SEKAI MAHIKARI BUNMEI KYŌDAN

A preliminary discussion
of a recent religious movement in Japan

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Introduction

Considering the fact that in postwar Japan there are about 380 religious denominations which are recognized by the Ministry of Education, any attempt to describe sufficiently the general situation in the religious field seems to be futile. Even if we take up only the field of the so-called "New Religions," we are lost, since at least one third of these 380 groups fall under this heading.

Why add to confusion by contributing a study of one more example of religious manifestation to the already vast literature on spiritual activities in modern Japan? The answer to this question is that the relatively insignificant group studied in this paper seems to reveal something about the factors underlying the phenomenon of mushrooming religious movements in Japan.

After the description of some aspects of the ideological foundations of Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan[1] we shall try to answer the following questions from the standpoint of cultural anthropology :

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1. 世界真光文明教団. "Church of the True-Light-Civilization for the World," hereafter always referred to as "Mahikari." We do not treat of the worship and other practices of this group.

1) Are these so-called " New Religions " really " new " and in what sense, or are they a kind of imitation of already well-known concepts and ideas in a new garb?

2) Considering the example of Mahikari, is there any possibility of generalization and scientific structuring of the religious phenomena in Japan?

3) Which are the concepts of comparative sciences that could be applied to the Japanese scenery?

Generally speaking, Mahikari may be grouped under Shinto-affiliated denominations. The origin of this organization can be traced back to 1959. The founder and present leader is Mr. Kōgyoku Okada.[a] Born 27 February, 1901 (Meiji 34), Okada claims to be a descendant of Oda Nobunaga in the 14th generation. His grandfather had been president of the Educational Council of the old Kishū Province (today Wakayama-ken), and his father was a manufacturer of clothing in Harajuku, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, where Okada was born. After finishing middle school, Okada entered the Military Academy of the prewar Imperial Army and became the youngest equestrian flag-bearer in the First Regiment of the Imperial Guard. During the war, Okada fell from a horse. His backbone was severely injured, which resulted in caries of his bones. The doctors of the Army Hospital predicted him a life-chance of three years. During this time of expecting death and of being a beggar in the postwar years Okada began to think about his life and the fate of mankind. In these years there occurred, as he says, the heavenly inspiration, which became his guidance for the

a. 岡田光玉

future. He recovered from his injuries without the help of medicine.

The religious movement, Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan, which Okada founded, was recognized by the Ministry of Education on 5 November, 1960 as stated by members and officials of the group. Its headquarters, located until February, 1968, near Shibuya Station, were moved this year to Denenchōfu, Ōta-ku. Its main publication is the monthly *Mahikari* (True Light). The membership may be around 30,000. The greater part of these members is living actually in Tokyo, where the organization has about 15 branches.

The following outline of some ideological aspects of Mahikari derives mainly from several interviews with Okada since spring, 1967.

The origin of Mahikari—The revelations of Okada

Okada's story of the foundation of the new group runs like this: "It was at 5 o'clock in the morning on February 27 in 1959, when I heard the words of God. I believe it was really the greatest moment in the history of mankind—it was the greatest moment which suggested the dawn of a completely new era in human history. . . . I heard a revelation telling me, 'All things in the universe are the Voice of God, and the Voice of God is full of divine truth.'"

Okada goes on to say that the voice admonished him to take the name Kōgyoku as his proper name. His second revelation came in 1962. At that time it was said to him, "This shall be the first year of baptism with fire." This revelation was repeated in 1963 with nearly the same words, "This shall

be the second year of baptism with fire. The fire of the God shall begin to burn at last."

To understand these revelations and the meaning of the term "God," we have to follow some complicated interpretations of the Japanese language given by Okada. His linguistic explanations are at least rather unorthodox, but they seem interesting enough to give a few examples below. In connection with this pseudo-linguistic approach, Okada developed an evolutionistic scheme of the genesis of mankind. Since there seems to be no other religious group, except perhaps Tenri-kyō, which has shown any interest in developing a theory on the origin of mankind, the origin of languages etc., and since in combination with such speculations not one religious denomination has made any attempt to offer to the believer a nearly closed system, it may be worth-while studying these aspects of Okada's teachings.

The original " chon " and its emanations

God, the highest spirit, the Unseen Being, is called and referred to by Okada as " *chon.*" The manifestation of this spiritual being in the publications of the group is ＼, i. e., the third radical of the list of the 214 Chinese radicals. This *chon*, the Unseen Spirit of God, is the essence of the universe, *uchū no ki.*[a] It is referred to as *reisō,*[b] i. e., *chon* is the feature, shape or physiognomy of *rei*, the spirit. This *reisō* is interpreted as near to, but not the same as, the meaning of *tamashii,*[c] soul. And *tamashii* is *kiyoi,*[d] i. e., pure. Okada also uses the formulation that *chon* is the cell of the spirit, or *reisaibō.*[e] The verbal

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a. 宇宙の気　*b.* 霊相　*c.* 魂　*d.* 浄　*e.* 霊細胞

expression of the essence of the *chon* is *su*.[a] The reading of the character 主 as *shu* is, according to Okada, already a mistaken reading made by man in the course of time. The *su* is the controlling power and the function of the deity. The deity *chon* alone is spiritual, unseen, a unified being, like the point, which is the derivation of the sign *chon*. The *chon* is the *shin-shin*,[b] the deity of the center.

The creation of the world begins with the first uttering of the *chon*, that is, -*n*. The further emanations of *chon* are a line of other gods (*shin* or *kami*[c]). The manifestation of these *kami* can be seen in the *Hiragana* and *Katakana* syllabic alphabets of the Japanese language. Following Okada, the term, *kana*, may be interpreted as *ka* (God) and *na* (name). Since the *Kana* system has 48 sounds, Okada concludes that there were 48 deities in the beginning. But how did these *kami* come into existence?

Here Okada seems to combine his idea of language interpretation with the Chinese teaching about the *Yin* and *Yang* and the five elements. He says that the *chon* created first a male and a female principle in the form of fire and water. These elements are shown by Okada in the form of a cross:

火 (fire)
——————水 (water)
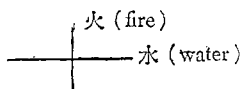
The horizontal line is blue, the vertical line red. The Japanese readings of 水 and 火 are *mizu* and *hi* respectively, but *hi* can be read also as *ka*. Excluding the already known *su*,

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a. 主 *b.* 芯神 *c.* 神

which has a central significance in the whole system, we may read the red and blue line as *ka-mi*.

Chon created the spirit of the fire and the spirit of the water, i. e., *hi no seirei*[a] and *mizu no seirei*.[b] But *hi* or *ka* are of course only an unseen essence, the substantial manifestation of *ka* being the sun (*hi*[c]) and that one of *mizu* the moon (*tsuki*[d]) and rain (*ame*[e]). Finally fire and water combine to become *tsuchi*[f], the earth.

In conclusion, Okada says that the *kami* are the deities who have the power, function and essence of fire and water combined. These *kami* now are manifested in the *kana*-sounds. Okada thinks that the Japanese language is the language of the *kami*, the original and first language. In his evolutionary scheme all other languages derive from this first language. The Japanese language has preserved so much of the language of the *kami*, because the *kami* lived here on earth, i. e., in Japan. In many examples he shows how all languages and all writing systems may be derived from the Japanese *kana*-sounds and *kana*-alphabets. Mostly he uses Sanskrit, Hebrew and Greek examples to prove his point. The Japanese language has the word *kotodama*[g] for "language," i. e., the spirit of the words (*kotodama*), and the spirit of the sounds (*otodama*[h]), and these spirits of the words and sounds are the *kami*.

Okada is mostly interested in finding equations between Shinto and Christian beliefs. Therefore he continues his argument with the following interpretation : The 48 sounds of the *kana* syllabary may be read : 4-8-sounds＝*yo-ha-ne*, which

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a. 火の精霊　*b.* 水の精霊　*c.* 日　*d.* 月　*e.* 雨　*f.* 土　*g.* 言霊　*h.* 音霊

is the Japanese reading of the name of the apostle and evangelist, St. John, who writes in the beginning of his gospel : " In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." This, however, is the meaning of the first revelation made to Okada : " I heard the voice of God."

Kannagara-no-michi—The way of the kami

As was explained, the essence of the spirit is the first and unified god, and the *chon* is the essence that cannot be seen, felt or known.[2] The controlling power and the function of this core of the universe is *su* or *nushi*. The equation of expressions in the Japanese language is possible for Okada, because the country, which is today called Nihon, is really the country or place of the " origin and source of the light," *hi-no-moto,[a]* or, at the same time, the " source and origin of the spirit " (*hi-no-moto[b]*).

Such equations of words or sounds are possible, since " God is the Word," as St. John says, or in Shintoist terminology, the language is *kotodama*, the spirit of the word, which is *otodama*, the spirit of the sound. The *tama* is part of the pure spirit, i. e., the cell of the spirit of *chon.*

The question, which has not yet been answered, is why and how the spirit of *chon* is manifested or manifesting himself. The answer to the " why " is given by Okada with the two

2. In his publications Okada uses the English words, " unseen, unfeeling, unknown," and does not notice that while " unseen " and " unknown " have a passive meaning, " unfeeling " is an active word and therefore does not fit in this place.

a. 日の本 b. 霊の本

terms, *makoto*[a] and *daiai*.[b] *Makoto* (truth) and *daiai* (great love) are two manifestations and functions of the controlling power of *chon*, which is *su*. *Makoto* is *ma-no-koto*, the truth. But *makoto* is not only truth, it is at the same time *mannaka*,[c] the center of *chon* or *su*. *Ma* is the way of manifestation of the *su* by truth. The *su* gives birth to the creation of the two elements, *hi* and *mizu*, fire and water, through his functions of truth and love. Up to this stage, the *kami* deriving from the two elements are not yet manifested in substance. This substantiation of the essential beings is done by the *kami's* entering into human bodies. As bodily beings, mankind is called *shinjin*.[d] In this stage human beings and *kami* are unified or one. This way of the *kami* becoming human beings is the Way of the Gods, *kannagara-no-michi*.[e] This is the original true state of mankind, the time of paradise on earth.

In the teachings of Mahikari this is the time of the dwelling of gods on the earth. The first stages of the creation of elements and *kami* are the seven so-called *shindai*[f] or *tenshin-dai*,[g] i. e., "God-eras." These are followed by two further stages, the eras of union with the spirits, *kōtō*.[h] In the second era of *kōtō*, the features of the five races of mankind are shaped. There are five races, because of the five female sounds in the *kana*-syllabary.

The meaning and significance of su

According to Okada, the true pronunciation of the character 主 is *su*. It means the controlling power of *chon*. This power

a. 真　b. 大愛　c. 真中　d. 神人　e. 惟神の道　f. 神代　g. 天神代
h. 皇統

appears in the above-mentioned union of *kami* and mankind, the oneness of both as *shinjin*, which is a state of complete identification and sameness. The idea of completion in the Japanese language is indicated by the sound *su*. In verb forms like *gozaimasu*, the word has no meaning without the *su*. The *su* is essential for the complete meaning of the word. This he explains with a reference to the English language : The word "stop" does not mean anything without the "s" in the beginning. The wide range of the meaning of *su* may also be seen in the Japanese words *sumera-mikoto*, *sume-mikoto* and in the name of the river in the precincts of the Shrine of Ise, the Isuzu-gawa. Okada thinks that taking away the *su* would be like removing the clapper from the bell (*suzu*). As the core of the universe, *su* is creator of all things, the elements, the *kami*, mankind, animals and plants in his function of *makoto* and *ai*, truth and love. This is done by his *mikokoro* or will. Another interpretation, which we have to take up again a little later, is the identification of *su* or *shushin* with the word for the numeral " one," *hitot-su*, which is written by Okada with the characters for " one " and " king."[a] Furthermore, the *su* is the almighty and all-knowing god. Before he gives birth to the fire and the water, the male and female essence or elements, he is referred to in the Japanese language as *oyashin*[b] or *chichi-oya-kami*,[c] i. e., " parent-god " or " father-god."

As has been mentioned already, Okada puts great emphasis on the equation of Shintoist and Christian ideas. But this does not mean that he neglects ideas from other religions. Refer-ring to Buddhism, for instance, he gives the following interpreta-

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a. 一王　*b.* 親神　*c.* 父親神

tion of the name of Amida : *a* means the element of fire, *mi* the element of water and *da* is the indication of completeness ; or the name of Kannon, the deity of Mercy, is explained as *kami-no-on*, the " sound of fire and water."

The fact that *su* cannot be seen is indicated in the Japanese word, *kakuremi*,[a] i. e., the spirit of the *su*, the *rei* or, in a different reading-interpretation, the *mi*, is hidden. The manifestation of the *mi*, which is the same as the *me* in many other expressions for different *kami*, may be seen for instance in the creation of the " first-generation-gods," like *ame-tsuchi.*
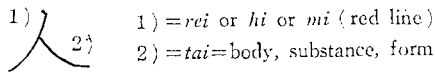
We mentioned above the word *sumera-mikoto.* This gives the key for the understanding of Okada's position in regard to the importance of the Japenese state. The Chinese character for *sumera*[b] appears in the word *tennō.*[c] This means that the emperor of Japan has the power of *su*, i. e., the controlling power over the state and the people, since *su* is the controlling power of *chon.* In the old ceremony of accession of the throne, the emperor, who shouted the sounds of *a, i, u, e, o* toward all directions, was considered as one with the Father-God at that moment.

Man and civilization

We have now to consider the meaning of man and his relation to God. Okada says that *su* created the universe, *uchū.*[d] This word expresses not only the creation of the world of *kami* under the roof of the world, but also the creation of mankind, considered as the bodily manifestation of the *kami* and the spirit.

a. 隠れ霊 b. 皇 c. 天皇 d. 宇宙

The meaning of *uchū* as the world of *kami* under the roof is explained with the character for *u*, which was originally the roof, i. e., the *chon*, and the two elements of fire and water under that roof. This universe includes the earth, which is created through the mingling of the two elements, fire and water. Man, *hito*,[a] the vessel or bodily manifestation of the spirit, also consists of the two elements, fire and water : one stroke is written by Mr. Okada in red, the second stroke of the character in blue :

1) = *rei* or *hi* or *mi* (red line)

2) = *tai* = body, substance, form

Hito = *Jin* = *Nin* : Man

The pronounciation of *hito* as *jin* already indicates a pollution and the segregation of mankind from god or from being one with god. In the Japanese language there is another reading for man, namely, *nin*. Okada writes this *nin* with the character of two (*futatsu*[b]) and the sound of -*n*. Here the relationship to fire and water and the significance of -*n* appears once more.

To understand the idea of civilization, we have to follow once more Okada's interpretation of the Japanese language. He calls the time during which *kami* were dwelling in Japan and were one with mankind as *shinjin* the " real civilization " (*bunmei*). This he explains in the following way : the character for *bun* is really a combination of the *su* or *chon* and the crossed two elements of fire and water under the roof. The character *mei*

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a. 人 b. 二

is simply the combination of the male and female forces, i.e., sun and moon.

Besides the civilization of the *kami*, as long as they are only essence, there is also the civilization during the age when the *kami* become man or substantiated in the vessel of the body, *mi*[a], which is the same as the *mi* of *mizu*. This means that the shapes of the spirit constitute the female or water-element in mankind. The spirit is again hidden in the body, *kakuremi*. Therefore there are originally, because of the five human races, also five civilizations, which are being considered as having existed in the beginning.
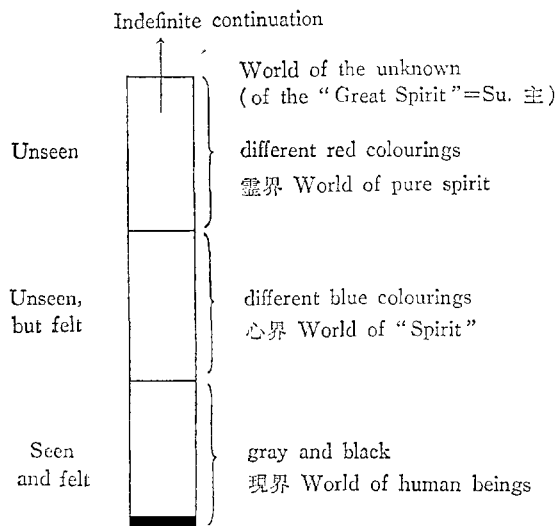
Man and the Three Worlds

According to Mr. Okada, there is a correlation between the different worlds and man in three stages. In the outline given above we dealt mostly with the two levels of the spiritual world and the substantial world of man with body-substance. There is now added a third level, the level of the spirits. This may be shown in the following way : the highest and first level is the so-called world of the spirit, *shinreikai*[b]. This is the world of the Unseen, Unfelt and Unknown. The second is the world of the mysterious, dim, weak or faint, called *yūkai*[c], which cannot be seen but felt. The third level is the world of human beings on earth, the *genkai*[d]. But in Okada's interpretation, not only these three levels are real and distinct, there are, besides, perhaps hundreds or thousands of stages in between, a picture of fluctuation and mutual interweaving. This idea may be explained with Fig. 1.

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a. 身 b. 神霊界 c. 幽界 d. 現界

Fig. 1

Indefinite continuation

Unseen

World of the unknown
(of the " Great Spirit "=Su. 主)

different red colourings
霊界 World of pure spirit

Unseen,
but felt

different blue colourings
心界 World of " Spirit "

Seen
and felt

gray and black
現界 World of human beings

Man is really correlated to these three worlds, for he is not only made out of the two elements, he has a kind of third skin, that of the intermediate world. This world (Figures 2, 3, 4) is important for the whole system. As a world of spirits or ghosts it constitutes a real danger for mankind. It represents the world of the dead, i.e., of the place where the second skin is going after the death of a person. Because humans driven by their senses are clingling to the world of flesh, they don't really leave this world. The only possibility to get rid of this dangerous world of spirits, in man and in the three worlds, is offered by the teaching of Mahikari.

In the whole of historical evolution and development this means that mankind became separated from the real spirit

through the pollution by earth desires. The original civilization, *bunmei[a]*, of the age of Paradise, became corrupted by the desires of the flesh and turned into the so-called culture, *bunka[b]*,
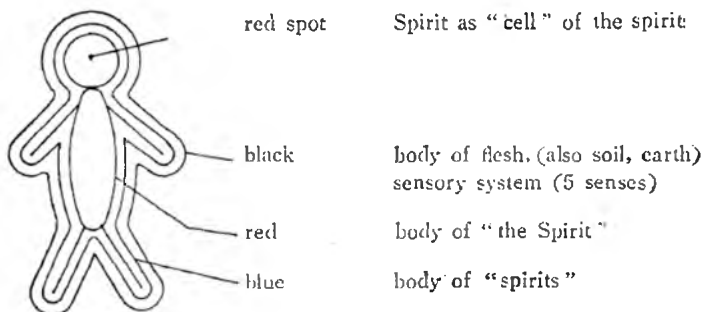
Fig. 2

Man with two " skins "

red

blue
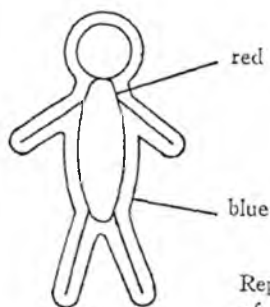
Representation of the correlation of man to the two elements, fire and water.
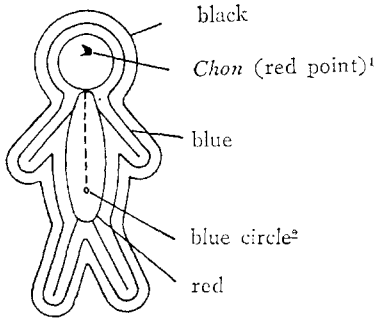
Fig. 3

Man with three " skins "

red spot	Spirit as " cell " of the spirit
black	body of flesh. (also soil, earth) sensory system (5 senses)
red	body of " the Spirit "
blue	body of "spirits "

Remark : The red spot is the same as *chon.*

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a. 文明 *b.* 文化

Fig. 4

Explanation of "Chon" in Man

black

Chon (red point)[1]

blue

blue circle[2]

red

Remarks : 1) This is referred to as *hon-rei* 本霊, main
spirit, or explained like this: the "soul,"
tamashii, i.e., the part of the spirit, *rei*,
which is separated from the "soul,"
tamashii, of the *kami*.

2) The blue circle within the red "skin" is
referred to as *fuku-rei* 副霊, "assistant
spirit.".

which is interpreted by Okada as *bunka*[a], dispersion.

Mankind has to get rid of this pollution through cleaning
or washing, i.e., the *misogi-harai*[b].

The teaching of Mahikari, the teaching of the meaning of
the true light, offers the possibility of a revolution, of a turn
of 180 degrees, which may lead back mankind to the state of
paradise, i.e., a state of happiness, health and peace.

The baptism by fire

Here seems to be the only real contradiction in the teachings

a. 分化　b. 禊祓い

of Mr. Okada. To the question of the author whether there will be a destruction of the world or not, his answer was, " There is no way of escape." In his interpretation, there will be a destruction of the world by fire. This is now the point where we may understand Okada's explanation of his revelation concerning the coming fire.

In Okada's system there seems to be only one possibility, namely, that by laying more emphasis on his part of the spirit, *rei*, he is going back from *bunka* to *bummei*. Man is living in a state of hell on earth, and the result will be a destruction by the baptism of fire. Okada says that mankind has to become aware of this baptism of fire. Until now we have been to much occupied with the idea of the baptism with water. That this is the truth, he, Okada, has to tell the world, as it has been revealed to him by God. This teaching of the true light, therefore, is also a revelation of the truth of God to mankind, which has been hidden, and only been told in parts in the Bible and in the Sacred Scriptures of Shinto. Okada, therefore, sees his first aim in the unification of the five religions of the world into one.
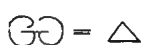
The sysmbols of the great religions and the numerals from one to ten

As Okada says, mankind has to return to the origin. The word for origin in Japanese is *moto*[a]. The return to the origin means that the left and right strokes of the character have to be separated in order to build a complete triangle. This may be shown as in this picture :

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a. 元

$$\bigcirc\hspace{-0.6em}\bigcirc = \triangle$$ the reading of *moto* is *motogaeri* = return to the origin.

There is one early sign of God on earth as example of the completeness of the triangle-symbol: Mount Fuji in Japan. Fuji may be written with the characters of negation and two[a]. Therefore, this word means that the not-two, i.e. three, give only the complete picture. This symbol of the triangle appears again in the star of David: ✡ .

In order to reach the stage of paradise on earth, man has to climb up the following different stages: three-four-five[b], which is read as Meshia, five-six-seven[c], which is read as Miroku, and after proceeding to the state of opening the stone-doors of the worlds number eight and nine, man is reaching the world of paradise, the stage number ten. This level is represented by the symbol of the cross +, being at the same time the Japanese numeral "ten." This cross also shows the two elements. It it read *kami* or *ami*, and so leads to the derivations of the forms "Amida" and "Amen." The symbols for fire and water, *ka* and *mizu*, may also be read as *ya-ha*, making the cross the symbol of Jahve.

The name and the symbols of Sekai Mahikari Bummei Kyōdan

Having read the explanations given above, the reader will now be able to understand the meaning of the name of the group, Sekai Mahikari Bummei Kyōdan. If we try to conclude the meaning of this name from the explanations given by

*a.* 不二 *b.* 三四五 *c.* 五六七

Okada, we may state the following points:

Sekai: The claim of the group is directed toward the whole world, toward mankind. The first step toward the salvation of mankind will be, following the revelations of Okada, the unification of the five major world religions.

Mahikari: This salvation of mankind will be done through the teachings of Okada, the *oshieshusama*[a], concerning the real meaning of God, the true light.

Bunmei: The final stage of mankind will be that of *Bunmei*, i.e., mankind has to go back the way from *bunka*, which means, dispersion, to the original state of paradise, a state of happiness, health and peace. The emphasis lies on the strengthening of the power of fire with the final goal of the civilization of the symbol of the cross, which is the spiritual civilization. The gradual improvement from the present materialistic civilization toward the real spiritual civilization is performed by the process of cleaning, through the teachings of the true light. These teachings shall lead mankind to become aware of the spiritual power, which is a part of the spiritual power of the God, *chon* and *su*.

These ideas, which are the fundamentals of the Mahikari group, are symbolically expressed on their crest. (Fig. 5)

Remarks: This is the crest of the " Association of the Friends of the

Fig. 5
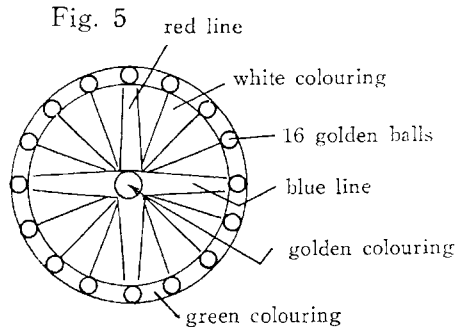
Friends of the Children of the Sunlight

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a. 教え主様

Children of the Sun." A different term applied to the members of Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan is " L. H. (Lucky and Happy) Children of the Sun." Theoretically all human beings are originally children of the sun, and therefore all have to become members.

The red line signifies spiritual power, consciousness and spirit.
The blue line symbolizes materialistic civilization.
In the crossing-point of these axes is the place of *su*.
Golden colouring signities heaven.
White colouring is the symbol of space, air, emptiness.
Green colouring means the earth.

The 16 rays and 16 golden balls in the circle stand for the so-called 16 kings or emperors and 16 countries, which emerged in the second era of oneness of *kami* and men, after the creation of the ancestors of the five races. The proof for the existence of these 16 emperors and 16 original countries, which originated in Japan and spread over the earth, may be seen, according to Okada, in the fact that in the tomb of the Egyptian ruler Tutankhamen the same symbols were found.

Other symbols appear in the new church of the headquarters in Denenchōfu which was dedicated in February, 1968. The shape of the church as seen from the entrance appears like this :　the crest of the group
This shape of the roof symbolizes heaven and man, *ten* or *ame* and *hito*.
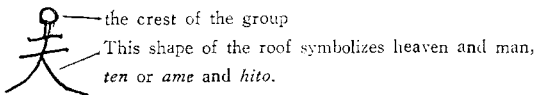
A second symbol, which appears on the front-wall of the church, looks like this :

This new sign is rather interesting. Okada explains that is the shape of a peach *momo*. There is only one reference possible : The mythological tale of Izanagi and Izanami, the first male and female deities, the creators of Japan and of mankind according to the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. After the death of the female deity, Izanami, who is burned during delivery of the fire-god, her spouse, Izanagi, tries to visit her in the dark underworld, the world of the dead, *ne-no-kuni*. But as he recognizes that Izanami's body has desintegrated and is covered with ugly worms, he tries to escape by using different charms or magical devices to stop the ghosts and spirits sent out by Izanami to take revenge for the disgrace Izanagi has done to her by lightening a fire in the dark world and seeing her and exposing her ugliness. As one device now Izanagi throws peaches against the ghosts to stop them for a short time. In my opinion, there is only one clue in the *Kojiki* to indicate why Okada chose the peach as a symbol of his church. In chapter 9, Izanagi adresses the peaches as follows : " Because you have saved me, you shall help in the same way the visible green grass of humans, who are living in the middle-country of the reed-fields, when they are suffering from pain and misery." The connection with the teachings of Okada and with the claim of the Mahikari group to save mankind is obvious.

Okada and his mission

To the question whether he considered himself a god, a messenger of the gods or a saviour of mankind, Okada answered : " I am not so crazy and silly to claim — as it is done by many other false religious leaders and so-called prophets —

that I am God myself or that I have god in my body. I am only the instrument of God, I am the trumpet of his truth." But nevertheless Okada does not deny the possibility that he is already on earth for the third time. In earlier incarnations he might have been Buddha or Christ. Okada denies that in a future time there will be another messenger of God on earth.

Conclusion

It would lead too far to go deeper into the system of Okada. There are many more points of ideological interpretations, of derrivations of words and meanings, there are ritualistic practices and prayers etc., and there are, of course, the sociologically interesting facts about the composition of the followers of the Mahikari group, — questions and problems, I hope to deal with on other occasions. The problem we are concentrating on in this paper is how the explained ideological foundations of the group phenomenologically fit into any scientific categories, and whether there is a possibility of generalizing these phenomena for an approach toward patterns and attitudes in religious life in modern Japan. The first question we have outlined in the introduction to this paper was : Are these ideas and concepts really new or are they only imitations of already well-known values in new clothings ? To answer this question, we must at first outline Okada's ideas on a more abstract level.

Abstracts

Without any reference toward the sometimes perhaps possible but often rather strange " linguistic " interpretation of words by Okada, we may derive the following abstractions :

1. The founder of the Mahikari group is the servant, instrument and trumpet of God. He bases his claim on revelations.

2. He states that the world nowadays is on a course toward destruction by fire, if there is no change of mind in mankind.

3. The teachings of Mahikari are leading toward this change of mind.

4. The original nature of mankind is the state of being one with the *kami*. This has been the era of Paradise on Earth.

5. The teaching or the " gospel " of Mahikari will lead mankind back to a future state of Paradise on Earth.

6. The original place of this Paradise on Earth was Japan. Japan was the original place of the creative act of God, Japanese was the first and original language, Japan is the birthplace of the five major religions of the world.

7. The truth of this assertion is shown through a new interpretation of the Japanese language and the comparison of the Japanese language with other languages. This truth is partly revealed in the holy scriptures of Shinto and the Bible, especially the gospel of St. John.

8. The first step toward the real spiritual civilization of mankind is the unification of the five religions through Mahikari.

Is Mahikari an imitation of the Shinto revival ?

If we take only point 6 of the abstracts and remember how Okada derives the important place of Japan as the original place of the *rei*, the source of the sun, and how much he is

referring to the genealogical line from Izanagi-Izanami and Amaterasu down to the first emperors, how he interprets the *kannagara-no-michi* by using different Shinto sources, one may come to the conclusion that Mahikari is nothing but the revival of the prewar system of nationalistic and imperialistic ideas. Does not his teaching resemble the following text : " Children, there are many countries in the world, but there is not a single other which like ours has over it a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal, and which manifests this inseparable relationship of the Imperial Family and the subjects. Is it not a great blessing that we are born in such an exalted country "[3]?

The differences between the State Shinto of the imperialistic era with its concepts of *kokutai*[a] and *saiei-itchi*[b] and the ideological concepts of Mahikari are obvious : the situational environment has completely changed. On the other side there is no connection of Mahikari with any official authority, neither an affiliation to the state organs nor to any kind of official priesthood. Remarkable is the attention, paid to the contribution of Christian ideas and scriptures towards the partly revealed truth of the so-called True-Light-God. But it cannot be denied that the core of the teachings of Mahikari may be found already in different Shinto scriptures or other theological concepts of the Japanese historical past. We only need to mention some striking examples : There is the Yoshida Shintō or Urabe

3. *Jinjō Shōgaku Shūshinsho Kyōshiyō* (Textbook on Ethics for Ordinary Primary Schools, Teachers Manual) Tokyo 1931, Vol. V p. 2, cited in D. C. Holtom, *The National Faith of Japan*, New York 1965 p. 133, n. 6.
a. 国体   b. 祭政一致

Shintō of Urabe Kanetomo, who declared : " *Kami* or Deity is spirit, without form, unknowable, transcending both cosmic principles, the *In* and the *Yō* (*Yin-yang*) . . . "[4], or when he refers to the nature of *kami* and man : " With reference to the universe we call it *kami*, with reference to the interactions of nature we call it spirit, *rei*, in man we call it soul (*kokoro*). Therefore, God is the source of the universe. He is the spiritual essence of created things. . . . "[5] Or if we look upon the writings of Yamazaki Ansai, the outstanding founder of the Confucian oriented Suiga-Shintō, we find Yamazaki declaring :

" The parent deities, Izanagi and Izanami, following the truth of the positive and negative principles, taught the way that men should ever follow. . . . God is the soul of the universe, man is the god-stuff of the world."[6]

A last example may be sufficient for our purpose to show that Okada's teachings can be traced back in the history of Japanese theological thinking at least from Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293–1354) down to the three great scholars of the so-called Pure Shintō Renaissance, Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769), Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843). Motoori Norinaga, for instance, says :

> " From the central truth that the Mikado is the direct descendant of gods, the tenet that Japan ranks far above all other countries is a natural consequence. No other nation is entitled to equality with her, and all are bound

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4. Kato Genchi "The Theological System of Urabe-no-Kanetomo", in *Transactions of the Japan Society of London*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 144.
5. Miyaji Naoichi, *Jingishi Kōyō* (An Outline of Shinto History), Tokyo 1924, p. 131, quoted in Holtom, l. c. p. 40.
6. *Jingi Jiten* p. 459, art. "Suiga Shinto", quoted in D. C. Holtom, l. c. p. 43.

to do homage to the Japanese sovereign and pay tribute to him."[7]

However in spite of the evidence of this overwhelming material, I do not hesitate to refuse the term imitation. Mahikari is a new religion. Using this term we do not refer to the academic struggle as to what can be called a New Religion and what not. Besides the fact that the teachings of Mahikari are a consistant new approach, because the known concepts of the historical past are only chosen in an eclectic manner and combined with other elements and molded into a new form, we rely on a completely different frame of reference, different from the approaches, which try to apply for instance models of comparative study of religions or theology etc., i. e., the frame of reference is the concept of culture, as it has been developed by the science of cultural enthropology.

Culture as a dynamic process—innovation versus imitation

Anthropologists define culture as " an integrated system of patterned behavior, ideas and artefacts, which is transmitted from generation to generation by means of symbols and learning within a certain group of people."[8] The religious system of beliefs and ideas concerning the supernational or superhuman aspects of danger and uncertainty, for instance, are but one

7. Ernest Satow, " The Revival of Pure Shintau ", in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* Vol. II (Reprint 1927), p. 177.

8. Definition from the Introductory Course in Anthropology by the author, following the current contemporary accepted definitions of the American School of Cultural Anthropology, esp. Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture and Behavior*, New York 1962 pp. 19—73. A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, New York 1948. R. Beals, " Acculturation," in Sol Tax, *Anthropology Today*, Chicago 1962. V. Barnauw, *Culture and Personality*, Illinois 1963.

aspect of culture. Any single aspect of a culture, even the habit of greetings and reverence, whether done with a deep bow or by shaking hands, is patterned after the type of culture to which the individual performing the act belongs. This patterning of the behavior of any individual of a given ethnic group is performed by the process of learning. This process can be regarded in two ways : a child learns by means of imitation and by the use of language and other symbolic media. If we consider culture as a static model, this kind of learning would perhaps have the result of a culture unchanged over a long period of time. But a " fundamental characteristic of culture is that, despite its conservative nature, it does change over time and from place to place."[9] This is the dynamic aspect of any living or dead culture. The change may occur from two sides : from the individual, which is the constituent part of the society in which culture becomes manifested, or from outside, i. e., from other cultures or by other forces, like the change of the environment, increase in population density, climatic changes or any other not man-made or man-controlled environmental factor. Any culture that wants to survive, has to adapt or adjust to new conditions, where perhaps the traditional patterns are not providing the same adaptation or adjustment. Most cultures on earth are borrowing their new patterns. If this borrowing is a derivation of traits, i. e., of ideas, new behavior patterns or artifacts, from a foreign culture, we speak of diffusion. Diffusion may be counted as responsible for 90 percent of all cultural

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9. G. P. Murdock, " How Culture Changes," in L. H. Shapiro, *Man, Culture and Society,* New York 1960, p. 247.

traits on earth, only 10 percent are real inventions,[10] The change
or introduction of a new trait or pattern we call innovation.
Innovation is the formation of a new habit by a single indi-
vidual which is subsequently accepted or learned by other
members of his society. Innovation may be the act of borrow-
ing, i. e., diffusion, or it may be done by invention. But in
most parts the innovation comes from within society : under
the pressure of gradually changing circumstances, there may
occur a slight modification of a pre-existing habitual behavior
or thinking-pattern. This kind of innovation we call variation.

To answer therefore our first question, we may say that
Mahikari is a new answer of the Japanese culture, new in the
sense of a special kind of innovation, i. e., a variation, and an
answer insofar as the culture is responding and adjusting itself
to new conditions, circumstances and environments. The ques-
tions we cannot answer in this paper are where these new
conditions derive from, which of the challenges toward the
culture are real and which forces are driving the culture to-
wards a change of its traditional patterns.

The second question has been, whether considering the ex-
ample of Mahikari, there is any possiblity of generalization
and scientifical structuring of the religious phenomena in Japan.

Church, sect, denomination or movement ?

Several approaches toward the problem of modern religious

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10. There are some slightly different approaches in terminology : it may be
sometimes useful to distinguish between transmission within the society,
origination, i. e., invention or discovery, and diffusion. Then origination and
diffusion are the constituent factors in the process of innovation. J. J.
Honigmann, *The World of Man*, New York 1959, pp. 194 ff.

phenomena in Japan have been made already. Mostly the term
" sect ", sometimes the term " church " has been applied to the
modern religious groupings in the Japanese society. One of
the latest approaches[11] tries to divide the different groups by
applying terms like "Monotheism"[12] or "Epicurean Movement".[13]
We doubt the applicability of such terms in reference to re-
ligious phenomena in the Far East. Since Anthropology claims
to be the science of culture, and since therefore the concepts
developed by this science have to be proven applicable to any
culture, whether it is the culture of the Bororo in the Amazon
jungle or the so-called " high culture " of China or Polynesia,
it may be useful to examine the terms of one aspect of culture,
the religious field, for their applicability. The difficulty has
been clearly stated — even if without a solution — and outlined
in a highly personal lecture by Prof. Zwi Werblowsky.[14] As
Prof. Werblowsky stated, the vocabulary of the specific Western
Religionswissenschaft has grown out of a preoccupation with
particular religions. This vocabulary... is largely derived from
intensive studies... of the Christian religion ... and Near
Eastern religions in contact with Biblical religions."[15] Therefore
we have to find a term which is of value for any phenomenon
with similar patterns in any other culture.

We think that we cannot use the term " sect " because of
its derogatory connotation. The term was used by the churches

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11. Neill McFarland, *The Rushhour of the Gods*, New York 1967.
12. Ibid., pp. 97 ff., in reference to Konkō-kyō.
13. Ibid., pp. 123 ff., in reference to P L Kyōdan.
14. Zwi Werblowsky, "Religions in Japan," in *Contemporary Religions in Japan* Vol. IV, Sept. 1963, No. 3, pp. 189-202.
15. Zwi Werblowsky, l. e. p. 192.

to designate schismatic groups.[16] This connotation is especially strong in the context of the European cultural heritage. There have been the different approaches by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch to define the sect as a contractual society in distinction to the institutional ecclesiastical body. But, as J. Wach pointed out already,[17] there is oftentimes the development from a sectarian group into an ecclesiastical body.

H. R. Niebuhr tried to define the church as the "natural social grouping," because the individual is born into it, whereas he has to join the sect.[18] But it cannot be denied that people are also joining a church and are born into a sect.[19]

To avoid these difficulties, we prefer the term " movement." This term implies the fact, that neither in the structure or organization nor in the ideological or theological foundations there has been reached the point of institutionalization. There is a free play of forces, the changing and modeling of the ideology, the shifting, the up and down of membership, and the term is free for application to any stage within the development to the group, whether there is growth, elaboration or decline and despersion or secession. The term implies the time-factor and the connotation of different stages of intensity.

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16. J. Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, Chicago 1944, p. 196; Ernst Troeltsch, " Church and Sect," in *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, Tübingen 1912, pp. 362-375.

17. J. Wach, l. c., p. 197.

18. H. R. Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, New York 1929, p. 19 ff.

19. A different approach for a new definition of the term " sect " has been undertaken by Bryan R. Wilson in *American Sociological Review*, 1959, pp. 3-15, where he denies the statement that a sect can only exist for one generation, as has been pointed out by Niebuhr, Howard Becker, Liston, Pope et al.

In the case of Mahikari and the elaboration of its doctrine there may be seen an intensive point in the new introduction of the peach symbol at the occasion of the consecration of the new head church in February, 1968, for instance.[20]

It may now be asked whether this movement is really a religious one. Without reference to the cult or the organization we have to answer the question whether we may speak in the case of Mahikari of the development and creation of a *belief pattern.*

Myth and moral theology

The intellectual expression of religion can be divided into two major modes, the mythic and the rational. It has been stated that " myth ... is a series of attempts to understand the world, to explain life and death, fate and nature, gods and cults."[21] Or as Cassirer said, " The world of myth is a dramatic world .... Here we cannot speak of ' things ' as dead or indifferent stuff. All objects are benignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repellent and threatening."[22]

We think that we may say that the teachings of Mahikari are fitting to a great extent into these definitions of myth. But it must be admitted that in Mahikari the real mythic mode is overshadowed strongly by the claim of Okada toward mankind.

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20. Unfortunately there has not yet been developed any sufficient model or method for measuring the intensity of dynamic social and cultural movements by scale.
21. E. Bethe, " Mythus-Sage-Märchen," Leipzig 1905, in S. K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, New York 1948, p. 144.
22. Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, New York 1953, p. 109.

This claim fits more the second constituent part of intellectual expression of religion, the rational one. The development of a rational theology involves the working out of a rational ethic or moral theory. As such, these theological, ethical or moral concepts are brought to bear on the education of the membership. In this way they enter into man's definition of the situation in which he acts, his conception of proper goals and the means to achieve them.[23] Thus the ideology or teaching becomes " bound up with practical attitudes towards the most varied aspects of daily life."[24]

The astonishing fact is that while almost all over the world the process of rationalization of the myth is done by a special class or group of people, who are within the organization above the level of ordinary members, moral theology mostly develops and emerges out of a class or caste of independent priesthood. This stage is surely not yet reached by Mahikari, and there may be doubts whether it will ever be reached. But phenomenologically the nucleus of a mythical as well as of a rational ideological expression is laid down. Whether this will be developed or not, will depend upon the question of how many members Mahikari can attract, i. e., the elaboration of the ideological concept and the implantation by education and tradition are depending upon structural and organizational aspects.

Our third question was whether there are any concepts of comparative sciences for application to the Japanese religious scenery.

In relation with the study of culture change and the

23. T. F. Dea, *The Sociology of Religion*, New Jersey 1966, p. 45.
24. Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory*, Glencoe, Ill. 1958, p. 209

emergence of belief patterns of relatively small groups within a given society anthropologists have developed the concept of so-called nativistic movements.

Nativism and the Charismatic Leader

The phenomena to which the term has been applied are so widespread that there is up to now a considerable academic struggle for a definition. I follow here the definition of Ralph Linton which seems to embrace the widest range of phenomena. Linton says, "A nativistic movement is any conscious, organized attempt by some members of a society, to revive or to perpetuate selected aspects of their culture."[25] There are different modes of nativistic movements. The one, which would fit the Mahikari group, could be labelled a nativistic movement with some " millenaristic " or " messianistic " aspects. This means that the coming millenium is modelled directly after the past, with some modifications.[26] Often the different aspects of nativistic movements cannot be clearly distinguished. The ideas of a coming millenium are often combined with concepts of world-destruction and or with the hope for an everlasting paradise, but a paradise *on earth*. All these aspects can be found in the teachings of Mahikari. The most interesting fact is the creation of these groups by a personal founder, who is at the same time founder, messias, organizational and spiritual leader and prophet.

25. Ralph Linton, " Nativistic Movements," in *American Anthropologist*, 45, 1943, pp. 230-242 ; R. Redfield, R. Linton, M. J. Herskovits, " A Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," in *American Anthropologist*, 38, 1935, pp. 149-152 et al.

26. There is no possibility of counting the different contributions to the problem of "messianistic" or "revitalization" movements which have been made by Mühlmann, Wallace, M. Mead et al. for nearly all culture areas of the earth.

He is the typical charismatic leader, as defined by Max Weber who says: "Charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader."[27]

The main aspects of charismatic nativistic movements are the unusualness, the radical or revolutionary claim and the spontaneity. Due to these aspects these movements are in the real sense creative. For this reason we do not agree with Prof. Werblowsky, when he says that the real dynamic in religious life in Japan may perhaps be seen in the " low-level " religions, as he refers to the new religious movements in Japan generally.[28] Due to the fact that especially these groups are spontaneous in regard to their creation, that they have spiritual founders, who must be considered as charismatic leaders, and that they are revolutionary, i. e. *deviant* in the reference-frame of traditional attitudes of thinking, in traditional patterns of behavior, that they are calling for a change, a reversion, a cleaning, or what expressions they may ever use, shows their originality and their important role as dynamic forces in a living culture. These movements are in our reference frame not " low-level," but " high-level " manifestations.

Finally I should like to express the expectation that this

27. Max Weber, " The Theory of Social and Economic Organization," in Talcott Parsons (ed.), New York 1947, p. 358.
28. Zwi Werblowsky, " Religions in Japan," in *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, Vol. IV, Sept. 1963, No. 3, pp. 189-202.

preliminary outline of some aspects of the religious reality in modern Japan may stimulate the discussion of these phenomena. What I wanted to show by the example of the Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan is the fact that we may find in the clothing of the so-called New Religions the versatility and creative power of an old culture as a response to the challenge of forces which we have not defined yet, but which are driving a considerable number of people of this culture toward a redefinition of their cultural settings with the purpose of adaptation and adjustment to the new environment,[29] — that we may find at least in the religious field the phenomenon, how a culture tries to find a more rewarding system which provides the members of this culture with the ideological background to deal and to cope with this challenging force of change, which may be called " modernization " and " impact of the Western cultures."

29. This means purpose or goal of a culture, as postulated from the functional viewpoint. In the framework of functional theory, adaptation is the response of a culture toward lethal threats, adjustment the answer toward a non-lethal tension. See: J. J. Honigmann, *The World of Man*, New York 1959, pp. 171 ff., and R. Firth (ed.), *Man and Culture*, New York 1957, esp. Ralph Piddington, "Malinowshi's Theory of Needs," pp. 33 ff.; B. Malinowski, *The Dynamics of Culture Change*, New Haven 1945.