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Editors' Introduction

Searching for Legitimacy: Tenrikyo, Omoto, and "Marginalized" Religions of Modern Japan

The purpose of this special issue is to provide a new perspective on the study of "new religions" (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教) by positioning "early new religions"—religious groups that emerged in nineteenth-century Japan—as "marginalized religions." It also seeks to propose a framework that allows us to reconsider the history of religion in modern Japan from peripheral (marginalized) positions.

Scholars of religion in Japan have categorized the religious groups that emerged within the span of approximately two hundred years from around the end of the Edo period to the present day as "new religions," which are seen to have various characteristics that differ from those of established religions such as Christianity and Buddhism (Shimazono 1992). It is debatable, however, whether it is appropriate to discuss religious groups that arose in the nineteenth century and those that emerged after the end of World War II under the same category. Social and political contexts in these two time periods were significantly different, as were the challenges faced by each religious group.

We therefore limit the focus of our inquiry to "early new religions" and explore the process of their historical development. These groups, which include Kurozumikyo, Tenrikyo, Konkokyo, Renmonkyo, Maruyamakyo, and Omoto, among many others, operated in marginalized positions of society amid the social changes of modern Japan, such as the formation of the nation-state, the proliferation of a modern rationalistic worldview, the development of capitalism,

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the imperialization of Japan, and Japan's wars against China, Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and others. By focusing on zones of contact between these religious groups and society, the present volume seeks to foreground the complex relationship between religions and modernity as experienced outside the Western cultural sphere.

The focus on the historical context of modernity in Japan can also shed new light on the study of New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Western contexts. One of the characteristics of "newness" related to Japanese new religions concerns the development of these groups in association with the historical process of modernity (Reader 2005, 93). This sets apart new religions in Japan from their Western counterparts, whose newness tends to be associated with the membership comprising first-generation converts and is not necessarily predicated upon the analysis of specific historical conditions of modernity that would marginalize or even criminalize emergent and relatively "new" religions (Barker 2004). Dissecting the impact of modernity on the very process of emergence, development, and transformations of early new religions in Japan provides a new angle from which to approach minority religions in other social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Study of New Religions in Japan in the Post-World War II Period

To elucidate the scope of our present task, we first review the history of research on new religions in Japan. Scholarly attempts to understand new religions that emerged toward the end of the Edo period began as early as in the 1930s (Nakayama 1932; Tsurufuji 1939), but it was not until after World War II that more systematic studies started to develop. The 1950s saw a rise in sociological and historical studies of new religions that focus on social changes as the background to their emergence (Takagi 1954; Oguchi and Takagi 1954; Saki, Inui, Oguchi, Matsushima 1955). Some of these new religious groups had preserved writings of their founders, which, together with other texts produced by their members and institutions, provided a rich variety of primary sources for research. These texts have allowed scholars to reveal new religions' worldviews that differed from those of traditional religions, such as the connection between the source of life and human beings as well as this-world-oriented salvation (Tsushima 1979). In the 1970s and 1980s, a general image of new religions gradually emerged as a result of fieldwork conducted by scholars on various religious groups. This culminated in the compilation of *An Encyclopedia of New Religions* in 1990, which is still an influential work in the field.

Many of these studies were also informed by the perspective of people's history (*minshūshi* 民衆史), which focused on religious movements led by non-elite leaders as a lens to critically understand Japan's modernization process. As a rel-

atively new capitalistic empire seeking to catch up with Western powers, Japan went through a rapid process of Westernization and industrialization, which resulted in contradictions and inequalities in many corners of society. Scholars with this view approached the ideas and practices of new religions as a response of non-elites to these new social conditions. For many historians, the conflict between the modern emperor system and new religions was a particularly important issue. By studying how these religious groups conducted their own activities based on the religious authority of non-elite leaders, historians discovered examples of people seeking to criticize and relativize the Meiji regime, which emphasized the authority of the emperor as a divine being with a mythological origin as a way to unify the people and the country (Murakami 1958; Yasumaru 1974; 1977; Kozawa 1988; Katsurajima 1992).

Meanwhile, beginning in the 1980s, Western scholars of Japanese religions have approached new religions by drawing on the scholarship of Japanese religions as well as of new religious movements in the West, in particular sociology of religion. While many of these studies focused on groups that gained attention in the West, such as Soka Gakkai and Sukyo Mahikari (Davis 1980; Métraux 1988), some works also examined early new religions, including Tenrikyo and Kurozumikyo (Ellwood 1982; Hardacre 1986). This body of research did not necessarily develop in dialogue with the Japanese-language scholarship at the time, but rather revealed the teachings and practices of new religions through a variety of research methods.

Recent Studies on New Religions and the Concept of "Marginalized Religion"

Studies of new religions that emerged after the 1950s developed against the background of the rapid growth of religious groups such as Soka Gakkai, Rissho Kosei-kai, Agonshu, God Light Association (GLA), the Unification Church, and Kofuku no Kagaku. However, most of these groups ceased to grow in membership after the 1990s, with many of them trending toward a decline. The Aum Affair in 1995 further accelerated this trend.

The study of new religions continued to develop after the publication of *An Encyclopedia of New Religions* by building upon the contributions of earlier works. With a few exceptions (Stalker 2008), however, it gradually shifted its focus from the analysis of founders and first-generation members during the emergence period to the process of succession and transformation from the second-generation onward. Various scholars published monographs on new religions that developed after World War II, including Soka Gakkai, Agonshu, Jehovah's Witnesses, Sekai Kyuseikyo, and Shinnyo-en (Akiba and Kawabata 2004; Yumiyama 2005; Inose 2011; Tsukada 2015; Kumamoto 2018; McLaughlin 2018; Baffelli and Reader 2018; Yamaguchi 2022).

This shift is also seen in the study of early new religions. Religious groups that arose before the establishment of the modern religious system such as Kurozumikyo, Tenrikyo, and Konkokyo became institutionalized as modern religious organizations around the time when their second-generation members succeeded the leadership. Until the 1980s, the study of new religions was marked by a tendency to search for the "essence" of these religions in pre-institutionalized forms of movements led by their founders and first-generation members. In contrast, the development of these movements after institutionalization was seen in a negative light due to their transformation into rigid bureaucratic organizations as well as their subordination to the state or was simply disregarded as deviation from the original teaching (Oguri 1969; Murukami and Yasumaru 1971).

From around the 1990s, a growing number of studies began to focus on the development of early new religions during and after the time of second-generation members (Watanabe 1990; Ōya 1992; Lee 1994; Nagaoka 2015; 2020; Smith 2024). This is partly due to the perceived "saturation" of studies on the founders and first-generation members of these new religions. However, this shift of focus in the research was also part of a broader effort to reframe the problem of "aging" new religions toward the question of how such groups and their followers lived through the process of transformation. Such changes in approach, however, makes it difficult to see the differences between new religions and established religions, providing that the latter groups—whether it be Buddhist or Christian groups—have also changed as they developed in different historical and geographical contexts.

A new picture emerges when we shift our focus from new religions themselves to the historical context in which they were situated. New religions, especially early new religions, garnered mass appeal as religious movements but were at the same time seen as "evil cults" (*inshi jakyō* 淫祠邪教) that should be eradicated in the age of modern nationalism. In the eyes of the Japanese imperial state, these religions were seen as organizations that should be exploited for its strategy of nation building and wartime mobilization. The experiences of early new religions in these contexts overlapped with those of Buddhist groups, which were seen as mainstream religions, and Christian groups, which were closely associated with Western nations and cultures. However, the experiences of early new religions were qualitatively different due to the marginalization or subordination they faced at religious, cultural, and political levels, and in such a position they underwent processes of self-formation and self-transformation by negotiating with religious, cultural, and political values and conditions of modern Japan. Their difficult experiences may allow us to reconsider the unequal and violent nature of Japanese modernity. This is why we use the concept of "marginalized religion."

"Marginalized religion" is not a substantive concept defined by internal characteristics of the early new religions but rather a distinctive concept that focuses

on the unbalanced power relations arising in the contact zone between new religions and mainstream society. Members of early new religions were always thrown into ongoing power dynamics that would marginalize them, and their negotiations with larger society led them to take on complex and hybrid characteristics. Their experiences cannot be understood in terms of popular/elite, rational/irrational, orthodox/heretical, or pro-empire/anti-empire dichotomies but should rather be seen as disrupting such dichotomies.

Thinking of these religious groups as marginalized religions allows us to critically understand the complex politics unfolding around new religions while avoiding their essentialization. We can also compare the modern experience of these groups with that of marginalized religions outside Japan, which are not limited to new religious movements.

Critical Studies of the Concept of "Religion" and "Marginalized Religions"

Following trends in the Western academic discourse that were increasingly critical of the concept of "religion" (Smith 1982; Asad 1993; McCutcheon 1997; Fitzgerald 2000), scholars of religion in Japan began to deconstruct the origins of the Japanese term for "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教), which was formulated in the context of diplomatic negotiations with Western countries in the late nineteenth century, as well as of the complex domestic political processes leading to the formation of the modern nation-state (Isomae 2003; Shimazono and Tsuruoka 2004; Hayashi and Isomae 2008; Josephson 2012; Maxey 2014). The ideal relationship between "religion" and the state, society, and science was also debated by government officials, bureaucrats, and intellectuals throughout the twentieth century, with the position of "religion" in modern society being in a constant state of reorganization (Akazawa 1985; Maekawa 2015).

Buddhists and Christians in Japan also endeavored to define their faith as "religion" by referring to modern academic knowledge (Hoshino 2012; Klautau 2012; Ōtani 2012; Krämer 2015). Some of the early new religions that came into being in later periods also formed their religious organizations with the concept of "religion" as a point of reference. This process overlapped with that of established religions in some respects but differed in many others. Magical rituals and practices that supported the development of early new religions were criticized as "superstition" that should be excluded from "religion" and were subject to police persecutions and social pressure. Their worldviews and ideas of salvation were also seen as being dangerous due to the perceived risk of denying or challenging the legitimacy of the state and were sometimes legally and socially excluded with such labels as "evil cult" or "pseudo-religion" (Katsurajima 2015).

However, early new religions were not only unilaterally excluded due to the social dynamics of marginalization. By actively engaging in the debate over the

concept of religion, they attempted to negotiate with the view of religion formed by the government and mainstream society. They sought to establish their own identity, sometimes by seeking recognition as an authentic "religion" and at other times by distinguishing themselves from existing religions. The discursive activities of the early new religions, which were at the boundary between "religion" and "superstition," "evil cult," or "pseudo-religion" sheds new light on scholarship related to the conceptualization of religion at large.

Overview of Articles

The articles featured in this special issue each illuminate how these religious groups, their founders, members, and other social actors have negotiated the place of their respective religious traditions within Japanese society in response to social forces that, to varying degrees, drove them into marginalized positions. Nagaoka Takashi's article seeks to address the question of marginality through a comparative analysis of the myths of Tenrikyo and Omoto. As Nagaoka rightly indicates, previous studies have tended to frame the relationship between national myths and the myths of the so-called "new religions" in terms of a binary opposition between orthodoxy versus heresy, as evinced by works of such influential scholars as Murakami Shigeyoshi. Nagaoka alerts us to the dangers of this view, which can lead scholars to neglect the ways in which new religions engaged with national mythology in creating or (re)interpreting their own myths.

To dissect the complexity of such mythmaking processes, Nagaoka focuses on Tenrikyo's *Doroumi kōki*, featuring a story told by Nakayama Miki of the creation of the world and human beings, and Omoto's *Reikai monogatari*, which is a multi-volume text dictated by Deguchi Onisaburō regarding his spiritual experiences in the world of kami. Though originally different in their stance toward the official myth of the nation and modern nationalism, religious and social actors in and related to both groups sought ways to reconcile the contradictions between their myths and the national myths in an effort to mitigate the political pressure from the authorities and to gain recognition by the state and mainstream society. Their efforts were in vain, as the tension with the state heightened from the mid-1930s onward, leading to the suppression of Tenrikyo's myth and the devastating crackdown on Omoto. The formation of the myths of these new religions was thus entangled in a complex political context. In his conclusion, Nagaoka urges scholars of Japanese religion to carefully reexamine the received scholarly narratives by shifting their focus to the experiences of members of marginalized religions.

It was not only the charges of blasphemy against the official myth of the state with which marginalized religions had to grapple. Social pressure label-

ing them as "superstition" and an "evil teaching" was another crucial aspect of marginalization, which Takashi Miura's article illuminates. The author focuses on Omoto's cofounder, Deguchi Onisaburō, and his unique conceptualization of the notion of "superstition" that was formulated during the period from the late 1910s to the mid-1930s. Rather than squarely rejecting the criticisms leveled by journalists, academics, and political actors, Onisaburō internalized the very language of "superstition," subverted its meaning, and used it in ways that would allow him to legitimize his group.

In so doing, Onisaburō criticized established religions and related social actors as being "superstitious" while discursively positioning Omoto beyond the conceptual perimeters of superstition and religion. His condemnation of superstition even extended to Omoto's own traditions, as marked by the dismissal of the *Fudesaki*, which is Omoto's primary scripture written by the other cofounder, Deguchi Nao, and the prohibition of the practice of *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神, which involves spirit possession. Adding to these measures to eradicate superstitious practices was Onisaburō's move to define the realization of the imperial way as Omoto's supreme goal, which entailed placing Omoto's main deity, Ushitora no Konjin, in a subordinate position under Amaterasu. By illustrating all these processes of transformation, Miura reveals how leaders and other social actors of marginalized religion in modern Japan acted as active agents—rather than passive victims—to shape and reshape the concept of superstition that society used to invalidate the group.

The interplay between a marginalized religion and its critics is also highlighted in Franziska Steffen's discussion of Tenrikyo during the Meiji period. She traces social discourses between 1890 and 1908 to demonstrate how proponents and critics of Tenrikyo fought over the legitimacy of the new religious group by relating their arguments to science and the Christian-oriented conception of "revealed religion." Much akin to Onisaburō's subversion of the concept of "superstition" mentioned earlier, both sides of the debate negotiated the meaning of religious salvation and healing to support their own claims. A variety of ways in which the proponents of Tenrikyo sought to advance their arguments reveal their active engagement in public debate to provide scientifically legitimate interpretations of their faith.

In Steffen's assessment, these formulations of the self-image of Tenrikyo have not received sufficient scholarly attention due to the lack of introspection on three premises in the study of religion: the myth of disenchantment, a biased concept of religion, and the question of magic. These modernistic underlying premises all relate to what Steffen calls "compromised revelation," which allowed Tenrikyo to claim the authenticity of their faith practices as a revealed religion and yet confined the group to Nakayama Miki's original, unadaptable teaching. In the case of the healing practice that Miki developed, for instance, removing

it from the religious faith would undermine the authenticity of her revelation, but keeping it in the religious tradition would invite criticisms from wider society. Steffen suggests that unpacking these theoretical premises allows scholars of marginalized religions to see how their members and proponents executed their agency as they appropriated intellectual discourses to claim authenticity and legitimacy of their faith tradition in their own terms.

The final article of this volume departs from the pre-World War II context and sheds light on the identity negotiation of Tenrikyo from the 1960s onward. In his analysis, Masato Kato focuses on the process of Tenrikyo's disaffiliation from Sect Shinto traditions—a process that he calls "de-Shintoization"—by adapting John Breen's and Mark Teeuwen's notion of "Shintoization." In the decades following the end of World War II, Tenrikyo made a wide array of changes to its doctrine, ritual practices, and other aspects of the tradition in its effort to restore Foundress Nakayama Miki's teaching, which had been compromised due to state censorship. As part of the restoration, Tenrikyo dissociated from Sect Shinto tradition, which it had adopted at the time of gaining sectarian independence during the Meiji period. The process of de-Shintoization resulted in shedding its Shinto identity at the level of institutional affiliation as well as the removal of Shinto-related materials and practices from its ritual space, such as *shimenawa* しめなわ and *tamagushi hōken* 玉串奉献. However, this did not lead to a complete makeover, which Kato describes as "selective dissociation." Considering that Tenrikyo's de-Shintoization in the postwar decades was part of its pursuit of a distinctive religious identity, it remains to be seen whether Tenrikyo will make further changes to its ritual arrangements in relation to what is viewed as "proper" religion. Kato suggests that the case of Tenrikyo's dissociation from Shinto tradition can be a useful point of reference when analyzing the identity negotiation of other marginalized religions, including former Sect Shinto groups.

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