



Franz Winter, *Hermes und Buddha: Die neureligiöse Bewegung Kōfuku no Kagaku in Japan*

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FRANZ WINTER'S new monograph, whose title translates as *Hermes and Buddha: The New Religious Movement Kōfuku no Kagaku in Japan*, is of great interest to scholars of Japanese religions, especially those who are working on the contemporary period and new religious movements. The book focuses on Kōfuku no Kagaku, one of Japan's "new new religions"—in other words, new religious movements that have grown popular since the 1970s. After Nishiyama Shigeru 西山 茂 first coined the term *shin shinshūkyō* 新新宗教 (occasionally also translated as "neo-new religions") in 1979, this field of research initially focused primarily on Mahikari but has been dominated since 1995 by studies on Aum Shinrikyo, the apocalyptic movement that perpetrated a sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in that year. Other new new religions such as Kōfuku no Kagaku, Agonshū, Shinnyoen, GLA, and Pana Wave Laboratory have received less scholarly attention.

As is evident not only in the large amount of scholarship on the movement and its social impact but also in the emergence of a vigorous anti-cult movement in Japan, Aum Shinrikyo has certainly had a more dramatic effect than Kōfuku no Kagaku on Japanese religions during the so-called "Lost Decades" (1990s–present). Nevertheless, Kōfuku no Kagaku—which used to be known in English as "Institute for Research in Human Happiness" but now employs the name "Happy Science" outside Japan—is an important movement in its own right. Previous scholarship in European languages is limited to three doctoral dissertations (WIECZOREK 2002; BAFFELLI 2004; FUKUI 2004) and a few articles (ASTLEY 1995; YAMASHITA 1998; FUKUI 1999; HERMANSEN 2007; SCHRIMPF 2008; SHIELDS 2009; TSUKADA 2012).

Except for two articles authored by Winter (WINTER 2008; 2013), the other scholars' research has focused on millennialism, the media, cultural nationalism, and the concept of happiness. While Winter also engages these issues, he delves in far greater detail into Kōfuku no Kagaku's history and doctrine, an aspect that is rarely emphasized in the existing literature.

Winter has doubtlessly written the definitive reference work on Kōfuku no Kagaku's teachings and its founder, Ōkawa Ryūhō (b. 1956). Winter argues against reducing the study of new religions to a search for sociological and psychological explanations of why adherents are drawn to new religions and strongly criticizes the so-called "crisis model" that depicts members of new religions as driven into the arms of new religious organizations due to their anxiety in periods of profound social change. While Winter did engage directly with Kōfuku no Kagaku followers, his study is not centered on fieldwork, unlike many recent anthropological and sociological studies of new religions. Readers learn very little about the daily practices and lives of Kōfuku no Kagaku members. Instead, Winter aims to systematically explore the teachings that Kōfuku no Kagaku has offered its adherents. The exhaustive detail of his study makes it a useful sourcebook on Kōfuku no Kagaku's teachings.

In chapter A.1, Winter provides a concise overview of the study of Japanese new religions. He begins with a brief introduction to various terms that are used to designate new religions in Japanese. He ultimately settles for *shinshūkyō* 新宗教 (new religion), which tends to be contrasted with the terms *kisei shūkyō* 既成宗教 (established religion) or *dentō shūkyō* 伝統宗教 (traditional religion). With this choice, Winter conforms to the practice of most contemporary Japanese scholars of religion and reinforces the academic move away from such pejorative terms as *shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教 (newly arisen religion) that are still favored by journalists and critics of these movements. He follows the terminological review with a critical synopsis of the identifying characteristics and periodization used in previous scholarship on Japanese new religions. He notes the negative bias of many studies that embrace the "crisis model" and depict these movements as unsophisticated, only able to appeal to the uneducated masses. Most relevantly for the topic of his monograph, he ends this chapter with an examination of the debate surrounding the term "new" new religions and outlines their relationship with the popularity of New Age spirituality and the occult. While this chapter offers few new insights and largely summarizes the current state of the field, it is nonetheless a useful primer and prepares readers for the chapters that follow.

The next two chapters contain a comprehensive synopsis of Kōfuku no Kagaku's history and teachings. Chapter A.2—the longest chapter in the book at about a hundred pages—chronicles Kōfuku no Kagaku's beginnings as a study group around Ōkawa Ryūhō; Ōkawa's metamorphosis from a spirit medium into a reincarnation of the Buddha and then into an earthly manifestation of the supreme spirit being El Cantare; the movement's responses to aggressive criticism by the mass media and to

the backlash against alternative religion in the wake of the Aum Shinrikyo incident; and its increasing international outreach and domestic institutionalization. Chapter A.3 surveys various media in which Kōfuku no Kagaku has presented its teachings with great creativity, from printed books and magazines to audio and video recordings, as well as *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animated films).

Each of the next four chapters singles out a specific aspect of Kōfuku no Kagaku's teachings—the movement's view of history, the roles of Hermes and Jesus, and Ōkawa's channeling of messages from the spirit world. Chapter B.1 provides an exhaustive treatment of Kōfuku no Kagaku's adaptations of ancient civilizations (including ancient Greek, Indian, and South American cultures), as well as the myths of lost continents (Mu and Atlantis) and of ancient civilizations founded by extraterrestrial aliens. According to Ōkawa, El Cantare has been reborn multiple times in human history, beginning with La Mu and Thoth on the lost continents of Mu and Atlantis, respectively. He then appeared as Rient Arl Croud in the Incan Empire, Ophealis and Hermes in ancient Greece, and Gautama Siddhartha in India before being reincarnated as Ōkawa in modern Japan. Scholars of Japanese religions will find Winter's comparisons of Kōfuku no Kagaku's adaptations with those offered by GLA and Mahikari to be particularly enlightening. Likewise, Winter's discussion of the Japanese reception of the Atlantis and Mu myths and the links with millennialism in late twentieth-century Japan are also fascinating and illustrate that contemporary Japanese religions are embedded in a complex global web of New Age and intellectual concepts.

The following two chapters, though brief, constitute the basis for the title of the monograph. Chapter B.2 examines the role of the Greek deity Hermes in Ōkawa's teachings. As one of several earthly manifestations of El Cantare, Hermes is the second most prominent figure after the Buddha, to whom Winter devotes much attention in chapter A.2. Ōkawa's Hermes emerges as a romantic hero who embodies love and progress leading to success in life, in contrast to the Buddha who embodies wisdom and self-reflection. These four fundamental principles—love, wisdom, self-reflection, and progress—are central to the attainment of human happiness.

In chapter B.3, Winter discusses Kōfuku no Kagaku's adaptation of Jesus. According to Ōkawa, Jesus spent his adolescence and early adulthood studying the religious traditions of Egypt, India, and Persia before starting his own teaching career under the protection of Hermes. Winter explains that Ōkawa casts Jesus as a subordinate of Hermes in order to distinguish his teachings from those of Takahashi Shinji 高橋信次 (1927–1976), the founder of GLA, who considered Judeo-Christian figures such as Moses, Jesus, and the Archangel Michael central to his cosmology.

In chapter B.4, Winter explores Ōkawa's channeling of voices from the spirit world. Early in his career as a spiritual leader, Ōkawa published a series of books that recorded verbal transmissions (*reigen* 靈言) from famous historical and religious figures inhabiting the spirit world. Winter places Ōkawa's communication with spirits in the dual contexts of traditional Japanese spirit mediation and mod-

ern spiritist channeling, which became popular in nineteenth-century Europe and North America. In fact, Ōkawa regarded himself an heir to both traditions. As Winter notes, Ōkawa's channeling provided his early followers with truths about the spirit world; however, later in his career Ōkawa no longer focused on transmitting messages from spirits but proclaimed spiritual truths in his role as the contemporary earthly incarnation of El Cantare.

Winter concludes that Kōfuku no Kagaku illustrates many characteristic elements of contemporary Japanese religiosity but that it also is very distinctive. He notes that the movement's adaptation of global spiritual concepts is a common characteristic of new religions. According to Winter, it is far more productive for researchers of new religions to focus on globalization, which highlights the movements' claims of universality, than to label these tendencies merely as syncretism, which generally assumes that the movements are not original but derivative. Indeed, Winter seems to be following a trend in recent scholarship on new religions that addresses the issue of globalization (MURGUIA 2005; WHELAN 2007). Yet the concept of globalization needs to be employed cautiously: claims of universality are not limited to the new religions but also include established religions. And an embrace of globalization, depending on how it is understood, can have similar implications as "internationalization" (*kokusaika*; also translated as "internationalism"). As James Fujii and Marilyn Ivy have shown, late twentieth-century internationalization in Japan was "deliberately crafted as an alternative to Western paradigms of cultural and economic hegemony" (FUJII 1998) and served to "[domesticate] the foreign and [disseminate] Japanese culture throughout the world" (IVY 1995, 3). As such, internationalization, and globalization, can be intimately tied to Japanese uniqueness discourse.

Winter contends that Kōfuku no Kagaku's teachings embrace a degree of globalization that is rarely seen in other contemporaneous new religions. He argues that, when other newly-founded Japanese religions adopt non-Japanese notions, such as New Age concepts, they tend to root them firmly in a discourse of nationalism and Japanese uniqueness, if not cultural superiority; in contrast, Ōkawa consistently stresses his teachings' place in a global tradition. Winter seems to take a stance similar to Monika Schrimpf's position that Kōfuku no Kagaku displays less cultural essentialism than most Japanese uniqueness discourse (SCHRIMPF 2008). However, how are we to interpret Ōkawa's claims that famous historical and religious figures from all over the world were reborn as Japanese in recent history, including himself as El Cantare's contemporary reincarnation? Tsukada Hotaka's work suggests that Kōfuku no Kagaku does in fact have its own form of cultural nationalism, which Tsukada identifies as rooted in "economic supremacy" (TSUKADA 2012). Perhaps in this respect Kōfuku no Kagaku resembles some of the older new religions such as Soka Gakkai, which, under the leadership of Ikeda Daisaku, has presented itself as the guardian of a global, post-Enlightenment intellectual and cultural tradition (MCLAUGHLIN 2009).

Winter also argues that *Kōfuku no Kagaku* illustrates the processes by which a new religious movement develops a flexible, innovative doctrinal system through experimentation. Adherence to these teachings, which are represented in diverse media, promises followers personal and professional success. This, in turn, is said to foster the development of a utopian society in which everyone will find happiness by heeding Ōkawa's spiritual guidance. Again, one might point to similarities to post-war new religions, including Soka Gakkai, that have promised adherents worldly success and have made it their ultimate goal to foster an ideal society. However, Winter stresses that *Kōfuku no Kagaku* is different from other well-known "new" new religions (such as Aum Shinrikyo and Agonshū) since it does not emphasize the attainment of supernatural powers but promotes the cultivation of love as an antidote to rampant materialism and excessive rationalism.

Winter's monograph has been meticulously researched—including materials in Japanese, German, English, French, and Italian. The list of Ōgawa's works that Winter covers is exhaustive, including the Japanese originals and English and German translations, even one translation into Portuguese. These works are discussed in rich detail. However, readers who are not yet familiar with contemporary Japanese religions should be forewarned that the study is most likely not accessible to a novice reader. In order to appreciate the full relevance of *Kōfuku no Kagaku*'s role in contemporary Japan, readers often must be able to contextualize the rich data on their own, particularly in chapter A.2, which lacks a chapter introduction. In the other chapters, contextualization is largely limited to comparisons with other new religions and New Age culture. In contrast, Winter provides limited background on how *Kōfuku no Kagaku* relates to broader sociocultural trajectories and to modern established religions and older new religions in Japan.

For example, from the late twentieth century onward, discussions about the nature of and how to best attain personal happiness (*kōfuku* 幸福 or *shīawase* 幸せ) have spanned the breadth of the Japanese social landscape. In fact, the concept of happiness in Japan has been the focus of much sociological, anthropological, and psychological research in recent years that has highlighted the need for cultural contextualization (UCHIDA et al., 2004; KOSAKA 2006; COULMAS 2009a, 2009b; SHIELDS 2009; UCHIDA and KITAYAMA 2009; ROBERTSON 2010; UCHIDA and OGIHARA 2012; TIEFENBACH and KOHLBACHER 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Situating *Kōfuku no Kagaku*'s teachings within these broad social trends would help readers to better grasp the movement's appeal within Japan and its specific construction of happiness.

Moreover, while Winter criticizes the "crisis model" of new religions, he does not seem to question the "stasis model" of established religions. The absence of references to established religions might lead readers to assume that they have not adapted to or changed in modernity. However, mounting scholarship on modern Japanese Buddhism and Shinto has shown that these traditions have changed a great deal in the modern era. While many established religious organizations are arguably struggling with problems of retention, they are surely not entirely irrelevant to many

of the issues that Winter discusses. For example, modern Buddhist thinkers have often tried to prove the compatibility of their tradition with modern science and emphasized the transnational, universal character of their tradition; many Buddhist denominations have produced *manga* and *anime* hagiographies of their founders and made use of multiple media to propagate their teachings; and some Buddhist entrepreneurs have begun to draw on trends that are often identified as New Age.

Winter may be reluctant to emphasize parallels with established religions because he wants to avoid reducing the complexity of Kōfuku no Kagaku's teachings to apparent reformulations of older teachings as suggested by the "old-wine-in-new-bottles" model. While I applaud Winter's conviction that Kōfuku no Kagaku's teachings are innovative and well worth a detailed examination and that such a case study can serve as an instructive example for a new religious movement, it shifts onto the reader the burden of posing larger theoretical questions beyond the immediate confines of Kōfuku no Kagaku or the study of Japanese new religions and New Age culture. Unfortunately, this may obscure the study's significant contribution to the social history of contemporary Japan and to the field of religious studies as a whole.

By providing a more clearly articulated theoretical framework for his study, Winter could have made more explicit the larger debates with which his work engages implicitly. For example, in his overview of terms describing Japanese new religions, a brief discussion of Western terms such as "cult" and "sect" and the development of the more neutral term "new religious movement" under the influence of the Japanese-derived term "new religion" could have helped to connect this study to scholarship on new religious movements beyond Japan.

Furthermore, his argument against sociological and psychological reductionism is relevant to long-standing methodological debates in the discipline of religious studies. Yet one has to wonder whether Winter's position is not reductionist in its own way by prioritizing doctrine over sociological, anthropological, and psychological aspects. While doctrine can certainly play an important role in some religions, it does not shed light on how adherents beyond the sectarian leadership experience or find their place in the organization, what their daily ritual practices are, or even how they interpret and implement the movement's teachings. This has become evident in the field of Buddhist studies, which has traditionally been very textually oriented but has incorporated more historical, sociological, anthropological, and psychological approaches in the past couple of decades. Winter is correct, however, to point out that, unlike the doctrines of more traditional religions, the teachings of new religions often remain insufficiently explored. In this respect, his study makes a significant contribution to the field of contemporary Japanese religions.

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Barbara Ambros  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

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