956							1	2
1957					1			4
1958							5	3
1959							1	4
1960							3	2
1961				1		14	1	2
1962	2		1			15	10	4
1964	3	2	2	2	3	15	40	3
1970	8	6	8	6	4	23	19	13
1972	1	2			2	20	8	4
1974	24	7	5	1	4	22	13	19
1975	13	8	3	4	4	24	54	43
1976	32	12	2	1	6	25	68	16
1977	18	17	5	1	2	29	49	27
1978	11	25	5		1	1	40	37
1980	2	3		2	1	23	35	48

Table 6. Generation and Kuyō, This worldly profit

	a	b	c	d
	Nenki Kuyō	Bodai Kuyō	Senzo Kuyō	This worldly profit
issei	3	3		
nissei	12	10	7	8
kibei nisei	7	2	7	4
sansei	1	1	2	1
white		1	1	
Black			2	
total	23	17	14	14

Table 7. Nisei, Kibei Nisei and kuyō, This worldly profit

		a	b	c	d
		Nenki Kuyō	Bodai Kuyō	Senzo Kuyō	This worldly profit
nisei	Japanese	2	3		
	English	5	5	1	4
	Bylingual		3	1	
kibei nisei	Japanese	10	6	6	6
	English	1	2	1	1
	Bylingual	1	2	+	1

Glossary

amacha kuyō	甘茶供養	jizō	地藏
Batōkannon	馬頭觀音	jizōkō	地藏講
Benzaiten	弁財天	jōka	淨化
bodai kuyō	菩提供養	meinichi	命日
bon	盆	nenki kuyō	年忌供養
Gedatsukai	解脱会	senzo kuyō	先祖供養
genzeriyaku	現世利益	Shugendō	修驗道
gohō shugyō	五法修業	taisai	大祭
goreichi	御靈地	Tenjin-Chigi-sha	天神地祇社
higan	彼岸	Toyouke-no-ōkami	豐受大神
hōon kansha	報恩感謝	ujigami	氏神
ie	家		