QUESTIONS and PROBLEMS ?

What is the status of "State Shinto"?

The answer to this question is very simple, but the explanation of the answer is somewhat complicated.

The answer is that State Shinto has no status; it is non-existent. It ceased to exist when as a result of Occupation directives, the state stopped sponsoring and supporting Shinto or, for that matter, any other religion. Its continued non-existence was assured by articles 19, 20 and 89 of the Constitution of 1946.

There is an erroneous impression abroad that State Shinto continues to exist. For example, in some books that are currently being used as textbook in American colleges, we find statements such as the following: "State Shinto was completely disestablished ···(but it) was permitted to continue·····on precisely the same basis as other religions····· " This is clearly the result of a confusion between the terms "Shrine Shinto" and "State Shinto." The two are not identical. The term "State Shinto" referred to a combination of Imperial Household Shinto, Shrine Shinto, and certain well-defined ideas and practices related to the origin and history of the Japanese people. The aggregate of these elements ceased to exist, although the two most important components continued. Shrine Shinto continued as a religion, which it always has been, and the Imperial Household continued to observe as private affairs the traditional Shinto rites and practices which are largely, but not exclusively, connected with the three palace sanctuaries.

In order to prevent this answer from becoming a dissertation the

explanation must stop here. It should be noted in passing, however, that although the Imperial Household rites have become the private affairs of the Imperial Family, the wedding of the Crown Prince in April, 1959, was conducted at the Imperial Palace sanctuaries as a state affair on much the same basis as a state funeral, for example, would be conducted in Washington.

What is a "new religion?"

Since the termination of hostilities in 1945 the the term "new religions" has come into vogue and Japan has become known as a museum of religions. It is an open question, however, whether the Japanese are any more susceptible to eccentric faiths than any other people. Although there was a very great proliferation of denominations and sects in the postwar period, the number of religious groups that could not be classified under one of the three major streams of religion in Japan is in fact very small.

What happened was that, when complete religious freedom was established in 1945, (1) a very large number of temples and churches seceded from their long-established sectarian systems, (2) groups, which for purposes of convenience had operated within certain sectarian bodies, became independent, (3) shrines, which heretofore had been in a different classification, became incorporated as religious bodies, (4) prophets and charlatans set themselves up as the founders of religious organizations, and (5) just plain crooks became incorporated under the loosely drafted Religious Corporations Ordinance in order to receive tax exemption.

Thus, in the immediate postwar period the number of religious denominations incorporated with the Ministry of Education suddenly increased from a wartime low of 44 to some 700 more or less which, irrespective of their origin, were all indiscriminately referred to by the press as "new religions." Subsequently, administrative and legal changes resulted in the elimination of many of these, so

that by 1957 the figure had been reduced to 379 of which, according to the Ministry of Education, 169 were Buddhist, 38 Christian, and 142 Shinto, while some 30 could not be so classified.

The term "new religions" generally refers to a selected group of about 125 of the more than 300 religious denominations and sects, which emerged as independent bodies in the immediate postwar years, and for the most part, as we have seen, can be classified as either Buddhist, Christian, or Shinto. Obviously, then, the term "new religions" is misleading. It does not make sense to speak of a Buddhist new religion" or a "Shinto new religion." These are contradictions in terms. The expression "new religions" was popularized by postwar journalists. In lieu of a satisfactory substitute, it was taken up by others and has continued to be used uncritically. This being the case, it is important for the reader to understand that actually there are very few religious bodies that can truly be called "new religions." Most of the 125 organizations usually referred to by this term, while exhibiting unique characteristics in their organization and activities, are nonetheless within the orb of the traditional faiths of Japan and should still be regarded as a part of them.