

NOBUTA KISHIMOTO AND THE BEGINNINGS  
OF THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION  
IN MODERN JAPAN

*Norihisa Suzuki*  
*St. Paul's University*  
*Tokyo, Japan*

I

It is generally known that the modern scientific study of religion in the West was established by Max Müller with the publication of his *Lectures on the Science of Religion* in 1872. The religious situation in Japan at this time was hardly conducive to any such development. We find instead the continued proscription of Christianity and an absence of religious freedom. In the following year, however, public placards banning the Christian religion were removed by the new Meiji government, most immediately in response to mounting sentiment, both within Japan and without, against the forcible governmental suppression of a group of recently-discovered Roman Catholic descendants of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century converts in Urakami, Nagasaki.

For our purposes in this article it is of some interest to note that books attacking Christianity—called *hajasho*—began to be published in large numbers around this time. Written mostly by Buddhist priests, these were essentially efforts to defend

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Buddhism against the twin dangers of Christian proselytization, which the opening of Japan in 1858 had made possible after two centuries of isolation, and the government-sponsored movement to extricate Shinto from its previous baneful associations with Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri seisaku*). A detailed account of this publishing activity I have presented in another paper.<sup>1</sup> For present purposes, only a brief summary is necessary here.

The one distinctive feature of the *hajasho* of this period which separates them from the various earlier anti-Christian writings of the Tokugawa period is that, while the latter relied on one or more of a variety of popular prejudices for information on the foreign religion and assumed a strictly narrative form, the scholarly *hajasho* of this period clearly betray, for the first time, a studied reading of various Christian works. For instance, there is some evidence to show that a school operated by the Nishi Honganji sect of Shin Buddhism, a school called Gakurin, purchased and studied the Bible with great care in the closing years of the Tokugawa period. Indeed, in 1867 the study of refuting the claims of Christianity—*hajagaku*—was instituted as a regular departmental program of studies within its administrative structure.<sup>2</sup>

In the end, however, it must be said that *hajagaku* made no important contributions to the modern scientific study of religion (*shūkyōgaku*) in Japan. Though undeniably the formal

1. Suzuki Norihisa, "Nihon no han-kirisutokyō shisō no keifu" [A genealogy of anti-Christian thinking in Japan], *Shūkyō kenkyū*, 170 (1961). (Summary of a paper presented before the Japanese Association for Religious Studies.)
2. According to the *Ryūkyō daigaku sanbyakunen shi* [A tercentenary history of Ryūkyō University] (1939, p. 594), the total enrollment in the *hajagaku* department was limited to twenty in 1870.

study of a religion not one's own, *hajagaku* failed to transcend its essentially apologetic character. While admittedly the term "science of religion" enjoys a wide variety of usages today, it is difficult for us to identify *hajagaku* with what is meant by "the science of religion" in a strict sense. For in order for the modern scientific study of religion to acquire respectability as an academic field of study, a serious effort must be made to adopt a value-neutral posture *vis-à-vis* religions in general.

At what point, then, did the first real contact with *shūkyōgaku*, as we have defined it, take place in Japan? Nanjō Bunyū<sup>3</sup> can be regarded as the first Japanese to have made contact with what may safely be called the science of religion. Nanjō, along with a certain Kasahara Kenju, had been sent by the Higashi Honganji sect to England in 1876. There he became a student of Müller, but what Nanjō received from Müller were lessons on Buddhism. That is, Nanjō achieved his reputation as a Buddhologist rather than as a scholar of religions in general, while the gifted Kasahara died before making any achievements.

A month following Nanjō's return to Japan in May 1884,<sup>4</sup> a certain Ishikawa Shundai spoke of "the science of religion" – to my knowledge the first usage of the term in Japan. In an article entitled "Kankyo jiyō" [Observations on the contemporary religious situation] prepared for the sixth volume of the work, *Kyōgaku ronshū* [Collected treatises on Buddhist doctrine], Ishikawa wrote:

While I am personally a believer of the Shinshū sect, I acknowledge the value of conducting my discussion here from a point of view beyond my own

3. Except for title and author, all Japanese names in this article are given in Japanese order: first the surname, then the personal name. Ed.

4. *Reichikai zasshi*, vol. 2 (1884).

religious commitments, namely, from the standpoint of the science of religion (*science de religion*).

It seems that the term Ishikawa used, *shūkyōgaku*, was a translation from the French, but it is impossible to tell whether he learned the word during his tour of several European countries in 1872 for the Higashi Honganji sect or only later acquired his familiarity with it.

Following Ishikawa's usage of the term in 1884, such educational institutions as Dōshisha's College of English (in its Department of Theology)<sup>5</sup> and the Institute of Philosophy (*Tetsugakkan*)<sup>6</sup> founded by Inoue Enryo inaugurated lectures on "the science of religion" in 1887. Two years later, Tokyo Imperial University instituted lectures in "Comparative Religion and Oriental Philosophy,"<sup>7</sup> by which time Meiji Women's High School (*Meiji jōgakkō*) also established an academic program in "Comparative Religions."<sup>8</sup> It is also believed that the

5. *Dōshisha gojūnen shi* [A fifty-year history of Dōshisha University] (1930, p. 227).
6. *Tōyō daigaku sōritsu gojūnen shi* [A history of Tōyō University on its fiftieth anniversary] (1937, pp. 11-16). The offering of a course in *shūkyōgaku* was announced in the prospectus of the Institute of Philosophy, but it is not clear whether the course was ever taught under that title. A class in "philosophy of religion" was taught in the third year, however. Moreover, we know that the Institute published lectures on "the theoretical study of religion" and "the practical study of religion" for the benefit of auditing students.
7. *Tōkyō teikoku daigaku gojūnen shi* [A fifty-year history of Tokyo Imperial University] (1932, p. 1307). In the *Shūkyōgaku kiyō* [Bulletin for the study of religion], in its special memorial issue commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of *shūkyōgaku* as an academic discipline, Inoue Tetsujirō stated that the lectures on "Comparative Religion and Oriental Philosophy" began in the spring of 1891. Though a course with the same title was offered in the Department of French Literature two years earlier, the course in question was most likely not offered until the spring of 1891 after Inoue's return to Japan in 1890.
8. Meiji Women's High School placed a notice in volume 173 (1889) of the

Protestant Seminary of the General Evangelical Church and the Tokyo San'ichi Seminary of the Anglican Episcopal Church were offering lectures in the study of religion and related subjects in the same years.<sup>9</sup>

The second half of the 1880s thus witnessed the appearance of lectures in *shūkyōgaku* at a number of educational institutions. (The reasons for this development I shall discuss on another occasion, owing to limitations of space here.) However, this promising development did not, in the end, firmly implant the science of religion in Japanese soil. Of the above-mentioned schools, some suspended their lectures after a short time while others went completely out of existence.

It was not until the inauguration of a lectureship in the science of religion at Tokyo Imperial University's College of Liberal Arts in 1905 that *shūkyōgaku* acquired the respectability of an academic field of study for the first time. The professor in charge of these lectures was the well-known scholar of religion Anesaki Masaharu.

But the story begins somewhat earlier with a different personality. Nine years earlier, in 1896, Anesaki and a certain

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*Jogaku zasshi* identifying the course as an elective. The name of the instructor is unknown.

9. According to Minami Hajime in his *Nihon ni okeru jiyū kirisutokyō to sono senkusha* [Liberal Christianity and its pioneers in Japan] (Bunshoin, 1935, p. 251), a certain Otto Schmiedel lectured on the science of religion at the Protestant Seminary. The timing is not entirely clear, but as Schmiedel arrived in Japan in 1887 and returned to Germany in 1892, the lectures would of course have been given between these two dates. Again, at the Tokyo San'ichi Theological Seminary a man named Isaac Dooman lectured on the subject, subsequently publishing his lectures in 1892 under the title *Hikaku shūkyōgaku* [The philosophy of comparative religions] (translated by Yoneda Shōtarō and published by the Anglican Episcopal publishing company).

Kishimoto Nobuta had established an organization known as the Society of Comparative Religion (*hikaku shūkyō gakkai*). As will be described below, Kishimoto played an exceedingly important role in the founding of this society. Moreover, it was primarily Kishimoto who bridged the earlier development of lectures at various educational institutions in the second half of the 1880s and the inauguration of the above-mentioned lectureship at Tokyo Imperial University in 1905. In this brief essay I would like to examine the early development of the science of religion in modern Japan, focusing on Kishimoto Nobuta and his understanding of this field of study.

## II

Kishimoto Nobuta was born in an area called Hanabatake in the castle town of Okayama on December 16, 1866, the second son of Taki Yoshio, a samurai retainer of the lord of Okayama fief.<sup>10</sup> When he was seven years old, according to one story, his mother took him to a tutelary shrine for his coming-to-boyhood ceremony. But the six-foot long cotton loincloth meant for adult wear, which this seven-year-old child had donned, came undone along the way, forcing him to walk home with the entire loincloth dangling from one hand.<sup>11</sup>

For three years, from August 1877 to July 1880, Kishimoto

10. This brief biographical statement is based on his *curriculum vitae* as it appears in the *Kyūshokuin meibō* [Register of former employees] put out by the Higher Normal School (predecessor of the present-day Tokyo University of Education). Kishimoto's handwritten account of his activities prior to September 1895 is also extant.
11. Nakayama Tarō, *Nihon wakamono shi* [A history of Japanese youth] (Nichibunsha, 1956, p. 46). Nakayama appears to have heard of this incident from Kishimoto himself.

attended the prefecturally administered middle school at a time when Christianity was first being introduced to the Okayama area. The foreign religion had been brought in initially by a youth who had returned from the United States a year or two prior to Kishimoto's entrance into middle school.<sup>12</sup> Though the youth died of illness soon after his return, the Christian message continued to be propagated under the active patronage of Nakagawa Yokotarō, a senior official of the prefecture and a Christian. In 1876 an American missionary doctor named Wallace Taylor arrived under the auspices of the American Board. From 1877 on, while Kishimoto was in middle school, Japanese missionary students from Dōshisha carried on active evangelistic work under the auspices of the same organization. Among them, Kanamori Tsūrin of the famous Kumamoto Band frequently visited Okayama to preach and in June 1879, following his graduation from Doshisha, stayed at Nakagawa's home while beginning full-time missionary work. The results of all this Christian activity were the establishment of the Okayama Church, the baptism of twenty-seven local persons by the famous Christian and founder of Dōshisha, Nijjima Jō, and on October 13, 1880, Kanamori's ordination to the clergy.

Following his graduation from middle school in 1880 at the age of fifteen, Kishimoto enrolled in the Department of Liberal Arts of the College of English at Dōshisha. (His enrollment there was probably not unrelated to the above-mentioned various contacts this university had with Kishimoto's native Okayama.) A year and a half later, in February 1882, he and

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12. Yuasa Yozō, *Kirisuto ni aru jiyū o motomete* [In search of freedom in Christ] (Yuasa, 1958, pp. 110-112).

his classmates, Abe Iso'o and Niihara Toshihide, were baptized by Niijima at the Dai-ichi Church on Imadegawa street in Kyoto.<sup>13</sup>

In June 1884 Kishimoto and classmates graduated from the Department of Liberal Arts of the College of English. Only ten remained of the thirty students who had been admitted together four years earlier. Of the ten, Murai Tomoji, Yamoka Kunisaburō, Abe, Niihara, and Kishimoto were known as "the five friends." For his graduation ceremony, Kishimoto recited in English an essay he had written entitled "Society and the Individual." At that time, Kishimoto still possessed his original surname, Taki, while Abe was still Takeuchi. According to the latter, the two later changed their names to avoid military service. As eldest sons were exempt from conscription, they managed to have themselves nominally adopted as eldest sons by families hitherto unknown to them.

Kishimoto's activities during the next ten months are unknown, but it is likely that he was engaged in evangelistic work in the Kansai area. We know, for instance, that he and his senior at Dōshisha, Ōnishi Hajime, paid a visit to a church in Kurashiki during that time.<sup>14</sup>

In April 1885 he entered the Department of Theology of the same College of English at Dōshisha and continued to preach the Christian faith in various areas of the Kansai. We know he toured Kyushu as well. For instance, Ishii Jūji, the well-

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13. Abe Iso'o, *Shakaishugisha to naru made* [Until I became a socialist] (Myōzensha, 1947, p. 90).

14. *Kurashiki kirisuto kyōkai ryakushi* [A brief history of the Kurashiki Christian Church] (1935, p. 13).



known Christian and founder of Okayama Orphanage, noted in his journal for March 23, 1885, that "our friends, Kishimoto and Kayashima, left Takanabe today." This was a reference to Kishimoto's trip to Takanabe, Ishii's home town in Miyazaki Prefecture. In the same journal some three weeks later Ishii wrote, "I will never forget Kishimoto Nobuta's departure for Kyoto." Again, during the winter vacation in late 1886, Kishimoto, together with his friends Abe and Kanamori, departed on foot on a missionary tour from Kyoto to Okayama, stopping at Akashi, Himeji, Ako, and Kagato in Bizen along the way.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to missionary activities Kishimoto worked in the Department of Liberal Arts of the College of English as a teaching assistant in English, math, and other subjects, during his days in the Department of Theology. It is interesting to note that the catalog of courses offered by the department lists "Science of Religion" as a regular major, with "Oral Dictation in Comparative Religion and Theology" scheduled for the third term of the third year. It is probable that he took the course. If so, this was his first exposure to *shūkyōgaku*.

On graduating from the Department of Theology in 1887, Kishimoto taught English and history as a part-time instructor at a middle school in Shiga Prefecture for some eighteen months. Following that brief assignment, he taught psychology, economics, history, and English for an equally short period of time at the Tōka School in Sendai.

In September 1890, at the age of twenty-five, Kishimoto entered the Divinity School at Harvard University. There he probably attended George Foot Moore's lectures on the history

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15. Abe, op. cit., p. 131.

of religion.<sup>16</sup> His main topics of research and study while at Harvard were the philosophy of religion, comparative religion, Sanskrit, and Pali. In 1891 he and his friend Murai Tomoji, who was then studying at Andover Theological Seminary, went to welcome their mutual friend Abe Iso'o when the latter arrived in Boston en route to Hartford Theological Seminary. While in the United States, the three young men were much influenced by the teachings of the Unitarian Church. (Later they would carry out many activities under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Association.) Kishimoto graduated from the Divinity School with a Bachelor of Divinity degree in June 1893; he also earned an M.A. in philosophy of religion from the Harvard Graduate School.

In September 1893 the Parliament of World Religions was held in Chicago as a part of the World Exposition of that year. Kishimoto joined the Japanese delegation, which included such people as Shibata Rei'ichi, Hirai Kinzō, Shaku Sōen, and Kozaki Hiromichi, and delivered an address there. In April 1894 he was recommended for membership to the American Oriental Society, and in June he passed his oral examinations for the Ph.D. at Harvard. He never submitted the dissertation, however. In July he returned home.

On his return to Japan, Kishimoto, now twenty-nine years old, began teaching the science of religion at Tokyo Senmon College and the Universalist Theological Seminary. Tokyo Senmon College, predecessor of the present Waseda University, appointed him lecturer of a course called "Comparative Re-

16. Kitagawa Mitsuo [Joseph M. Kitagawa], "Beikoku shūkyōgaku no tenbō (jō)" [A review of religious studies in America, part 1], *Shūkyō kenkyū* 158 (1959).

ligions” offered in the third year of study in the Department of Liberal Arts.<sup>17</sup> He may have owed his appointment at Senmon College to Ōnishi Hajime, who came from the same district and was his senior at Dōshisha, as Ōnishi had been teaching there for a time.

Kishimoto’s lectures at Senmon College were compiled into a booklet entitled *Shūkyō no hikakuteki kenkyū* [The comparative study of religion] and published in 1895, the year following his return to Japan. In this booklet he pointed out that magazines of late had been asking such questions as “Is Shinto a religion?” and “What should be the role of religion in Japan’s future?” This was a response to the increasing public interest in the question of religion, spurred by events such as the publication of Inoue Tetsujiro’s *Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* [The confrontation between education and religion] in 1893, which set off a major intellectual debate, and the above-mentioned Parliament of World Religions in Chicago.

Kishimoto’s response to the question could not limit itself to what was of mere contemporary interest, however. Rather, as an academician, he sought to explain the importance of promoting interest in the science of religion. “Religion,” according to Kishimoto, “is deeply related to the stirrings of the human heart. Moreover, nothing has influenced society as much as religion.”

Kishimoto suggested three basic approaches to the study of religion: the analytical, the historical, and the comparative. The first is to study the various structural components of a religion; in the case of Shinto, for instance, the components

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17. *Chūō jivon* 7 (1894), p. 38.

would be gods, beliefs, rituals, and the like. The historical method is to give priority to the development of, and changes in, a given religion. Finally, the comparative method (*shūkyō-gaku* in the strict sense) is to study one religion in the context of another. For this last-mentioned method, according to him, an extensive knowledge of several religions and an impartial attitude are prerequisite. The comparative method, moreover, often implies the other two approaches insofar as similarities and differences among religions in their structural components, as well as processes of change and development, are observed. Also, the comparative method cannot ignore the influences religions have had on one another. Finally, it requires observation of their similarities and, eventually, arriving at a definition of religion.

The above-mentioned features of the science of religion as Kishimoto conceived them in his *Shūkyō no hikakuteki kenkyū* remain vital to the field today. There is, however, one important difference. Kishimoto thought the various religions ought to be judged in terms of their intrinsic importance. Though he argued strongly in behalf of impartiality, he felt a need to evaluate the character of the various objects of worship. This was one part of his particular understanding of the science of religion. The value of a religion can be quickly established, he claimed, by observing whether the character of its object of worship is concordant with the findings of scholarship and the demands of morality. Not unrelated to his defense of evaluation by scientific means was his belief that Japan provided the best setting for comparative religious studies as she had in her past absorbed various different religions and could potentially

give birth to “a perfect religion.”

The Universalist Theological Seminary in Iida-cho, Tokyo, at which Kishimoto also lectured on his return from America, was a seminary affiliated with the Universalist Church. In marked contrast to the doctrine of predestination the Universalist Church believes in the salvation of all mankind. It differs from other Christian sects principally on this point. (Originally introduced to Japan by George L. Perin in 1890, it is believed that Nakamura Keiu was responsible for translating the faith taught by this church as *uchūshinkyō*.)<sup>18</sup> The Universalist Church, together with the General Evangelical Church and the Unitarian Church, belonged to liberal Christianity, a fact which accounts for the ease of movement from one to another and Kishimoto's lecturing at the Universalist Theological Seminary. It can be presumed that his lectures there were in content substantially the same as his lectures at the Tokyo Senmon College. Having seriously studied the science of religion at Harvard, Kishimoto was fortunate to come home at a time when interest in the science of religion was being increasingly expressed.

In September 1894, shortly after his return, the reputable Christian journal *Rikugō zasshi* carried an article by him entitled “Hikaku shūkyōgaku no kenkyū ni tsuite” [On the comparative study of religion]. The following year, in January, he joined the editorial staff of the journal, thus becoming an associate of people like Ōnishi Hajime, Harada Tasuku, Matsumoto Matatarō, Ukita Kazutami, and Ono Eijirō. He was given responsibility for “all articles and other matters concern-

18. Minami, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

ing religion and morality."<sup>19</sup> The large number of essays he began to write at this time were compiled into his subsequently published book *Shūkyō kenkyū* [Religious studies] (Keiseisha, 1899).

In the meantime, from March 1895 to the end of the Sino-Japanese War in July of that year, he visited Korea and the Liaotung Peninsula at the behest of military authorities to survey local customs and religions. Following his return to Japan in September, he returned to his post at Tokyo Senmon College and taught sociology, art history, the history of Indian philosophy, and English. He taught in other institutions as well. At the Senshin School in Shiba, Tokyo, he taught such subjects as Indian philosophy, the history of Christian dogma, and English. At Aoyama Gakuin he taught psychology, the history of Western philosophy, world history, and English. He also taught English at the middle school affiliated with the Higher Normal School. From these various teaching assignments, we can see the breadth of the man's scholarly interests.

### III

On September 26, 1896 a group of forty-two religious people--nineteen Buddhists, sixteen Christians, two Shintoists, and five unaffiliated persons--gathered at Viscount Matsudaira Yoshinaga's villa in Shiba, Tokyo to hold an informal meeting on religion where views could be exchanged freely. The meeting had been organized by men affiliated with the journal *Nihon shūkyō*, men such as the Christians Togawa Antaku and Iwamoto Zenji and the Buddhists Ōuchi Seiran and Shaku Sōen. Publi-

19. *Rikugō zasshi* 166 (1894).

cized also as a Buddhist-Christian dialogue, its main objective was to explore ways to reduce the tension between the two religions. It seems clear that the "ecumenical" spirit of the Parliament of World Religions held three years earlier in Chicago played no small role in bringing these men of diverse backgrounds together. Shaku Sōen, for instance, participated in both.

Not all religious people shared in the spirit of the meeting, however, and even before it occurred, rumors flew about wildly. Its most extreme critics suggested that the meeting was a scheme to fuse Christianity and Buddhism into some fantastic new Japanese religion. This surely was not the case.

Something of the character of the meeting can be inferred by examining the list of participants.<sup>20</sup> The major sects and denominations of Buddhism and Christianity were not represented. This was especially conspicuous on the Christian side. Criticized from the very beginning by the *Fukuin shinpō*, organ of the Japan Christian Church (*Nihon kirisuto kyōkai*), the Christian participants were mainly Congregationalists affiliated with Dōshisha.

For our purposes, the most significant consequence of the meeting was the decision to establish some kind of society for the study of comparative religion. The actual course of events leading up to the establishment of the Society of Comparative Religion (*hikaku shūkyō gakkai*) was later recorded as follows:

On September 26, 1896 a group of people with a commitment to religion met at Viscount Matsudaira's villa in Shiba to exchange views on religion in an open discussion. In the course of the discussion two of the participants, Kishimoto Nobuta and Anesaki Masaharu, raised the question of establish-

20. *Nihon shūkyō* 4 (1895).

ing a scholarly society to promote research in comparative religion. An outline of a plan to establish such a society was submitted. Later, on the first of November, Anesaki called on Kishimoto and the two drew up concrete plans. They agreed to hold the first meeting on the fourteenth of the following month and invite all interested persons. When they met again on the seventh of November at an alumni association meeting, they decided to hold the first meeting at the Kanda Youth Hall.<sup>21</sup>

Anesaki Masaharu had been listed on the register of participants at the Shiba gathering as a writer for the religious column in the *Taiyō*.<sup>22</sup> He had begun to take an interest in the science of religion two years earlier and had come to be known through his publishing of the journal *Teikoku bungaku* with Ueda Bin, Takayama Chogyū, and others. In the interim he had graduated from Tokyo Imperial University with a major in philosophy and entered its graduate school. It seems likely that Kishimoto came to know him through their common interest in the science of religion and Indian philosophy. Following their meeting, Kishimoto assisted Anesaki in many ways. For instance, Anesaki's article "Bakabonka no tetsugaku oyobi shūkyō" [Philosophy and religion in the Bhagavad Gita], serialized in the *Rikugō zasshi* over five issues in late 1895 and early 1896, was probably published by Kishimoto, an editor of the journal at the time.

As mentioned earlier, Kishimoto and Anesaki met twice after the Shiba gathering to organize a society for the study of comparative religion. Their efforts bore fruit on November 14, 1896 when, at the Christian Youth Hall in Kanda, Tokyo, the Society of Comparative Religion held its first meeting. The records of that meeting give us some sense of what it was all

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21. *Shūkyō* 62 (1896).

22. *Nihon shūkyō* 4 (1895).



about.

The evening of November 14, 1896 was rainy. Eight people appeared as expected: Anesaki Masaharu, Hirota Ichijō, Kishimoto Nobuta, Sasaki Yūkei, Shirayama Kenchi, Taki Sei'ichi, Watanabe Kaigyoku, and Yoshida Kenryū. Anesaki started out by commenting on a most unusual phenomenon: dragon-serpent worship in India and China. Many remarks and facts concerning this phenomenon were offered. For instance, the dragon is supposed to have evolved from the serpent. Naga, the dragon worshiped in India, has no horns like those his Chinese counterpart wears. The serpent in Japan and in other countries is said to possess female characteristics such as lustfulness, jealousy, beauty, cleverness, and so on. The reasons for this will be discussed later.

In Japan Benzaiten and the deities of Gion and Suwa shrines are associated with dragon-serpent worship. Each one ought to be researched carefully. Dragon-serpent worship is often associated with the worship of trees and shrubs.

Linguistic problems concerning dragon-serpent worship include similarities and differences in meaning among the following: *ryū* and *hebi*, *tatsu* and *mi*, *Nāga* and *Sarpā*, *Drachen* (dragon) and *Schlange* (serpent). The etymology of each word should be researched. For instance, does the *kuchi* of *kuchinawa* derive from the word "mouth" or the word "to decay"?

Research ought to be done on the relation between the dragon-serpent and other reptiles such as crocodiles and lizards, and in turn, their relation to Suitengū and Konpira.

What is the significance of the crocodile in the *Kojiki*?

At this point Hirota Ichijō introduced the problem of *goma*. *Goma* (Sanskrit, *homa*) are of four kinds, and each one involves a different utensil.

The problem of Fudō Myōō (Sanskrit, *Acala*) was also taken up.

The topics for the next meeting were decided on as follows: Kishimoto Nobuta will lead a discussion on sacred numbers, Watanabe Kaigyoku on religious rites and customs associated with carnal desire.

Meetings will be held on the second Saturday every month at the Kanda Youth Hall. Members, in alphabetical order, will take turns chairing the meeting as well as recording its proceedings. Anesaki Masaharu was first. Hirota Ichijō will chair the next meeting. Each member is requested to invite seriously interested persons to join the Society. However, for the time being, the total membership should not exceed twenty.<sup>23</sup>

What were the backgrounds of the other six participants at

23. *Shūkyō* 62 (1896).

the meeting? Hirota Ichijō was a graduate student at Tokyo Imperial University who had graduated from its Philosophy Department together with Anesaki and had also attended the meeting on religion held in Shiba. Shirayama Kenchi was a student at Senshin School and probably one of Kishimoto's

**Table 1. The Society of Comparative Religion**  
—Meetings, Subjects, and Number of Participants—

Meeting No.	Date	Subject	No. of Participants
1	November 14, 1896	Dragon-serpents; <i>goma</i> rites	8
2	December 12, 1896	Sacred numbers	10
3	January 9, 1897	Carnal lust	5
3*	February 13, 1897	Carnal lust	5
4	March 13, 1897	Taboos; abstinence	8
5	April 10, 1897	Taboos; abstinence	8
6	June 12, 1897	Gods and animals	4
	June 27, 1897	(Fellowship meeting)	6
7	November 13, 1897	Offerings	8
8	December 11, 1897	Festivals	7
9	January 15, 1898	Religious practices of the New Year	5
10	February 19, 1898	Religious practices in February-March	6
11	March 12, 1898	Religious practices in April-May	5
12	June 11, 1898	The death of Buddha, Christ, and Mohammad	8
13	July 2, 1898	(Fellowship meeting)	5
14	October 8, 1898	Religious practices in June-July	6
15	November 12, 1898	Religious practices August-October	5
16	December 10, 1898	Religious practices November-December	5
17	January 28, 1899	The gods and goddesses of Japan	6
18	April 23, 1899	The gods and goddesses of Japan	4
19	July 8, 1899	(Fellowship meeting)	Unknown
20	September 30, 1899	Study tour discussion	10
21	October 14, 1899	Magical practices and rites	12
22	November 12, 1899	Lecture on Koreyoshi Yūjirō	Approx. 20

\* The third meeting, though divided into two sessions meeting on different dates, was considered as a single meeting.

students. Taki Sei'ichi and Yoshida Kenryū were graduate students in the Philosophy Department of Tokyo Imperial University, a year behind Anesaki. Watanabe Kaigyoku had graduated from the Jōdo Buddhist Central School a year earlier. No information is available on Sasaki Yūkei.

At least thirty-three clearly identifiable people attended the meetings at one time or another, but the average number of participants per meeting was 6.6. Meetings whose participants are identifiable number twenty-two.

The Society of Comparative Religion formally ended its activities at its twenty-second meeting in November 1899, though two more meetings were subsequently held on an informal basis. Its self-dissolution was probably not unrelated to Anesaki's departure for Germany for study in the following spring. It is clear that Kishimoto and Anesaki were the two central pillars of this organization.

#### IV

Though both Kishimoto and Anesaki played central roles in the founding and continued existence of the Society of Comparative Religion, it can be presumed that Kishimoto, Anesaki's senior by eight years, was the more influential of the two within the Society. Indeed, Kishimoto looms in the background of most of Anesaki's activities up to his appointment as Lecturer on the science of religion at Tokyo Imperial University in 1905. For instance, it was probably Kishimoto who helped Anesaki have his work *Hikaku shūkyōgaku* [Comparative study of religion] published by the Tokyo Senmon College Press in July 1898. (This was a compilation of his lectures at the Jōdo Buddhist

Central School the previous year.)<sup>24</sup> Again, Kishimoto no doubt had a hand in the publication of the book which grew out of Anesaki's course on *shūkyōgaku* at Tokyo Imperial University in August 1898, the book entitled *Shūkyō gairon* [Introduction to the study of religion] published in March 1900.

Anesaki spent the next three years in Germany, returning home in 1903. In April 1905 he assumed the above-mentioned lectureship on the science of religion at Tokyo Imperial University. It was at this time, as pointed out above, that the field acquired the status of an established academic discipline for the first time in Japan. Though Kishimoto may have played no direct role in the establishment of this lectureship, there can be no ignoring of the fact that it was he who paved the way from the very beginning, from the birth of the Society of Comparative Religion until the field acquired respectability. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to examine briefly Kishimoto's academic career and activities during and after this important period.

Kishimoto became of editor of *Shūkyō*, the organ of the Unitarian Universalist Association in November 1896, the same month the Society came into existence. This explains why records of the Society's activities first appeared there. Moreover, he published many articles of his own on the science of religion in *Shūkyō*, thereby paving the way for others to follow.

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24. Anesaki, in the preface to his *Shūkyōgaku gairon* [Introduction to the science of religion] (1900), calls it the Jōdo Buddhist High School (*jōdo shū kōtō gakuin*). The 1926 *Taishō daigaku ichiran* [Taishō University catalog] states, however, that it was named Jōdo Buddhist Central School (*jōdo shū gaku honkō*) until 1898 when the name was changed to that used by Anesaki. Consequently, I have here called it the Jōdo Buddhist Central School.

Kishimoto at this time greatly expanded his activities. In January 1897 he, along with Ōnishi Hajime, Anesaki Masaharu, Yokoi Tokio and others, established the *Teiyū kondankai* [Teiyū study group]. Later in that year he assumed the post of chief editor of the *Rikugō zasshi*. Several months later he merged *Shūkyō* with this famous Christian journal as he felt his efforts were being duplicated. Moreover, in October 1898 he joined Katayama Sen, Saji Jitsunen, Kanda Saichirō, Murai Tomoji, and Kōtoku Shūsui in organizing the *Shakaishugi kenkyūkai* [Society for the study of socialism], a historic event in the history of Japanese socialism.

In the following year he assumed a teaching position at the Higher Normal School. In December of that year he collected the articles he had published in *Shūkyō* and the *Rikugō zasshi* and published them through Keiseisha, a publishing house specializing in religious works, under the title *Shūkyō kenkyū* [Religious studies]. The chapters of this book were arranged as follows: Various Aspects of Religious Studies, The Classification of Religion (Parts I and II), The Origin of Religion, The Foundations of Religion, and Religious Progress.

Various reviews were included in the book when it appeared in a second edition. The journal *Nihonshugi* stated: "Where it discusses the progress of religion, it is essentially a defense of Unitarian dogma." This was an accurate observation, but there is no denying the fact that it was still the most appropriate primer on the science of religion available at the time, particularly in its discussions of the methodology, classification, and origins of religion.

Not long after, he compiled his journal articles, again from

*Shūkyō* and *Rikugō zasshi*, into a work titled *Rinri shūkyō jiron* [Contemporary ethics and religion] which Keiseisha published in September 1900. In November of the same year he published his *Shakaigaku* [Sociology], a compilation of his lectures at the Tokyo Senmon College the year before. This book subsequently became known within Japanese sociology as one of its earliest writings.

Kishimoto suspended his teaching at the Higher Normal School in November 1902 because he wanted to devote his energies to his position at the Tokyo Senmon College, which had been renamed Waseda University six months earlier.

In April 1902 Keiseisha published his *Nihonjin no go tokushitsu* [Five characteristics of the Japanese people], a work which had grown out of a series of lectures delivered at the Yui'itsukan in Shiba, Tokyo around 1895, together with articles carried in *Taiyō*. According to Kishimoto, the Japanese are fastidious and abhor impurity, have a cheerful spirit and a fondness for beauty, are shrewd and capable of adapting to new things, are affable and respect propriety, and are thrifty and just. When seen in the context of Kishimoto's hope for the appearance of "a perfect religion" in Japan, these observations on the Japanese character give us additional understanding as to the kind of science of religion he sought to develop. Though never a Nipponist, he was a Japanese who did feel partial to his own country.

Kishimoto's writings on the science of religion ceased with the publication of his *Hikaku shūkyō ippan* [A miscellany on the comparative study of religion] in July 1902. This was a republication of his earlier *Shūkyō no hikakuteki kenkyū* with two articles added: "Magical Religion and Moral Religion" and "Three

Historical Stages in the Conceptualization of Purity and Impurity.” These two articles clearly reveal Kishimoto’s Unitarian sensitivities, strongly moral and progressive, as the reviewer of his *Shūkyō kenkyū* had pointed out.

Six months following Kishimoto’s final publication, Anesaki returned home from Germany after a stopover in India. Kishimoto at this point terminated his activities in the science of religion and allowed Anesaki to assume leadership of the field.

We have observed briefly the various characteristics of Kishimoto’s science of religion. It was imbued with the idea of progress and it was grounded in morality. Moreover, it was partial to Japan. He began with the insistence on approaching religion in a scholarly manner, but he also laid great stress on the value of Japanese culture and religion. He sought to locate his moral religion in Christianity, but he never felt Christianity had a monopoly on morality.

But we do not sufficiently understand the importance of these characteristics unless we see what they do *not* imply. What would be antagonistic to his understanding of religion? First of all, to view religion not in a scholarly way but purely as a matter of revelation would be antithetical to Kishimoto’s approach. Moreover, Japanese religion and culture would be ranked low. Christianity would be upheld as the only true religion, and other religions would have to be rejected.

These were, of course, the very characteristics of the thinking of “orthodox” Japanese Christians at this time. If the *Nihon kirisuto kyōkai* [Church of Christ in Japan] is identified as the “mainstream” of modern Japanese Christianity, those affiliated

with Dōshisha and the Congregationalists would have to be labelled “anti-mainstream.” The Unitarians in this frame of reference would be outright heretics, and Kishimoto, as an “anti-mainstreamer,” would be found in the heretical camp. His baptism into the science of religion at Dōshisha and his studies at Harvard had steered him in this direction. But Kishimoto was certainly not alone in this. The early supporters of the science of religion were as one in reacting consciously to the “orthodox” group.<sup>25</sup> This reaction invited stepped-up efforts on the part of the “mainstream” group to strengthen their “orthodoxy.”

In June 1908 Kishimoto assumed another teaching position, this time in the English Department at Waseda University. It was from this time on that he became known more as a scholar of the English language than of religion. According to his friend Abe Iso'o, Kishimoto's ability in English was more pronounced in his command of grammar and phonetics than in his English conversation.<sup>26</sup> Anesaki had an explanation for Kishimoto's departure from the field he had worked so hard to have recognized. Kishimoto had apparently incurred a debt while at Harvard which he found extremely difficult to repay after returning to Japan. The English language he found more profitable than the study of religion.<sup>27</sup>

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25. According to *Waseda gakuho* 19 (1898), Anesaki had been lecturing on the comparative study of religion at Tokyo Senmon College since September 1898. From this we may suppose that Kishimoto, who had been lecturing there up to this time, may already have abandoned the science of religion by 1898.

26. Abe, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

27. Anesaki Chōfū [Anesaki Masaharu], *Waga shōgai* [My life] (Yōtokusha, 1951, p. 8).



His departure from the field did not deter him from practicing the Okada method of seated meditation. He became quite absorbed in it and later published a book called *Okada shiki seiza sannen* [Three years with the Okada method of seated meditation] (1915). This, along with his activities in behalf of the Unitarian group *Kōdōkai*, was an expression of his inability to divorce himself from the pursuit of a religious life, though he had severed formal ties with the science of religion. Moreover, it showed that his understanding of the science of religion rested not only on the doctrines of morality and progress and his partiality to Japan but also on a deep personal search for the right way.

We have focused on the figure of Kishimoto Nobuta in our brief survey of the early history and distinctive characteristics of the field known as the science of religion.<sup>28</sup> We could, of course, have just as well selected Anesaki Masaharu. In any event the point to be emphasized is that the contemporary study of religion in Japan still manifests many of the interests and tendencies exemplified by these early pioneers.

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This paper is incomplete as it stands and contains a number of points that may seem questionable and obscure. Any criticisms of it will be most welcome. I wish to thank the Tokyo University of Education, Mr. Nakanishi Keijirō of the Editorial Office in charge of writing the history of Waseda University, and Mr. Yanagawa Kei'ichi of the University of Tokyo for their assistance in the preparation of this paper.

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28. Kishimoto Nobuta's son is, of course, Kishimoto Hideo, chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo until his death in 1964.

Glossary

Abe Iso'o	阿部磯雄	mi	巳
Anesaki Masaharu	姉崎正治	Murai Tomoji	村井知至
Aoyama Gakuin	青山学院	Nanjō Bunyū	南条文雄
Dōshisha	同志社	Nihon kirisuto kyōkai	日本基督教会
Fudō Myōō	下動明王	<i>Nihonshugi</i>	日本主義
<i>Fukuin Shinpō</i>	福音新報	<i>Nihon shūkyō</i>	日本宗教
goma	護摩	Niijima Jō	新島襄
hajagaku	破邪学	Nishi Honganji	西本願寺
hajasho	破邪書	Ōnishi Hajime	大西祝
Harada Tasuku	原田助	<i>Rikugō zasshi</i>	六合雜誌
hebi	蛇	ryū	龍
Higashi Honganji	東本願寺	Senshin Gakuin	先進学院
Hikaku shūkyō gakkai	比較宗教学会	shinbutsu bunri seisaku	神仏分離政策
<i>Kankyō jiyō</i>	観教時様	shūkyōgaku	宗教学
Kasahara Kenju	笠原研寿	<i>Shūkyōgaku gairon</i>	宗教学概論
Kishimoto Nobuta	岸本能武太	<i>Shūkyō no hikakuteki kenkyū</i>	宗教の比較的研究
Kōdōkai	弘道会	<i>Taiyō</i>	太陽
<i>Kōjiki</i>	古事記	tatsu	辰
Kozaki Hiromichi	小崎弘道	<i>Teikoku bungaku</i>	帝国文学
kuchinawa	くち縄	Tetsugakkan	哲学館
<i>Kyōgaku ronshū</i>	教学論集	Tōkyō San'ichi Shingakkō	東京三一神学校
<i>Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu</i>	教育と宗教ノ衝突	uchūshinkyō	宇宙神教