

*Measuring religion in Japan:  
ISM, NHK and JGSS*

**Survey Research and the Study of Religion in East Asia  
October 11, 2017 Pew Research Center**

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# Points

- Introducing three national surveys measuring religion: by Institute of Statistical Mathematics, JGSS and NHK
- Belief or practices
- Own belief or **religion of one's family**  
Different situations for men and for women  
for **a successor** and for a non-successor  
for a married and for **an un-married**
- A sense of **distrust towards religious organizations**
- Belief and political position
- Today's life and **inheritance of a family grave**

# Contradiction in the number of followers

According to the annual statistical research on religion in 2015

by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan,

The number of **religious groups** in Japan: **181** thousand

**Shinto** followers: 89.5 million (**70.4%** of the total population)

**Buddhists**: 88.7 million (**69.8%**)

Christians: 1.9 million (1.5%)

Other religions: 8.9 million (6.9%)

Total: **188.9** million (**1.49 times of population**)

Japanese population: **127.1** million

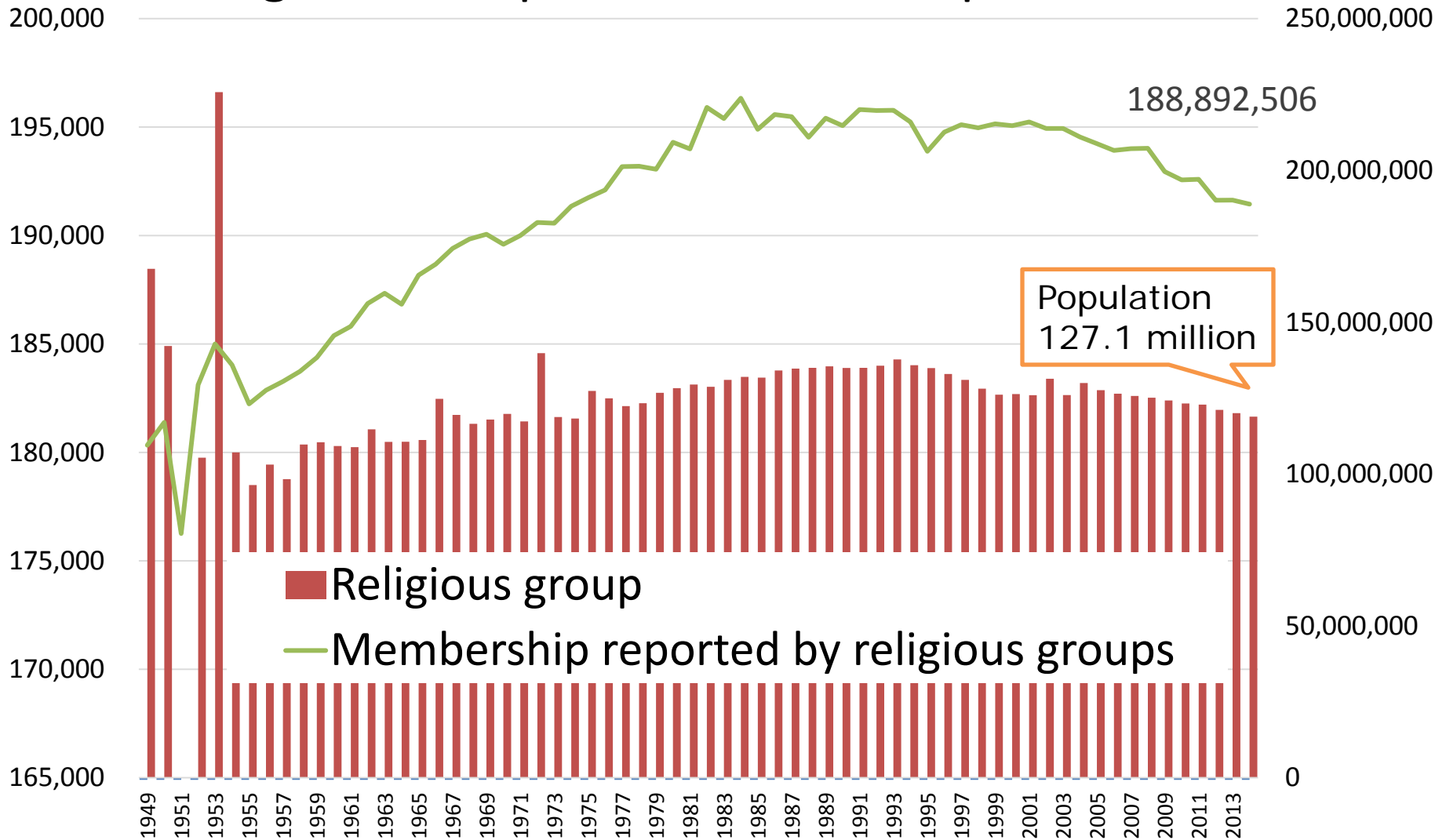
On the other hand, the Japanese National Character Survey in 2013:

**72.0% do not have** any **personal religious faith**

The Japanese General Social Survey in 2015:

**68.6% do not follow** any religion

# Religious Groups and Membership: 1949-2015



Source: the annual statistical research on religion in 2015 (published in 2017) by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan

# Major Surveys Measuring Religion in Japan

## 1. The Japanese National Character Survey

(日本人の国民性調査)

- The Institute of Statistical Mathematics (統計数理研究所)
- Conducted every five years since 1953; latest in 2013
- Includes questions about **religion** and **spirituality**
- stratified random sampling (N varies by year, 2000-4000; age 20+)

## 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)

- JGSS Research Center, Osaka University of Commerce
- Conducted every couple of years since 1999; latest in 2017
- Includes questions about **religion**
- Two-stage stratified random sampling (N varies by year, 3600-9000; age20+; 1500 for JGSS-2017)

### 3. Survey on Japanese Value Orientation

(日本人の意識調査)

- NHK, Broadcasting Culture Research Institute  
(NHK文化放送研究所)
- Conducted every five years since 1973; latest in 2013
- Includes questions about **activities related to religion and faith**
- Two-stage stratified random sampling (N=5400, age16+)

# Access to the Data Sets

- The Japanese National Character Survey
  - SSJDA (<http://csrda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/access/flow/>)
    - Available three surveys only (1958, 1963, 1968)
  - The Institute of Statistical Mathematics ([http://www.ism.ac.jp/ism\\_info\\_e/kokuminsei\\_e.html](http://www.ism.ac.jp/ism_info_e/kokuminsei_e.html))
    - No access to the whole data, frequencies and cross-tabs available
- Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)
  - SSJDA (<http://csrda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/access/flow/>)
  - ICPSR (<https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/>)
  - GESIS (<https://www.gesis.org/en/home/>)
- Survey on Japanese Value Orientation
  - SSJDA (<http://csrda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/access/flow/>)
  - GESIS (<https://www.gesis.org/en/home/>)

# 1. The Japanese National Character Survey by ISM

From **four different perspectives**:

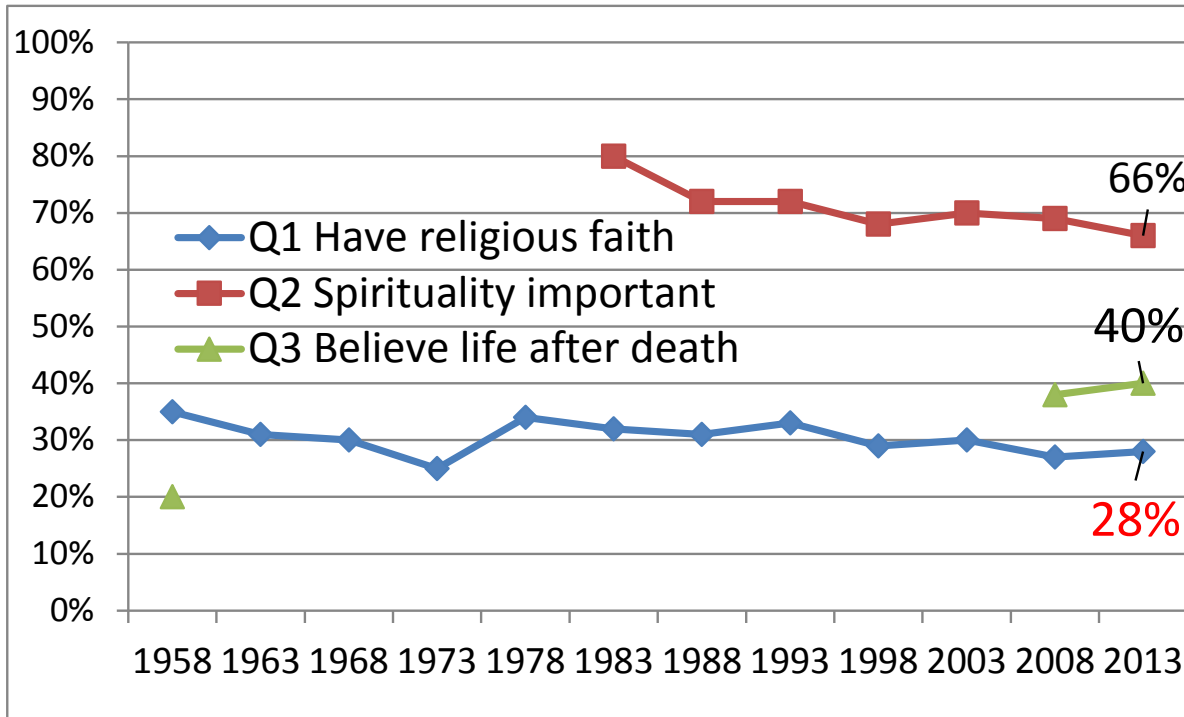
1. Do you have **any personal religious faith**? yes/no
2. Without reference to any of the established religions, do you think a **religious attitude is important**, or not important? yes/can't decide/no
3. Do you believe that there is **Life after Death**? yes/no
4. How do **you think of religion generally**?

Please choose the statement below that comes closest to your opinion.

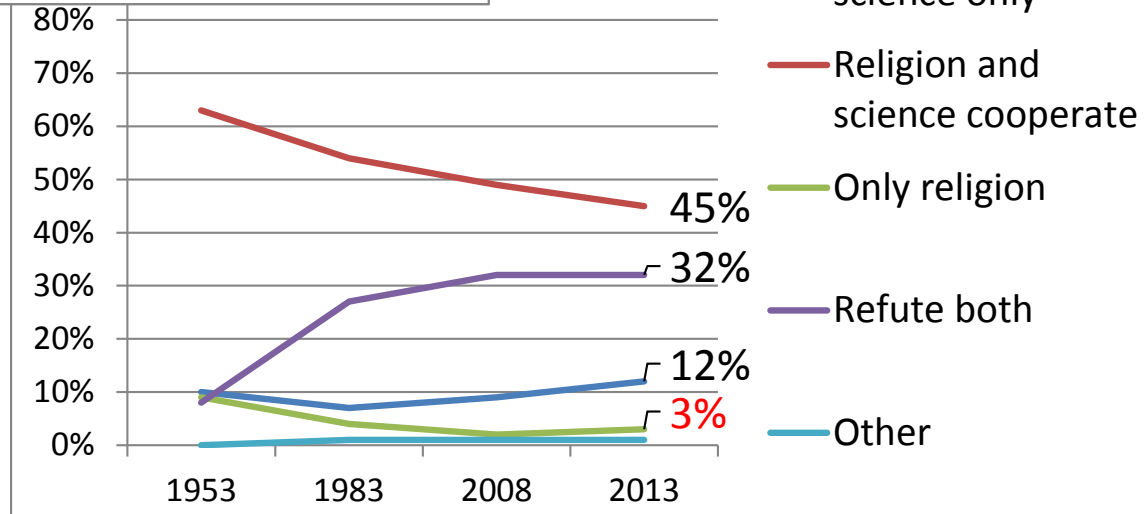
- a) Religion cannot save humanity; only **advancement in science can save humanity**
- b) **Advancement in science** and the **power of religion need to cooperate** in order to save humanity
- c) Advancement in science and the redemption of humanity are unrelated. Only the **power of religion** can save humanity
- d) **Neither** advancement in science nor the power of religion can save humanity
- e) Other(Specify)



# The Japanese National Character Survey by ISM



## Q4 Save humanity: Religion or Science



## 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)

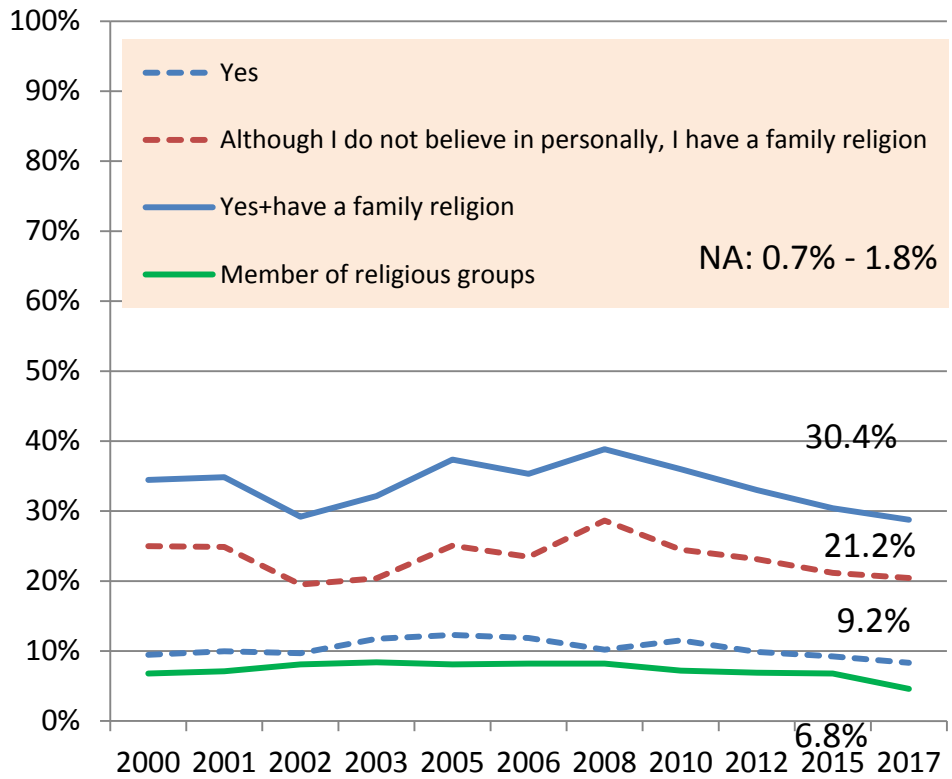
From five different perspective (1-4 ) and in terms of **the family grave**

1. Do you **believe in any religion**? Yes/no, but have a **family religion**/ no
2. Please **name the religion**
3. **How devoted** as a religious follower? very/certain degree/not very
4. A **member of religious groups**? Yes/no
- (5. How well do you **trust religious organizations**? Very much/some/not very)
6. How do you **feel about your own interment**? **Where** would you like **to be buried** when you die? Family grave of own parents/spouse's family/communal/to be scattered etc.
7. Are you **inheriting the grave of your family**? Yes/no (in the future /sibling or relatives)/no family grave
8. How would you like **to manage your family grave in the future**?



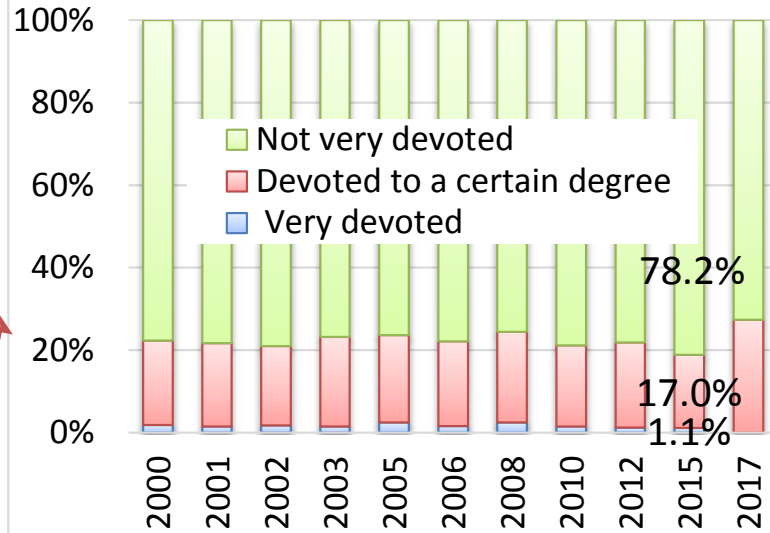
# 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS) <sup>Who have a family religion</sup>

Q1 Do you believe in any religion?  
 Q4 Member of religious group?



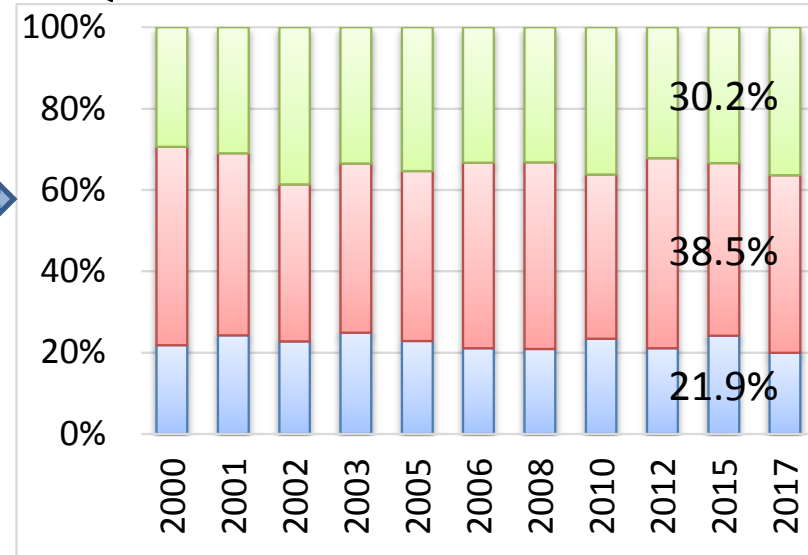
Membership 6.8% < follow a religion 9.2% < have a family religion 21.2%

Q3 How devoted? A certain degree



Yes, I believe in religion(s).

Q3 How devoted? more devoted



## 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)

Q1 Do you **follow a religion**? By Size of Cities or by Regional Blocks

JGSS-2015	Size of Cities				Total
	Big Cities	Cities with more than 0.2million population	Cities with less than 0.2 million population	Town and Villages	
Yes	7.4%	8.3%	10.6%	10.2%	9.2%
Not believe in personally but have a family religion	18.1%	23.2%	20.9%	24.7%	21.2%
No	73.7%	67.7%	67.7%	62.8%	68.6%
NA	.8%	.8%	.8%	2.3%	1.0%

	Regional Blocks						Total
	Hokkaido/Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Kinki	Chugoku/Shikoku	Kyusyu	
Yes	7.5%	8.9%	11.3%	8.8%	8.9%	9.6%	9.2%
Not believe in personally but have a family religion	18.4%	15.8%	23.0%	23.0%	27.1%	27.3%	21.2%
No	72.4%	74.5%	65.2%	67.0%	63.1%	62.2%	68.6%
NA	1.7%	.8%	.5%	1.3%	1.0%	.8%	1.0%

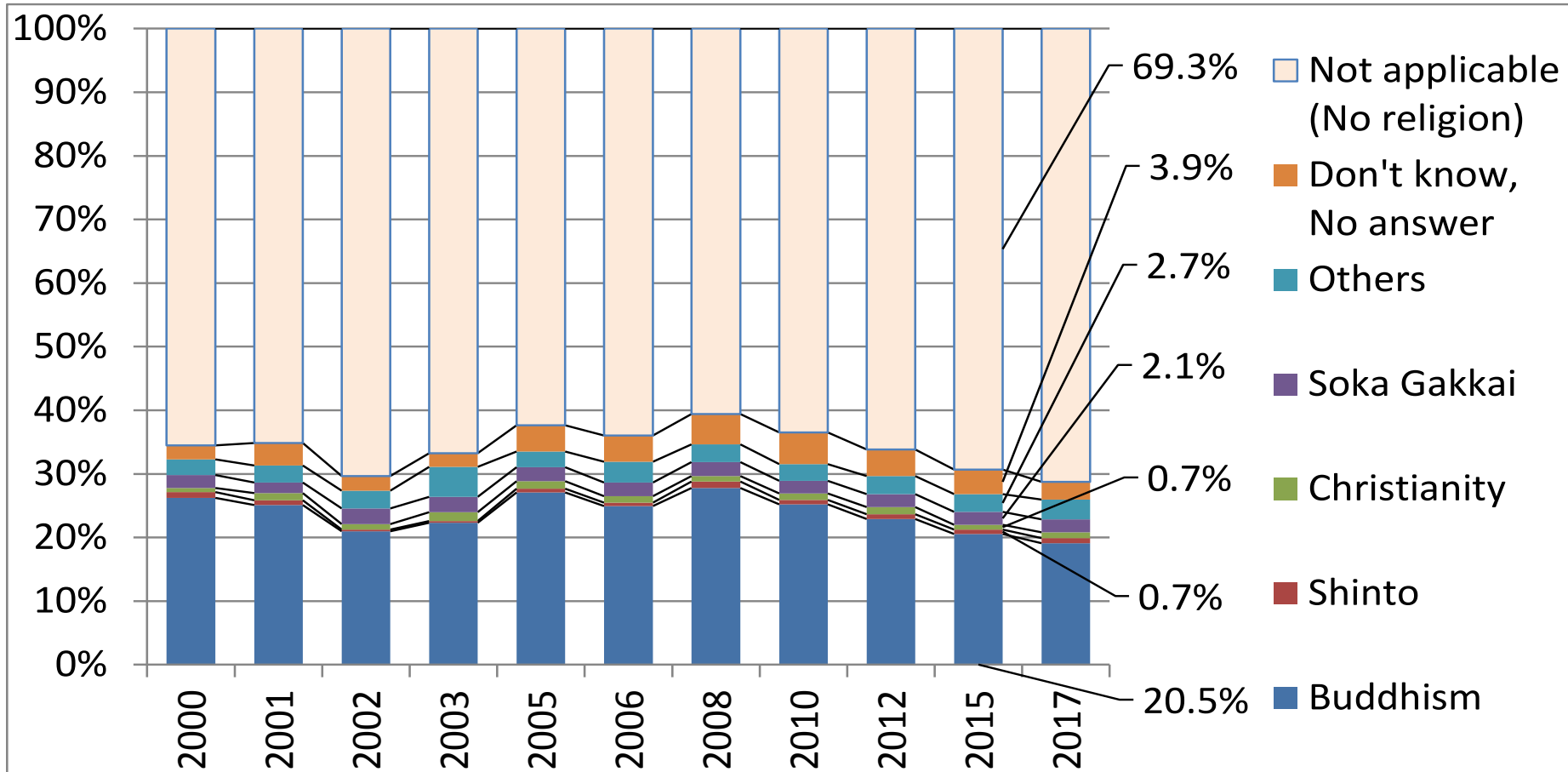
# 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)

## Q2. Name the Religion

Code	Japanese	English	Code	Japanese	English
<b>Buddhist</b>			<b>Others</b>		
10	仏教	Buddhism	42	立正佼成会	Rissho Kosei-kai
11	禅宗(曹洞宗・臨済宗)	Zen sect (Soto, Rinzai)	43	霊友会	Reiyukai
12	天台宗	Tendai sect	44	仏所護念会	Bussho Gonenkai Kyodan
13	浄土宗	Jodo sect (Pure Land )	45	幸福の科学	Happy Science
14	浄土真宗(本願寺・門徒宗・南無阿弥陀仏)	Jodo-Shin sect (True Pure Land )	51	崇教真光・真光	Sukyo Mahikari
15	真言宗	Shingon sect	52	天理教	Tenrikyo
16	日蓮宗	Nichiren sect	53	真如苑	Shinnyo-en
17	時宗	Jishu sect	54	神幽玄救世真光文明教団	Shin Yu Gen Kyu Sei Mahikari Kyodan
18	法華経・法華宗	Hokke sect	55	PL教団	Church of Perfect Liberty
19	本門佛立宗	Honmon Butsuryu Sect	56	霊波之光	Reiha-no-Hikari
82	日蓮正宗	Nichiren Shoshu	57	白光	Byakko Shinko Kai
<b>Shinto</b>			58	生長の家	Seicho no ie
20	神道	Shinto	59	金光教	Konkok yo
21	稲荷大明神	Inari Daimyojin	60	黒住教	urozumi kyo
<b>Protestant</b>			61	御獄教	Ontake-kyo
30	キリスト教	Christianity	80	先祖供養	Ancestor worship
31	カトリック	Catholic	22	大山ねずの命神示教会	Oyamanezunomikoto Shinji Kyoukai
32	プロテスタント	Protestant	29	仏教+神道(仏様・神様)	Buddhism + Shinto
33	ギリシア正教(日本ハリストス正教会)	Greek Orthodox	35	エホバの証人	Jehovah's witnesses
<b>Soka Gakkai</b>			36	世界救世教	Church of World Messianity
41	創価学会	Soka Gakkai	37	統一教会(世界基督教統一神霊協会)	Unification Church

## 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)

### Q2. Name the Religion

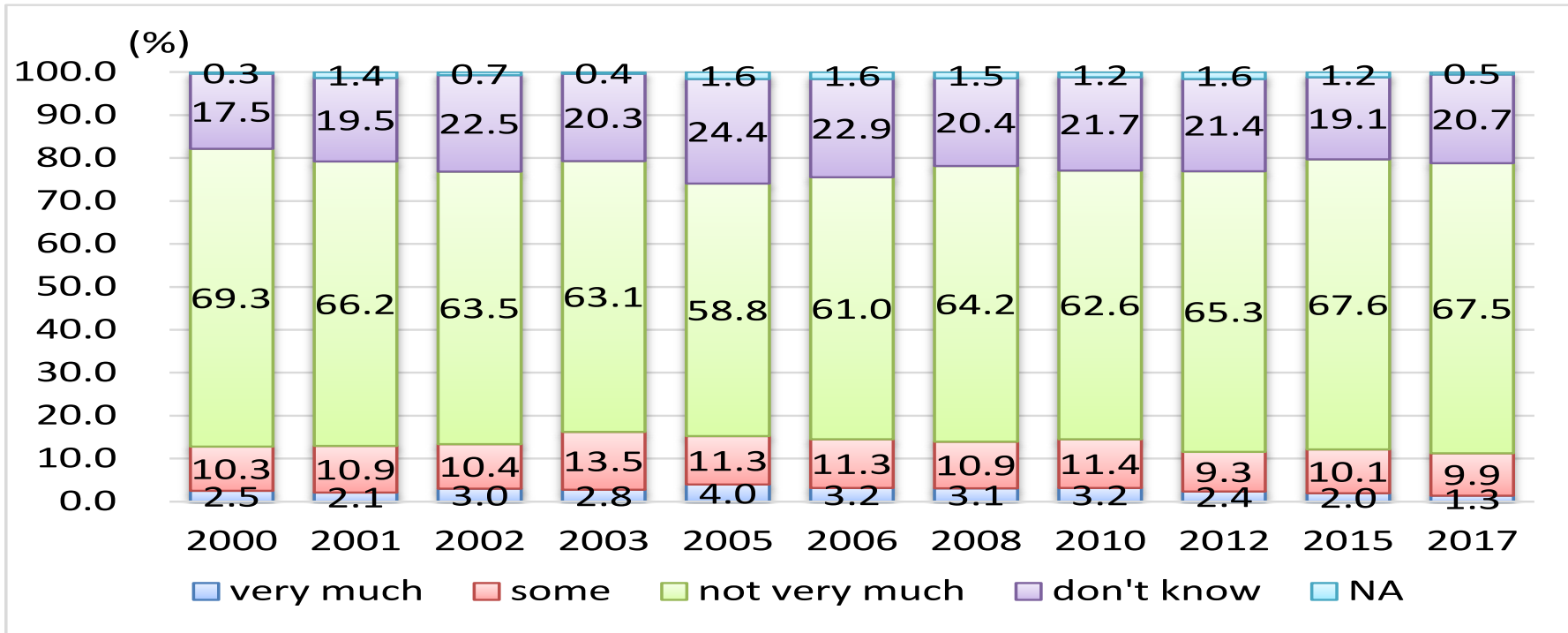


**86.0%** of followers of **Soka Gakkai** support **New Komeito**;

68.5% of New Komeito supporters are followers of Soka Gakkai in 2015  
(30 % of New Komeito supporters are not followers of Soka Gakkai)

## 2. Japanese Social Survey (JGSS)

Q2. How well do you **trust religious organizations**?



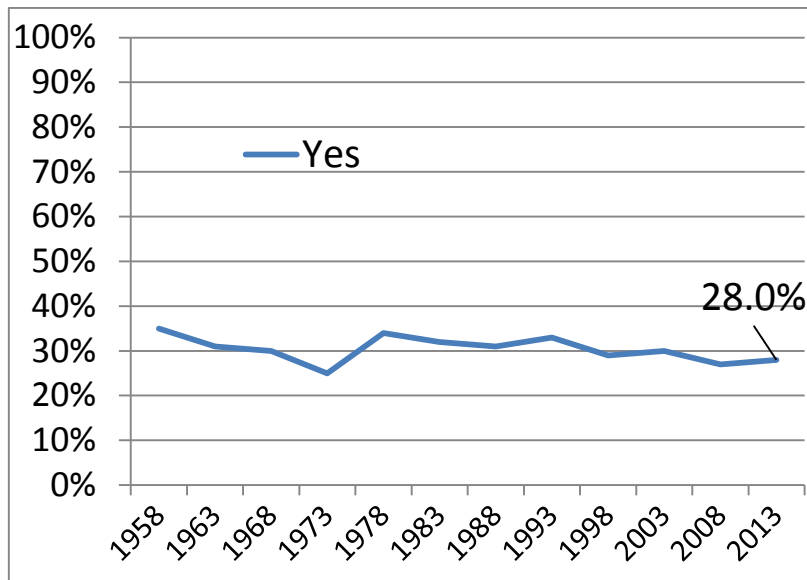
**Religious organizations are the least trusted** among 15 organizations: % of those who do not trust X very much in 2015: **religious group (68%)** > diet members (57%) > members of municipal councils (49%) > ministries and government agencies (28%) > labor unions (22%) , TV (21%), > police (16%), major companies (15%) , financial institutions (15%), scholars/researchers (13%), schools (12%), newspapers (11%), self-defense forces (10%), courts (9%), hospitals (6%)



# Comparison of Questions

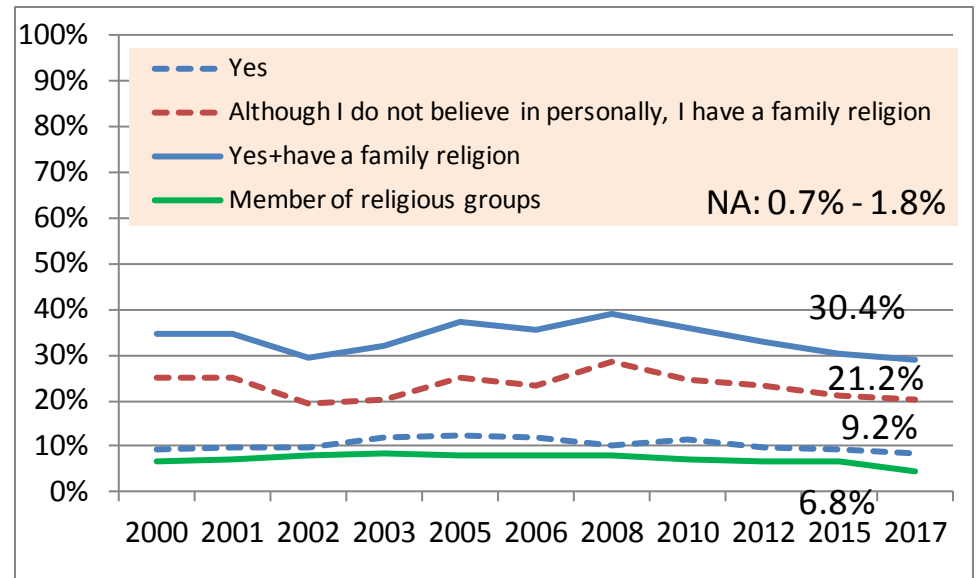
**Do you have *any personal religious faith*?**

(Japanese National Character Survey)



**Do you *follow a religion*?**

(JGSS)



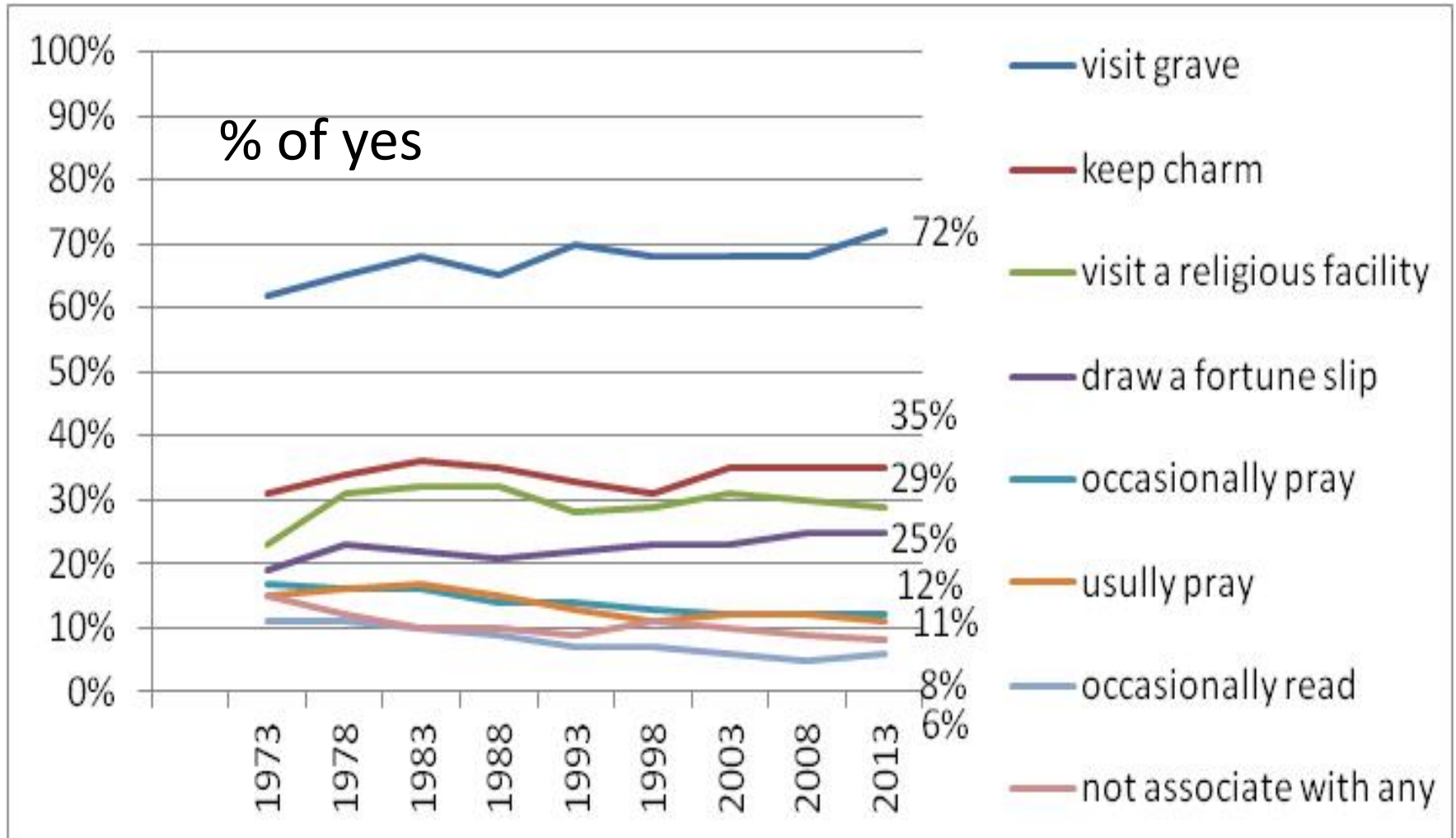
% of those who **have any personal religious faith** by ISM and that of those who **believe in or have a family religion** by JGSS are **close to each other**.

### 3. Survey on Japanese Value Orientation (NHK)

In terms of **everyday practices** related to religions

- ① I **usually practice religious activities** such as **prayer, participating in religious services, studying and/or missionary work.**
- ② I **occasionally** pray and participate in religious service.
- ③ I **visit ancestors graves** for a couple of times a year.
- ④ I **occasionally read religious books** such as bible or scriptures.
- ⑤ I have **gone to a religious facility to pray for good luck** (academic and business success, health, etc) during the past couple of years.
- ⑥ I **keep charm and/or amulet close to me** for good luck.
- ⑦ I have **drew a fortune slip and/or gone to see a fortune teller** during the past couple of years.
- ⑧ I do **not associate with** any activities which relates to religion or faith.

### 3. Survey on Japanese Value Orientation (NHK)



➤ Exceptionally high % of Yes for

**Q3. I visit ancestors graves for a couple of times a year.**



2010 7 29





## 4. Diversification of the grave

### Variety of graves and memorial ceremonies

- Traditional grave: **husband's family's ancestral grave**
- “**joint**” **grave of husband's and wife's families**
- Graves **without a family name** but with a phrase or word such as “in memory of...” or “impermanence.” 「偲ぶ」「無常」
- special cemetery that **guarantees permanent memorial services**
- buried with others **in a communal grave** regardless of family or marital ties

### Diversifying in forms

- conventional **three-tier tombstone**
- large, **wall-like tombstones**, each of which is **used by several families**
- **flat tombstones** laid out on the lawn
- cineraria with **locker-like storage places for urns**
- **communal memorial grounds** simply marked with a “virtual cemeteries” **on the internet**: view photos of the deceased, read their obituaries and wills, and listen to their recorded messages

# What do Japanese people think about the grave and the relationship with temples?

- Do they **continue to keep their family grave**? If currently do not have it, do they want to have it?
- People who want to have their own grave, where, what kind and with how much?
- What kind of the **relationship do people want to have with temples**?  
(Query from young Buddhist monks of several religious schools)
  - geographical and relational distance
  - financial cost: managing fee for the grave and offering

## ➤ **JGSS questions:**

1. **current situation** of the **inheritance of the ancestor's grave**
2. what do **people want to do with their ancestor's grave**



# JGSS 2000/2001/2010/2015

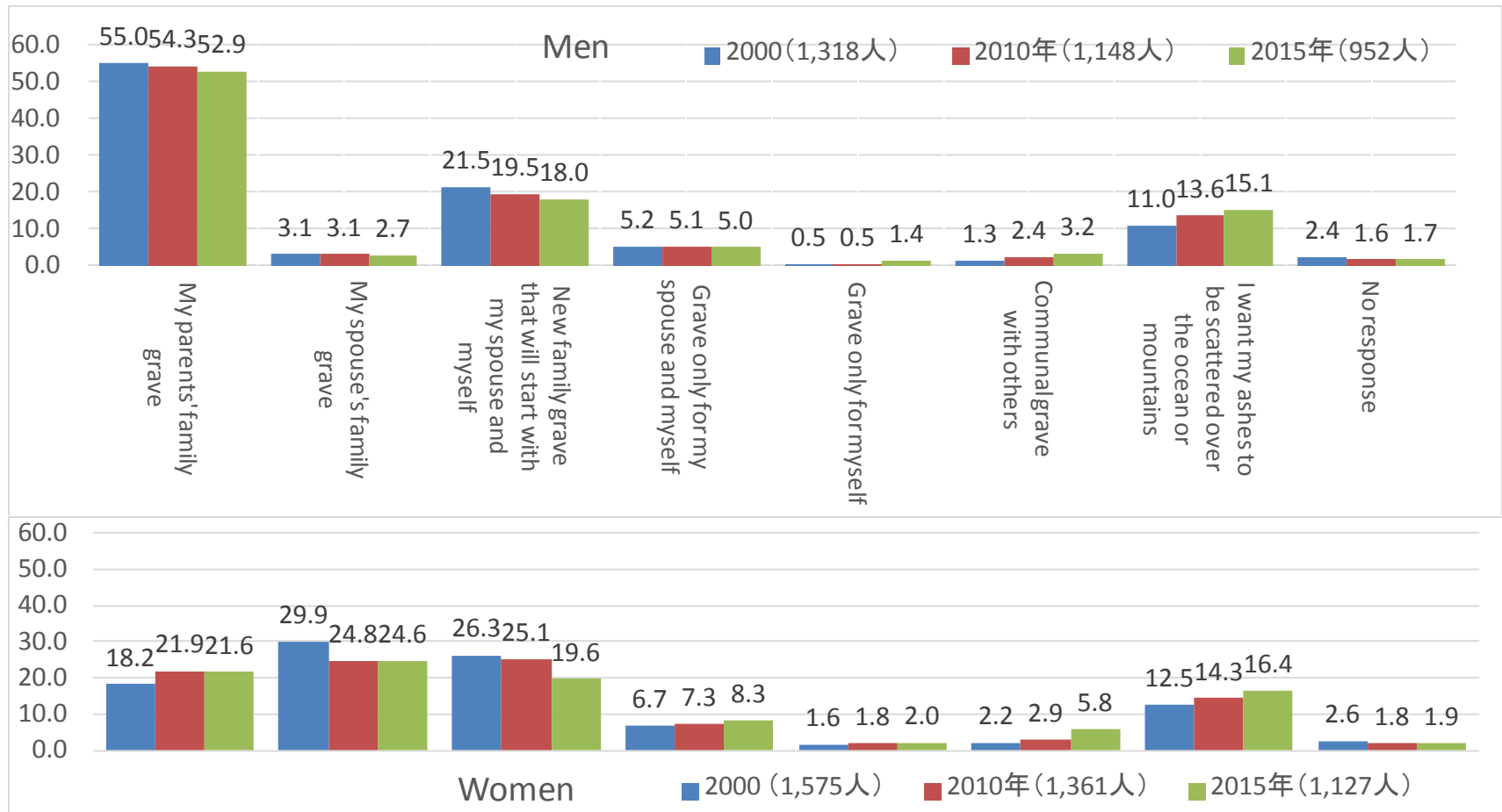
**Q63-1** How do you feel about **your own interment**? **Where would you like to be buried** when you die? Please choose only one that best describes the way you feel.

- 1 **Family grave** of my parents
- 2 My **spouse's family grave**
- 3 I want to **start a family grave** which starts **with my spouse and myself**.
- 4 Grave **only for my spouse and myself** (a locker-style charnel included)
- 5 Grave **only for myself** (a locker-style charnel included)
- 6 **Communal grave** with others
- 7 I want my ashes **to be scattered over the ocean or mountains**.  
(No conventional grave wanted)

**Q 63-2** What are the reasons for choosing above 6 or 7? Please choose all that apply.

- 1 I would rather be in the family grave or in my own grave, but have **no one to look after it**.
- 2 I would rather be in the family grave or in my own grave, but do not want to **bother my children to look after it**.
- 3 I want to **return to nature**.
- 4 I **do not see any meaning** in having a family grave or my own.
- 5 Other(Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )  
(nothing marked)

## 4. Where would you like to be buried? (2000, 2010, 2015)



- Slight changes can be observed for both men and women during past 15 years.
- For men % of those who wish to be buried with their parents gradually decreased whereas, for women % wishing to be buried with husband parents gradually decreased.
- For both men and women % of those wishing to build a new family grave decreased, and % wanting to be buried in shared graves and scatter ashes increased.
- For women % wishing to build a grave just for themselves and their husband also increased.

# JGSS 2015

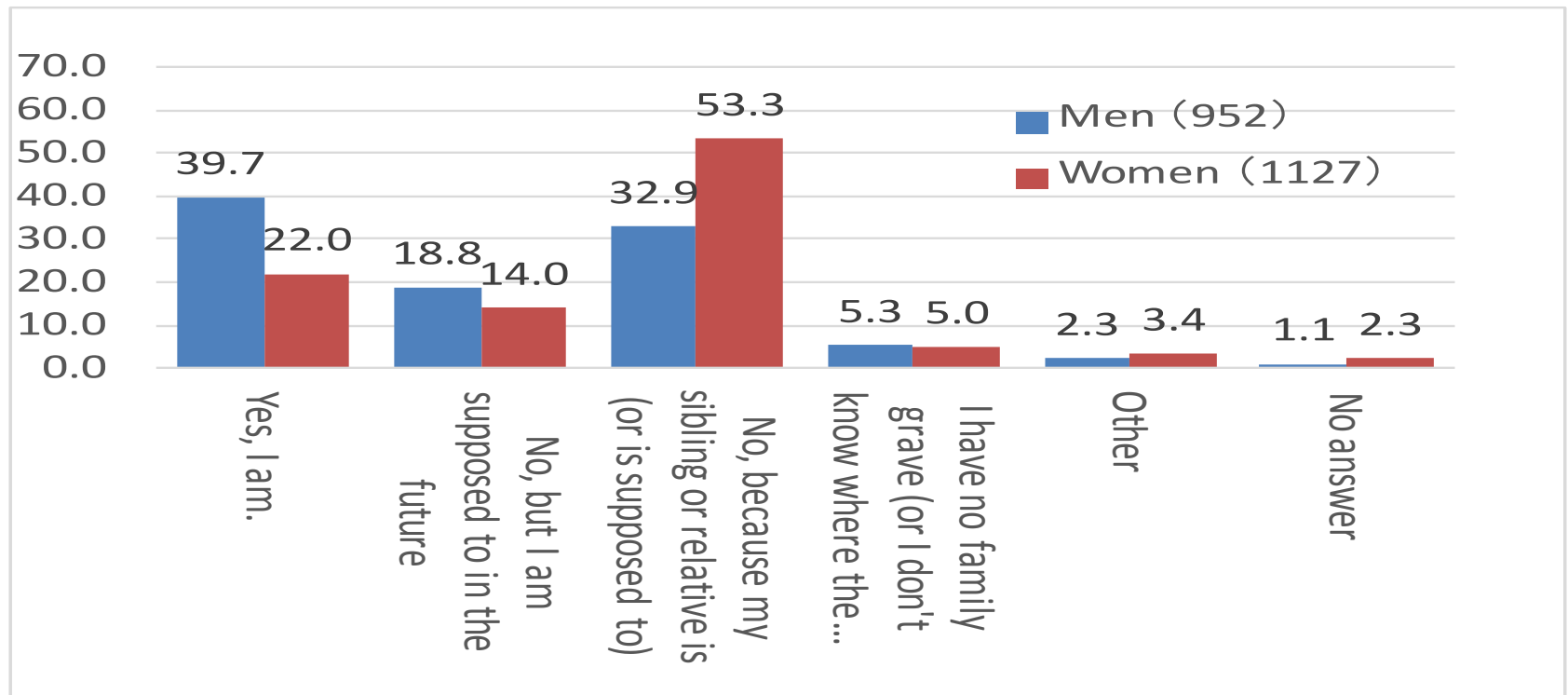
Q52-1 Are you **inheriting the grave of your family**?

- 1 **Yes**, I am.
- 2 **No, but** I am supposed to **in the future**.
- 3 No, because **my sibling or relative is** (or is supposed to).
- 4 I have **no family grave** (or I don't know where the grave is located).
- 5 Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

Q52-2 How would you like to manage your family grave in the future?

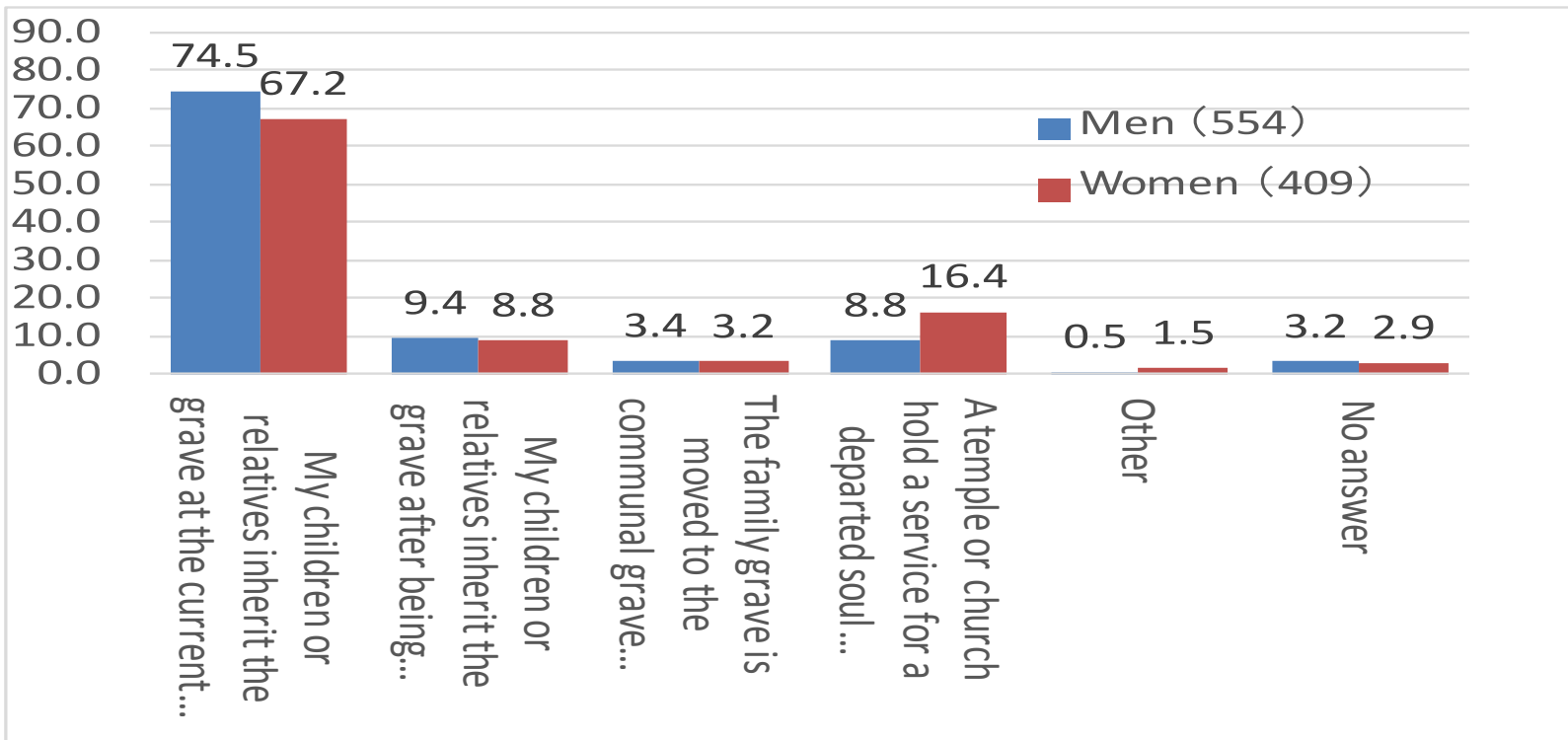
- 1 **My children or relatives inherit** the grave at the current location.
- 2 My children or relatives inherit the grave after **being moved to the convenient place**.
- 3 The family grave is **moved to the communal grave** (buried with others) and family members do not manage the grave.
- 4 **A temple or church hold a service** for a departed soul forever in compensation for donation.
- 5 Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )

# Are you inheriting the grave of your family? (2015)



- For men, 40% have already inherited and another 20% are expected to inherit in the future. 30% said sibling or relative instead of them.
- For women, about the half said sibling or relative instead of them. 36% have inherited or will inherit the family graves.
- For both men and women, 5% does not have or know family graves.

## How would you like to manage your family grave in the future? (2015)



- 75% of men and 67% of women prefer traditional ways; pass on their children or relatives
- One in six women prefer paying fee to a temple or church for the management
- 10% prefer to move to more convenient location

# Points

- Measuring religion: **direct or indirect ways to measure religion** by three national repeated surveys
- Belief or practices
- Own belief or **religion of one's family**
- A sense of **distrust towards religious organizations**
- Belief and **political position (for a certain % of population)**
- A focal point is **how to inherit or not inherit the family grave for a majority of Japanese who do not have a personal belief**
- Today's life and **inheritance of a family grave**
  - Different situations for men and for women
  - for **a successor** and for a non-successor
  - for a married and for an un-married
  - for those who has **no child** or **daughters only**
- **Structures of the family** (generations of the family) have affected **the continuity of one's family religion**

# Acknowledgements

- ▶ The Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS) are designed and carried out by the JGSS Research Center at Osaka University of Commerce (Joint Usage / Research Center for Japanese General Social Surveys accredited by Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), in collaboration with the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo.
- ▶ JGSS-2015 is supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 26245060 (Principal Investigator: Noriko Iwai), the Institute of Amusement Industry Studies (Principal Investigator: Ichiro Tanioka), the research grant from the Japan Center for Economic Research (Principal Investigator: Noriko Iwai), JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 24243057 (Principal Investigator: Masayoshi Kato), and the Osaka University of Commerce.

# List of JGSS codebooks

JGSS-2000 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2001 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2002 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS Cumulative Data 2000-2003 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2005 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2006 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2008 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2010 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

JGSS-2012 Basic spreadsheet/codebook

<http://jgss.daishodai.ac.jp/english/index.html>

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