

## The commercialization of the sacred: The structural evolution of religious communities in Japan

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### Abstrak

The author's purpose in this paper is to elucidate changes in the activities of religious groups in contemporary Japan by examining new forms of oblation (monetary donations and volunteer labor), as well as new relationships between believers and the religious groups to which they belong. The paper begins with an overview of the prevailing views of religious activity as a manifestation of the relationship between an individual follower and a particular religious group, and then concretely traces the changing role played by oblation in the shamanistic folk religions of Japan, Tenrikyo, and 'new' new religions. Religious activity in contemporary Japan has come to be characterized less and less by communal oblation, and increasingly by individually motivated oblation. Furthermore, the ties between new religions and their followers have increasingly taken on the character of commercial transactions, so that followers have become 'consumers' of religious resources, and the religious group a 'provider of information services'. The author calls this development the 'commercialization of the sacred', noting that new religions now focus on attracting donations in the form of membership fees and tuition, and using occupational task as the form of service to be rendered within the group. In addition, the paper tries to make sense of religious groups in contemporary Japan by classifying these according to organizational type. It is no longer sufficient to look only at the evolution from the traditional 'household' model, to the 'parent-child' model, to the 'congregation-bureaucracy linkage' model peculiar to the new religions that emerged after World War II, including the Soka Gakkai. It is now imperative to also consider a model that succeeds the 'congregation-bureaucracy linkage' model and that can be called the 'occupational task-implementation system-consumer' model.