

The history of the so-called New Religious Movements in Japan can be divided into three distinct periods. The first period is characterized by the breaking up of an old social and political order and the establishing of a new. The Meiji Era (1868–1912) is of central importance, but the period actually spans an interval from 1800 to 1930, thus beginning before Meiji and extending a few years beyond the Taishō Era (1912–26). The second period focuses upon the religious upsurge prior to and after World War II. It relates to years of Japanese military expansion, crises, defeat, and recovery, and spans four eventful decades, 1930–70, of the Shōwa Era (1926–89). The third period covers the last two decades of Shōwa, thus extending from 1970 until the present Heisei years. The last period is affluent and sees large-scale Japanese economic development in an increasingly international era. Religions which are founded in, or for other reasons are identified with, the last of these three periods are often called “New New Religions”, in Japanese, *shin shin shūkyō*.¹

The New Religious Movements are folk religions or popular religions. Strongly rooted in popular sentiments they are subject to changes with the passing eras. New Religious Movements originating in one of the first two periods may thus adopt religious characteristics of subsequent periods. For the study of New Religious Movements in Japan, an awareness of their dynamics of adaption to new circumstances is of utmost methodological importance.

In this paper I am concerned with New Religious Movements in the first of these three periods. Although my study thus falls short of providing a comprehensive interpretation of the contemporary, neo-religious situation in Japan, I still believe that it provides some relevant groundwork necessary to attain a complete grasp of present day New Religious Movements in Japan.

The Meiji Period (1868–1912)

The Meiji Period, which is the main focus of this study, was first and foremost the period of Japanese modernization. After the political and economic

¹ For a recent, comprehensive presentation of New Religious Movements, see Kōbundō 1990. For the terminological question concerning New Religious Movements, see my publication, Lande 1990.

structure of the Tokugawa Regime (1600–1867) had been deteriorating over almost a century, Meiji nationbuilders provided the reconstruction of a new and modern nation. The modernization renovated all aspects of Japanese life. Politics, economy and production, education, law, communications, social life and religion—all fields were affected. Modernization did not mean, however, that all traditional values had to go. On the contrary, a traditional ethos was maintained. The emperor system became the heartbeat of the nation, with serious implications for the religious life of the nation. In particular the division between a “secular”, patriotic State Shintō and a “religious” realm where Buddhism, Christianity and Sect Shintō were offered freedom within limits, came to assume a decisive function. Modernization implied in other words a powerful restoration of an emperor system, which acquired increasingly absolutist features.

*The Emperor and the Religions: State Shintō and Sect Shintō*²

The Meiji Restoration was the political breakthrough of a nationally supported movement behind the slogan, *sonnō jōi* (“Revere the Emperor! Expel the Barbarians!”). Behind the slogan as well as behind the opposition to the Tokugawa regime was the long spiritual development of nationalist and emperor-centred ideas, where the national gods were viewed with esteem and affection. The nationwide outburst of popular, reforming energy prior to the Meiji Restoration in the so-called *ee ja nai ka* (“Things are fine!”) dances, demonstrated this mood. People all over Japan expressed their hope for national renewal in dances of joy and expectation. Ise Grand Shrine and Shintō divinities were central symbols in the tensely emotional movement. It was nothing but natural to resort to emperor- and Shintō supporting policies when the broad, national restoration movement finally gained the upper hand in 1868.

In the years 1868–9, *fukkō shintō*, “Restoration Shintō”, dominated government thinking on the national ethos. This implied the unity of religion and state, *saisei ichi*, an idea which can be traced back to the national, Japanese chronicles *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, from the eighth century. A government department, *jingikan*, was established for the direct supervision of Shintō shrines. Pure Shintō was emphasised, and an edict that separated Shintō from Buddhism was promulgated as early as 1868. Buddhism was replaced by Shintō as a religion of the State; anti-Buddhist and anti-Christian campaigns were launched and a nationwide indoctrination of emperor-centred Shintō began. These policies drew massive protests from Buddhists and liberal reformers. The continued suppression of Japanese Christians led to strained diplomatic relationships with Western countries. Subsequently, the Shintō-favoured religious policies were modified from 1871. The ban on

² Cf. Murakami 1970: 77–126.

Christianity was lifted in 1873 and the *jingikan* was downgraded in 1877 to a religious bureau that included Shintō shrines as well as Buddhist temples.

The idea of a distinction between religion and ritual, however, also appeared around 1877 (Meiji 10). It became a crucial distinction, opening the way for the subsequent development of non-religious State Shintō. The early attempts at establishing *fukko shintō* as a national religion had proved a failure. The establishment of a body of rituals and national teaching as elements of an alleged non-religious emperor system, however, proved successful. From 1882 the distinction between religion and ritualist State Shintō was accepted by the state administration. Within the realm of “religion”, popular religions were distinguished from Buddhism and Christianity and could apply for a special legal status as Shintō Sects. If recognized, they were considered independent, religious bodies, although under constant and strict governmental surveillance.

A theoretical and administrative development of State Shintō versus religion took place after the promulgation of the Constitution (1889) and the Imperial Rescript of Education (1890). In 1900 separate governmental offices for State *Shintō*, *jinja kyoku*, and religion, *shūkyō kyoku*, were established.

During the early years of Meiji, the national consciousness grew. It was partly due to indoctrination, but nationalism was also strengthened over the years by wars with China (1895) and Russia (1904–5). The emergence of national consciousness affected the religious developments in different ways. The national policy of differentiating between State Shintō and religion was brought a step further. In 1909 the separate governmental offices for State Shintō and religion were assigned to jurisdiction by different ministries. The administration of religions came under the Ministry of Education; the office for State Shintō came under the Home Ministry. In Sect Shintō and Buddhist religious developments, patriotic trends gained in strength. Even Christianity followed the new patriotic and nationalist mood.

Tenrikyō, An Early Militant

I distinguish between New Religious Movements which aimed at the transformation of society, such as Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō on the one hand, and “quietist” movements, exemplified by Kurozumikyō and Konkōkyō, on the other. All four of these movements develop from a popular Shintō background, and with the notable exception of Ōmoto, they became registered as Shintō Sects during the Meiji Period. Towards the end of this first period, in Taishō, a strong quietist movement with a Buddhist background, Reiyūkai, developed. But first I will turn to Tenrikyō, and present the biography of the Foundress.

Nakayama Miki was the daughter of a poor farmer. The surname of Nakayama was given to her at thirteen, when she married into the likewise poor Nakayama family. She had been brought up in Pure Land Buddhism,

but the prophetic breakthrough, which occurred when she was 40 years old, took place in another religious context. A person who practised mountain ascetism, *shugendō*, had come to her house to perform a healing rite. Miki herself experienced *kamigakari* (a state of trance) while serving as a medium in the rite; whereafter she came to consider herself endowed with a divine mission. This event, Miki's first *kamigakari*, which took place in 1838, is considered the beginning of Tenrikyō.

From that time on she devoted herself increasingly to religious pursuits. She helped pregnant women to achieve painless childbirth, issued charms, performed rites and prayers for healing and good harvest. Local farming communities appreciated her offices, and her reputation grew. In 1867 Shintō authorities granted to her the honorary status of Tenri Myōjin, "The Illustrious Godhead of Divine Wisdom". The same year she also produced the central liturgical verses of Tenrikyō, the so-called *Mikagura uta*.

However, with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, her official recognition came to an end and Tenrikyō was subjected to continued harassment and periods of persecution. While Miki produced *Ofudesaki*, "Holy Writ", and the faith spread all over Japan, government pressure increased. In 1873 she was indicted for "excessive floods caused by rain rites".³ The persecution increased towards the end of the 1880s. Miki was brought into police custody not less than eighteen times, including the last detention of fourteen days in 1886.⁴

Miki was a teacher without capacity for compromise. She taught the ways of poverty and joyful life. It was not a life solely confined to a spiritual realm. Although the renewal of human life was conceived to start from the purified heart of the individual; a new world order, centred around the holy, religious centre in Tenri city, was supposed to spread from the spiritual beginnings.⁵

The Years 1887–1908: Tenrikyō expands

Tenrikyō continued to grow after Miki died in 1887. Through traditional religious affiliations (called *kō*) within Shintō and Buddhism, the Government promoted the organization of popular Japanese religion to counter the growth of Christianity.⁶ Tenrikyō organized *kō* from as early as 1875. In the nationalist decade around 1890 the number of believers grew rapidly. There were more than 200,000 believers in 1888; in 1892 there were 760 churches

³ Takagi 1959: 29

⁴ TOMD 1986: 111.

⁵ There are differences within Tenrikyō as to how the personality and message of Nakayama Miki should be presented. The image of a socially critical and outspoken Foundress is drawn in a cartoon, *Nakayama Miki Monogatari*, with the subtitle, "The True Image of The Foundress of Tenrikyō, Frankly and Honestly Drawn". It is a courageous attempt at a rediscovery of the Foundress of a religion which for long periods up to 1945 was subjected to a series of compromises with the authorities (Tomi 1988). For a more profound study of the historical issues involved, cf. Yajima 1988.

⁶ Tenrikyō 1960: 130f.

and 1,176,000 members. The year when Tenrikyō was finally granted recognition as a Shintō Sect, 1908, it numbered about 2,500 churches and 20,000 employed workers. The number of believers is considered to have reached three million.⁷

After Miki's death the movement grew rapidly under the leadership of her successor, Iburi Izo. His religious qualities were in high esteem. During his leadership 1887–1907, he wrote *Osashizu*, “Inspired Writings”, which were considered to be holy scriptures, like the ones produced by Miki. He was, however, not a prophet of Miki's uncompromising stature. The conflict between the leadership of Tenrikyō and state officials gradually softened during his reign. Already in 1888, soon after Revd Izo had assumed the leadership, Tenrikyō signalled a more compromising stand towards the authorities, and achieved recognition as a branch of Shintō. In the official version of Tenrikyō history it is stated thus: “Oyasama [literally “The Honorable Parent”, a term commonly used for The Foundress by believers] had not agreed to followers’ following the path that conforms to the laws of man. But this time, finding it very difficult for them to follow the path of faith, without complying with the laws, God the Parent permitted the establishment of the church as one of the ways that lead to the same goal.”⁸

A dominating concern in Tenrikyō during the years to come was the problem of its religious identity. For the sake of expansion in the Japanese empire, official recognition was considered a necessity. But the price was surrender to the claims of the official emperor system. For Tenrikyō, this price blurred its doctrinal identity, particularly when Meiji Doctrine was enacted and promulgated during the last of Iburi Izo's years of office. Comprising ten chapters based upon principles of national education, it underlined the spirit of piety and patriotism, heavenly truth and humanity—and reverence for the Emperor. This doctrine, which was formulated in co-operation with three scholars on religion and Japanese Classics from outside Tenrikyō, was an important presupposition for the status of Sect Shintō, attained in 1908.

The missionary work overseas had started in Korea in 1893 and in Taiwan in 1897; following the Japanese involvement on the Asian continent and the annexation of Formosa in 1895. In 1900 this mission had spread to mainland China, in 1911 a missionary from Japan brought Tenrikyō to Manchuria. The first step towards the American continent was already taken in 1896, when a missionary from Senba Church in Osaka set sail on the “Victoria” bound for Canada. He went on to Los Angeles in the USA. Missionaries from the same Senba Church also left for London, following an invitation by an English merchant who had encountered Tenrikyō during a stay in Osaka in 1908. The mission, which took off optimistically in 1910, lasted until 1919. Tenrikyō missionaries found the work strenuous and viewed the prospects

⁷ TOMD 1986: 113f, 119.

⁸ TOMD 1986: 114.

for progress very slim. The official Tenrikyō version states, however, that the efforts in Britain in the 1910s after all may have been a step towards the establishment of the divine will on earth.⁹

Ōmotokyō, A Meiji Militant

Few religious organizations illustrate better than Ōmoto the characteristic developments of New Religious Movements during the first period of their history. This religion, which resembles Tenrikyō as a world renewal faith, originated in the religious activities of the prophetess from Ayabe in Kyoto Prefecture, Deguchi Nao (1836–1918). Nao's story is like Miki's earlier, a tale of a religious woman who experienced the poverty and suffering of farming communities. She had eleven children, three died as babies, two became insane, one son died in war and another fled from home when her husband died. She had no formal education, but rose to the status of teacher in the religion Konkōkyō, with which she became affiliated.

In 1892 Nao experienced *kamigakari* and was filled with assurance that a new time of happiness was breaking through, thanks to a forthcoming divine manifestation which would affect the whole cosmos. The illiterate author wrote these revelations in the alphabetic system of *hiragana*. Later they were edited under the title of *Ofudesaki*, the same name as Tenrikyō had applied to the Holy Writ of Nakayama Miki.

The Greater World shall burst into full bloom like plum-blossoms do—simultaneously. The time for me, Ushitora no Konjin, has come at last. This means that the World that has opened like plum-blossoms shall be Heaven-ruled as evergreen pine trees; this is the world where things shall never go well without Kami's care.¹⁰

The godhead, Ushitora no Konjin, shows her background in Konkōkyō. The terminology is similar, but the perspective is broadened. Her visions of cosmos with clear implications for the totality of society transcend the inward looking dimensions of salvation found in Konkō. To Deguchi Nao salvation means cosmic renewal; her message resembles the teaching of Nakayama Miki, the Foundress of Tenrikyō. Influence from the surrounding political world can also be seen; Ayabe was a stronghold of The Popular Rights Movement, Jiyu Minken Undō, which was a forceful movement in Japanese pol-

⁹ The merchant, T. A. Lose, helped his Tenrikyō friends in London and they purchased a house in 30 Kingscote Road, Bedford Park, in Acton. However, it was gradually felt difficult to sustain the missionaries financially and to provide Japanese food for them. The religious work was also hard: one of the missionaries aired his opinion that the English were the most conservative people in the world and that their conversion to a new Eastern religion was inconceivable. Tenrikyō 1960: 152ff.

¹⁰ Oomoto 1974: 1.

itics during the 1870s and 80s. Themes such as “equality” and “reform” originated in the democratic movement and were carried on in the religious message of Deguchi Nao.¹¹

Now, Ōmoto has another founder, too: Deguchi Onisaburō (1871–1949). He was born in Kameoka, not so far from Ayabe and his original name was Ueda Kisaburō. Although the family line was traced back to the noble Fujiwara family, which dominated Japanese politics during the Heian period (794–1185), Onisaburō was born the son of a poor and penniless farmer. Following various initiatives in studies and learning and a number of jobs of short duration, Kisaburō entered a deep personal crisis upon the death of his father in 1897. He then turned seriously to religion. At Takuma Hills near his home he practised a week of fasting and meditation which led to shamanist experiences. He further pursued religion as a student of an authorized Shintō teacher, Nagasawa Katsutate. Concluding his period of formal religious training here, he was officially licensed for shamanist practices.

In 1898 Kisaburō made up his mind to meet the already well known profetess in Ayabe, Deguchi Nao. He was well received and stayed there for a number of days. Nao had a particular reason for her hospitality: she had pronounced that a prophet was to come from the East. However, not until two years later did the prophetess conclude that Kisaburō was the right person. He was adopted in 1900 into the Deguchi family as son-in-law, married to Nao’s daughter Sumiko.¹² He now took the name Onisaburō.

The last years of the Meiji Period saw increasing Ōmotokyō activities under Onisburo’s leadership. The doctrinal content was based upon Nao’s revelations and elements of Shintō. A tone of mysticism pervaded the teaching. Negotiations for approval by the government continued, but were complicated and time-consuming. During the Meiji Period, however, there was no confrontation with the authorities. Scores of new believers joined Ōmoto during the years of the Russo-Japanese war and the following depression in 1908. By the close of the Meiji Era Ōmotokyō had developed into a large, nationwide body.

Meiji Quietist Movements: Kurozumikyō and Konkōkyō

First a word about geography. The founders of both these New Religious Movements came from Kibi, a district in Okayama Prefecture. It may be more than incidental, as the district provided decisive traditions of religious reform. The great Buddhist reformer Hōnen (1133–1212) originated from the same area. Hōnen understood salvation as based upon the mercy of

¹¹ Umesao 1971: 24.

¹² This meeting of the two prophets, which actually laid the foundation of the new religious organization, Ōmotokyō, is mentioned or described in several later publications, such as Oishi 1982: 29ff, Takagi 1959: 33f, Thomsen 1963: 129.

Amida Buddha. Although the respective contexts of the two modern religious founders differed from Hōnen's, their Shintō-derived concern for divine grace and compassion displays striking resemblances to the basic idea of grace in the Pure Land School of Hōnen.

The eldest of the modern Kibi reformers was the Shintō priest Kurozumi Munetada (1780–1850), who in 1814 founded his new movement. Following personal sickness and severe experiences of death in his close family, he eventually experienced *kamigakari*. It signified a breakthrough from grief to joy. Trusting the universality of the Sun-Goddess, he taught that all human beings partake of the same divine nature and are brothers and sisters. He promoted sincerity and gratitude as the moral foundations of a movement which was called after him, Kurozumikyō, “The Teaching of Kurozumi”.

Konōkyō, “Light of Harmony”, was founded a generation later by Kawate Bunjirō (1814–83), who experienced *kamigakari* in 1859.

It is evident that the widespread fear of Ushitora no Konjin, a stern and malevolent local deity demanding strict observance of ritual procedures, formed a negative background for his experience. Kawate had contracted a serious illness which he believed to be a punishment by Konjin. On the brink of death, however, Kawate heard a divine voice. In correspondence with deep motifs in the Buddhist faith of Hōnen and the Shintō faith of Kurozumi, Kawate experienced the voice as a divine pronouncement of grace. Based upon the conviction that a gracious divinity pervaded life, Kawate from that time onwards promoted a new religious movement.¹³

Differing markedly from the ideas of world renewal found in Tenrikyō, Kawate taught that salvation was an inner and individual phenomenon. The believer was seen as a living deity and salvation rested in the relationship between the individual and the supreme God.¹⁴

The Development of Konkōkyō, 1859–1900

Like its more “communal” predecessor, Tenrikyō, Konkōkyō, however, had difficulties in obtaining official recognition. Although Kawate was granted status as a Shintō priest in 1868, the recognition was withdrawn a few years later, when he had voiced criticism of the official religious policy. In 1876, however, he obtained permission to teach within Okayama Prefecture. This gave him the right to teach, but limited his movements. He stayed in the worship hall, receiving believers, teaching and performing the act of *toritsugi* (mediation) there. He also wrote a personal biography which is venerated as a Holy Scripture in Konkōkyō. In the negotiations with the state, which

¹³ It is not quite clear whether Kawate identified the favourable deity Konjin. In Takagi 1959: 31 it is presupposed that such an identification took place. I follow, however, the more extensive study of Konkō by McFarland which does not favour an identification of Konjin and the divinity who spoke to Kawate; McFarland 1967: 102–7.

¹⁴ Takagi 1959: 31.

continued after the death of the founder in 1883, Konkōkyō in the year 1900 at last achieved Sect Shintō status. As in the case of Tenrikyō, the religion compromised with the emperor system to obtain this recognition. Konkōkyō was, for instance, not permitted to call the Founder a “living god”, as this title was considered a prerogative of the emperor alone. The authorities further demanded that three gods from the State Shintō mythology be included in the Konkō pantheon, before recognition was finally granted.

After the death of Kawate Bunjirō, his son served as a leader for ten years, whereafter his grandson and great grandson succeeded in turn. The family line of leadership continued also after the 2nd World War. From the middle of the Meiji Period, in particular after the death of the Founder, the more spiritual character of Konkō was discarded for more popular religious practice, aiming at various material benefits, such as moneymaking and good health.¹⁵

Although the individualist, inward looking religion did not grow as rapidly as Tenrikyō, it had a couple of hundred thousand adherents towards the end of the century.¹⁶ The religion primarily appealed to farmers, Kawate himself being a farmer. However, the soft, individual religiosity of Konkō also appealed to other groups, such as artists and merchants. It thus spread to urban areas; and in the Osaka area, the god of Konkō even became referred to as the “god of money-making”.¹⁷

General Perspectives on Meiji New Religions

The social crises which accompanied the rebuilding of political systems in the 19th century Japan, largely explain the occurrence of New Religious Movements. The New Religious Movements responded to the crises, particularly as they were felt in rural communities. I have above discussed Tenrikyō, Ōmotokyō, Kurozumikyō and Konkōkyō in some detail. Apparently *new* religions, they none the less basically illustrated how a network of traditional religion was applied to a new situation. Shamanism, which is deeply rooted in Japanese soil, is observed not only in the conscious practice of Deguchi Onisaburō. It can be said to pervade the New Religious Movements as a whole,¹⁸ counting Tenrikyō as well as Konkōkyō among its representatives. The distinguished sociologist of religion Hori Ichirō points to a group of popular, folk religious leaders, *hijiri*, “holy people” or “sages”. This group has played an important role in Japanese religious history through the centuries. They were a kind of shaman outside the established religious system, practising faith healing and offering advice on a wide range of affairs. Such *hijiri* could be found in nearly all the existing 70,000 villages in Japan around the

¹⁵ Murakami 1978: 316.

¹⁶ Cf. Thomsen 1963: 70.

¹⁷ McFarland 1967: 107.

¹⁸ Sugai 1971: 24.

time of Meiji Restoration.¹⁹ Founders of New Religious Movements largely came from the popular *hijiri*, or were inspired by them.

The New Religious Movements also display a specific relationship to the emperor system. The emperor was the pivot of the reformatory spirit of contemporary politics. This meant restrictions for the New Religious Movements. Doctrines and practices had to be harmonized to increasingly absolutist claims by the emperor system, expressed through the State Shintō ideology.

The regulations against *kamigakari* and healing rituals in 1873–4 illustrated such restrictions. A ban on free religious propaganda in 1886 together with doctrinal dictates also significantly showed the restrictions.

The development of the “Western” faith, Christianity, during these years throws some light upon the New Religious Movements. Since 1640 Christianity had been a banned faith on the Japanese islands. Numerous signboards prohibiting the Christian faith were erected and the ceremony of *fumie*, trampling upon a Christian symbol, was practised through the rest of the Tokugawa period in order to enforce religious unity. Although missionaries were permitted to stay in specified Japanese areas from 1859, this did not at all mean immediate religious liberty for the Japanese. Harsh persecution of a group of hidden Catholics occurred in 1867 and did not substantially fade until the ban on Christian faith and literature was lifted in 1873. Christianity was largely considered a danger during the first three decades of the Meiji Era. New Religious Movements were in fact called upon to counter the Christian threat, by establishing religious affiliations, *kō*.

The respondents to Christianity versus New Religious Movements were in general recruited in vastly different milieux. Over against the Christian impact among intellectuals and city dwellers, the New Religious Movements appealed to ordinary people, particularly in farming communities. Especially in the Meiji Period these two types of religions operated in almost separate realms.²⁰ A substantial point of contact in the Meiji Period can, however, be found in their common relationships to the Popular Rights Movement, *Jiyū Minken Undō*, in the 1870s and 80s. Among the New Religious Movements, the influence of this democratic, political movement is illustrated by Ōmoto, in whose birthplace Ayabe the Popular Rights Movement had been strong. With the passing of time, Christianity and New Religious Movements also came to share a common suppression when the immanent theocracy of

¹⁹ Cf. Schneider 1962: 38; Hori 1958: 128ff.

²⁰ The similarities between Tenrikyō and Christianity, ranging from parallels in the respective myths of creation to terminological similarities, are not sufficiently substantial to prove a significant historical contact. The claim that Nakayama Miki herself was influenced by a group of hidden Christians thus cannot be sufficiently supported, cf. Thomsen 1963: 59f. The possibility that Konkōkyō might have been influenced by hidden Christians, Thomsen 1963: 75, exists. To my knowledge, however, the question is so far not seriously enough investigated to provide decisive evidence.

the emperor system was increasingly enforced. For Christianity the problems first appeared in the field of education.²¹ The New Religious Movements, however, encountered the restrictions in their mythologies and formulation of doctrines. As illustrated above, the New Religious Movements over the years yielded to pressure for compliance with the emperor system. Similar situations developed in Christian churches. When the Three Religions Conference (Sect Shintō—including Kurozumikyō, Konkōkyō, and Tenrikyō—Buddhism, and Christianity) was held in 1912, Christianity joined the resolution to “respect the authority of religion, which each possesses; to promote national morality and public discipline, without spoiling our original creeds or interfering with one another; to maintain the honour of our Imperial Household; and to contribute towards the progress of the times”.²² To Christians, particularly to Christian schools, the problem of accepting State Shintō as non-religious and subsequently their compulsory participation in Shintō shrine ceremonies became disturbing issues towards the end of Meiji.

But the experiences of the New Religious Movements were even more disturbing. Several of the new popular religions decided to apply for recognition as Shintō sects. This status offered organizational independence and freedom of propagation, but also demanded a difficult and painstaking dogmatic adjustment to State Shintō. Among the fourteen sects which finally came to be recognized as Shintō sects were the three religions which I dealt with above: Kurozumikyō, Konkōkyō, and Tenrikyō. Ōmotokyō, however, despite diligent attempts, never attained this official recognition.²³

New Religious Movements in Liberal Japan, 1912–26

The Three Religions Conference was undertaken upon the suggestion of the Home Ministry with the clear aim of strengthening interreligious cooperation for political advantage. In this way it signified a continuing Japanese policy to implement the emperor system and religious cooperation for imperial aims.²⁴ A huge temple compound, The Meiji Shrine (Meiji Jingū), was constructed in the years 1915 to 1920 as a national shrine for the veneration of Emperor Meiji. The grand scale construction in central Tokyo signified and underlined

²¹ Two significant events from Christian history during this period are the Uchimura case and the Dōshisha case. Uchimura Kanzō’s refusal (1891) to make the prescribed bow to the Imperial Rescript of Education led to his forced resignation from his teaching position at Tokyo First High School. In the following nationwide debate, Christianity was stigmatized as an unpatriotic religion.

At the Protestant Dōshisha, a university founded in Kyoto by the Christian educator Neesima Jo, the Imperial Rescript of Education replaced for a while in the 1890s the Christian basis of its education. After a period of struggle and negotiations, however, the Christian educational basis was regained.

²² Quoted from Neill 1964: 331f.

²³ Cf. Kitagawa 1966: 183ff; Takagi 1959: 35f.

²⁴ Murakami 1980: 64.

the enormous importance attached to the institution of the modern emperor system.

Japan had participated in a fruitless Siberia expedition (1918–22), and the worldwide depression after World War I also hit Japanese industries. In 1923 Tokyo was panic stricken by a devastating earthquake. There was economic distress and social instability.

Politically, however, the years of the Taishō Period had an apparently liberal character. European democracies were flourishing, in contrast to the autocratic and militarily crushed Germany. Japan, which did not feel economically or politically insecure, was sensitive to developments in Western Europe. Internationalism became attractive. Within the country, the central concept of national polity, *kokutai*, was subject to varied interpretation. Although the influential democratic thinker Minobe Tatsukichi, professor at Tokyo University from 1900 to 1932, supported *kokutai*, he claimed that the emperor was below the state and subordinate to state laws. An influential Christian political thinker, Yoshino Sakuzo, professor at Tokyo University from 1913, showed strong commitment to parliamentary rule. The party system functioned in the national Diet, opening for a fresh, national debate in the pervading liberal spirit.²⁵

But stability and liberalism did not express the total picture of Taishō Japan. Growth of religions revealed that a climate of social unrest from early Taishō still prevailed. Neither was there any significant liberalization of laws or procedures regulating state and religion. Although the religions enjoyed tolerant supervision by the state in the relaxed atmosphere, the emperor system remained the focal point of Japanese authority also during Taishō period.

Development of the Established Reform Movements: Tenri

Foremost among the New Religious Movements during Taishō as during Meiji were the two movements propagating world renewal, Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō. Other New Religious Movements developed as well, some, like Tenri and Ōmoto, from syncretist Shintō roots; some from a Buddhist background. Among the latter ones, the Nichiren-inspired New Religious Movement Reiyūkai particularly drew popular attention.

I will first return to the further development of one of the early reform movements: Tenrikyō. Although the movement had accepted far-reaching doctrinal compromises to comply with State Shintō demands, the believers sought their norm of faith according to genuine Tenri-traditions. Various devotional publications appeared throughout Taishō and in the early Shōwa years, nurturing a genuine, Tenrikyō identity. During the Taishō and early Shōwa years, there were sparse interventions by the state authorities in

²⁵ Fairbank 1965: 529–79.

the religious life of Tenrikyō. A restoration of the original faith was thus thriving. In the services purer elements of worship were introduced.

These years saw a steady, organizational development, illustrated by the establishment of Tenrikyō Young Men's Association in 1918, Tenrikyō Church Headquarters Foundation in 1920, and Tenri Language School from 1925, which developed into a university. New churches grew up in Japan and overseas. In connection with Japanese settlements—spreading to Koreans, Manchurians, Mongolians and Chinese—the religion now gained a foothold overseas. Tenri Foreign Language School, which from 1925 was the centre for educating overseas missionaries, strengthened and undergirded the expansive efforts.

Ōmotokyō Clashes with the Government

Social unrest in early Taishō led to a period of great Ōmoto expansion. No other New Religious Movement, however, experienced a more devastating confrontation with the emperor system. Already during liberal Taishō, Ōmoto suffered a severe clash with the authorities. Negotiations with the government about official status continued; but Ōmoto never attained final government approval as an independent sect of Shintō. Deguchi Onisaburō was a dynamic organizer, his concerns spanning political, cultural, and religious fields. Practising a type of exorcist meditation, *chinkonkishin*, and preaching world renewal, *tatekae-tatenaoshi*, he appealed to increasingly large audiences. Farmers as well as intellectuals supported the movement. The famous author Akutagawa Ryūnosuke was among Ōmoto's sympathizers. In 1920 Onisaburō took the nation by surprise, buying the third largest newspaper in Japan, *Taishō nichichi*. For the very first time in Japanese history a religious organization controlled a mass medium. Seriously disturbed by the development, the government became more and more suspicious. Anti-Ōmoto study groups issued a proclamation: "The Ōmoto religion constitutes a danger to our country's security and an obstacle to the establishment of a healthy nation."²⁶ Following an order of trial in January 1921, the police made a sudden strike. The Ayabe centre was raided, pilgrimages were forbidden, and Ōmoto was ordered to reconstruct the Foundress' grave, due to its alleged resemblance to the Emperor's tomb. In the trial which followed, Onisaburō was given a five-year sentence for *lèse majesté* and violation of the press laws. Further appeals, however, led to a reversal of the verdict. The whole event is called "The First Ōmoto Incident".²⁷

Such harsh use of police force to curb a threat to the emperor system led in turn to a more cautious Ōmoto policy. The ideas of world renewal, *tatekae-*

²⁶ Deguchi 1973: 83.

²⁷ Deguchi 1973: 83ff; cf. Murakami 1980. The distinguished scholar, Deguchi Eiji, provides a substantial analysis of the whole process of the persecution; Deguchi E. 1970: 15–136.

tatenaoshi, were spiritualized, and organized activities turned from politics towards more specifically cultural and religious aims. Onisaburō started the publication of numerous volumes of *Reikai monogatari*, “Stories from the Spiritual World”. Each volume was dictated from the sofa and taken down by a group of scribes. Onisaburō finished a volume in two to three days. His cosmic visions of world peace also took a spiritual turn. Inspired by the peaceful connotations of one, global language, Onisaburō endorsed the Esperanto movement. From 1922 an Esperanto school opened in his home. The universal cooperation of religions was similarly an idea related to the peace issue and dear to the heart of the creative religious leader. In 1923 he established contacts with the Chinese Red Swastika League, and developed this concern into a work for the union of world faiths. A centre for religious unity was established in Peking and a number of supporters appeared, even in Western countries. The all-embracing and comprehensive idea of concern for world peace, however, found its most pertinent expression in the Jinrui Aizenkai, “The Universal Love and Brotherhood Association” (ULBA). In the early 1930s this organization maintained centres in Japan, Manchuria, Mongolia, China, Persia, Thailand, South America, Mexico, and the USA; and in European countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Switzerland, and Poland.

One peace project was, however, particularly comprehensive and significant; the Ōmoto invasion of Outer Mongolia which occurred in the first part of 1924. The so-called Mongolian incident had taken place in 1923, and Japan was gradually strengthening her grip on the Asian continent. The political situation of Outer Mongolia was complicated to the utmost, the Manchurian military officer Tschang Tso-lin representing the Chinese government formally in charge of the area, whereas Russia and Japan also pursued political and military aims in the region. Onisaburō saw Outer Mongolia as a test-case for the establishment of an independent, peaceful nation based upon a new religious foundation; a combination of Lamaism and Ōmoto came about on that occasion. Together with a few closely connected friends, one of whom was the world famous founder of the martial art of Aikidō, Mr. Ueshiba, Onisaburō managed to organize, after arriving in Mongolia, an army of 3000 handpicked soldiers. He ran, however, into serious trouble when one of his initial supporters, the military officer Tschang Tso-lin, attacked the army and arrested the leaders of the expedition. The leaders were convicted to death sentences. Due to rapid Japanese diplomatic intervention, however, the condemned leaders escaped execution. It was indeed a narrow escape: Onisaburō had already written his farewell poem. Together with his colleagues he was returned to Japan under the surveillance of Japanese police.

New Buddhist Initiatives: The Reiyūkai, a Nationalist Buddhist Development

Although the Taishō Era followed the Meiji nationalist track, a co-existent international mood penetrated even into the popular religions. An expression of this new internationalism can be seen in the stronger position of Buddhist ideas in Japan. Faith in the *Lotus Scripture*, particularly promoted by the Buddhist prophet Nichiren (1222–82) in the Kamakura Period, had remained a living force of Japanese popular religion. New Religious Movements of this Nichiren trend had already appeared: in late Tokugawa the Honmon Butsuryōkō arose as a lay organization for the propagation of the Lotus faith.²⁸ In the Meiji Period the Remmonkyo followed, but as this body failed to obtain a legal position within the Sect Shintō doctrinal regulations, it disappeared.²⁹ Both these movements suffered persecution from the authorities. With the dawn of a liberal Taishō Period, however, the prevailing tolerant and international atmosphere conditioned new appearances of the Lotus faith. Reiyūkai, “Friends of the Spirit”, appeared in 1919. The year 1925, when it was reorganized by the carpenter Kubo Kokutarō (1890–1944) and the housewife Kotani Kimi (1901–71), is however, considered its founding year. Faith in the efficacy of the Lotus scripture was constitutive; but the religion also contained elements of shamanism and mountain ascetism (*shugendō*)—and, not to be overlooked, ancestor worship. The medieval prophet Nichiren had stressed the importance of three religious principles: object, method, and place of worship. The Reiyūkai considered the method of worship, the bodhisattva way, the foremost of these principles. Works of love combined with worship of the ancestors in an overall shamanist framework constituted its main ingredients. But Nichiren Buddhism was also strongly nationalist in its aim and appearance, dating back to the nationalist fervour of Nichiren himself. The nationalism of the Nichiren religions certainly enhanced its appeal in a Japanese environment where nationalist feelings, in spite of a trendy internationalism, ran deeply and decisively. The Nichiren religion, Reiyūkai, certainly thrived in this atmosphere of the 1920s, with its complex national and international aspects.³⁰

With the Reiyūkai, the Nichiren type of popular faith broke through decisively in the realm of New Religious Movements. Parallel to the Shintō tradition, Nichiren Buddhism proved a major force of popular, Japanese religious faith for decades to come.

²⁸ Murakami 1980: 17f.

²⁹ Murakami 1980: 50f.

³⁰ Cf. Murakami 1978: 411–19; Murakami 1980: 88–91; Thomsen 1963: 110–16.

Summary

The national policy of religion during the first of these three periods of religious resurgence is characterized by a sophisticated, step by step application of the emperor system in Japan. Based on the restoration movement towards the end of the Tokugawa period, a Shintō-based politics of religion was firmly established shortly after the Meiji Restoration itself. The concept of the alleged non-religious State Shintō provided for a control of religions based on Shintō-ideas and an absolutist emperor system. The New Religious Movements which were born closely before, in, and after the Meiji period showed a social (Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō) as well as a quietist profile (Konkōkyō and Reiyūkai). Reflecting the mood of the times, the Shintō character was strongest in the early part of the period (Konkōkyō, Tenrikyō, Ōmotokyō), whereas the Nichiren Buddhist stream came more strongly to the forefront in the more international Taishō years. A typical feature of the developments of New Religious Movements during these years was a severe and restrictive encounter with the emperor system, particularly when the distinction between State Shintō and Sect Shintō became legally and administratively enforced. Although liberal trends and a relatively relaxed political atmosphere prevailed in the Taishō Period, there was consistently a close governmental surveillance and State Shintō based control of the New Religions Movements during the whole period. With the notable exception of Ōmotokyō, the New Religious Movements during the period of concern here adapted to legal categories which, although they implied compromise, provided options for expansion nationally and overseas.

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