

Tradition and Modernity in the New Religious Movements of Japan

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Two facts about the new religious movements (*shinkō shūkyō*)¹ in modern Japan are indisputable. One is that since the mid-nineteenth century vast and far-reaching changes have taken place in practically every sphere of Japanese life. On the surface, at least, very few things in contemporary Japan appear to be what they were before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This is true, no doubt, of almost any country in the world, but the rate of change in Japan and the contrast with the apparent strong bias against change in the preceding 350-year Tokugawa period place Japan in a unique position with regard to rapid social change.

The second fact is that since the early nineteenth century there have arisen many popular religious movements that have attracted millions of followers and are at present, without question, the most active religious groups in Japan. Almost all these new movements originated before World War II, but a number of them have experienced their most rapid growth since 1950.

We begin then with the undeniable fact of the rapid growth

1. For the purpose of this paper the term "new religious movements" should be taken as referring to the following eleven groups: Konkōkyō, Kurozumikyō, Ōmoto, P. L. ("Perfect Liberty") Kyōdan, Reiyūkai Kyōdan, Risshō Kōsei Kai, Seichō no Ie, Sekai Kyūseikyō, Sōka Gakkai, Tenrikyō, and Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō.

of new religious movements in a period of unprecedented and sweeping changes. Having stated this fact, however, we must next proceed to determine to what extent and on what level these changes have actually taken place. We must raise the question as to whether there have been aspects of life and levels of cultural experience which have not changed. Has radical change been the predominant movement in every area of Japanese life and culture, or are there aspects of life which have not changed at all (e. g., traditional vertical social stratification and the *oyabun-kobun* relationship within modern industry, education, and politics, etc.)? We must ask how deep or superficial the change is; what group or segment of society, what social class, or what geographical area is involved in the changes; and what aspects of culture one is speaking of (e. g., art, literature, social structure, religion, etc.). Nakane Chie points out that not all change involves basic change. She writes, "It is Japanese nature to accept change with little resistance and, indeed, to welcome and value change; but a superficial change of outlook, as facile as changes in fashion, has not the slightest effect on the firm persistence of the basic nature and core of personal relations and group dynamics."²

In addition to our analysis of change in modern Japan we must also closely scrutinize the meaning of the term "new" in the phrase new religious movements. Many commentators on these movements claim that the word "new" must be re-examined if not discarded entirely. Harry Thomsen points out that "the term 'new religions' has been subject to much

2. *Japanese society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 148.

discussion, and there is no denying the fact that it is a misleading and inaccurate name.”³ We need to heed McFarland’s suggestion that “what is called *new* may in fact be *old*. What is vaunted as *modern* may be controlled subliminally by what is *traditional*.”⁴ We must ask, then, in what specific ways the new religious movements are new, and to what extent traditional elements are to be found in them. It is necessary to inquire at how deep a level new elements penetrate into the new religious movements. For example, is their newness the same for their social organization, their worship and liturgy, their methods of propagation, and their basic myth-symbol system ?

Let us at this point set out definitions of the following terms which will help clarify the analysis that follows : religion, religious change, syncretism, secularization, and modernization.

Religion is here defined as that system of myths and symbols of ultimate values and norms which are taken as self-evident, incontestable, and authoritative and which provide the absolute foundation and motivation for one’s personal and social existence.⁵ Religious change at this level is defined as the

3. *The new religions of Japan* (Tokyo : Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1963), p. 15.
4. H. Neill McFarland, *The rush hour of the gods : A study of new religious movements in Japan* (New York : Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 6.
5. A myth is a story that tells of the origin, nature, and destiny of those elements in a person’s world view taken as ultimately real, significant, and meaningful. A symbol is a representation in conceptual form based on visible and tangible objects in the physical world which both point to and participate in what is taken to be of ultimate value. Myths and symbols are understood here as the main language of religion. For this definition of religion and for much of the theoretical approach used here I am indebted to Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a cultural system” in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion* (New York : Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 1-46 ; Peter L. Berger, *The sacred canopy* (New York : Doubleday and Co.,

substitution of a new system of myths and symbols of ultimacy for an old one. This change may be evolutionary, in which case the replacement is gradual and usually does not lead to a chaotic crisis of identity. In this type of change the replacement process is so gradual that it is often imperceptible to most people, and the rate of replacement for various specific myths and symbols is different. Also, it is easy for elements from the old system to remain alongside elements from the new system so that they can merge into one another. This merger of elements from the old and new systems is the phenomenon known as syncretism. Religious change may also occur abruptly. In revolutionary change the old system is at one stroke wiped away and replaced by a completely new system. This is dangerous and often means the destruction of the total life of the people holding the old system.

Secularization means the removal of the myths and symbols of ultimacy from a people without replacement by any new system. Modernization means the introduction of a significant number of new elements into a predominantly traditional system. In the process of modernization the culture must keep two concerns uppermost in mind: *identity* or the meaningful continuity of tradition to maintain order and stability, and *progress* or the ability to learn, change, grow, and advance impelled by new knowledge and techniques. Ideally, for a culture to modernize in a way that does not disrupt its world through the destruction of myths and symbols of ultimacy, it must keep a healthy balance between identity (tradition) and

Inc., 1969); and Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond belief: Essays on religion in a post-traditional world* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

progress (modernity).

In order to better understand the new religious movements in relation to Japan's religious past—asking how they are both continuous and discontinuous with that past—I propose to make an analysis first of “traditional” Japanese religion and secondly of “modern” Japanese religion. Then, by examining the new movements in the light of these two types of religiosity we can hopefully gain a more balanced view of what religious changes, if any, have taken place in the new religious movements.

An Analysis of Japanese Religious “Tradition”

Let us now make an analysis of Japanese “traditional” religion using four categories: 1. kami, 2. religious community, 3. man, and 4. salvation. (In classical western terms these categories would be theology, ecclesiology, anthropology, and soteriology.)

From time immemorial the name given to Japanese spirits, gods, demons, deities, divinities, etc. has been “kami.” The etymology of the term is uncertain but may well simply have referred to anything that was “high,” “above,” or “superior” to man. At any rate, this word has continued to the present as the Japanese name for deity. The name of the indigenous Japanese religion, Shinto, is a Sinicization of *kami no michi* or “the way of the kami.” The Japanese concept of deity can be centered in kami because the other major religious tradition that has become Japanized, Buddhism, often identified its Buddhas and bodhisattvas with kami. This syncretism between kami, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas took place at both the elite

and folk levels and affected almost every aspect of Shinto and Buddhist life and practice. One possible difference between Shinto and Buddhism is, as Bellah suggests, the immanence of the kami as over against the transcendent emphasis in Buddhism.⁶ However, until the introduction of Christianity in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the notion of transcendence was swallowed up by the indigenous notion of immanence as exemplified in kami. As in China, the cosmological world view that prevailed was one in which man, nature, society, and heaven (and in Japan the kami must be added) were all parts of one harmonious whole.

Hori Ichirō distinguishes two types of kami in Japanese religion: *ujigami* (clan or territorial kami) and *hitogami* ("person" kami). He gives six distinctive characteristics for each.

UJIGAMI

1. "The *uji-gami* play symbolic roles of maintaining and integrating the political and economic autonomy of a particular family, clan, kinship group or territorial society."
2. "A strong exclusiveness of beliefs as well as of the quality of the kami is accordingly reflected by the exclusiveness of the community..."
3. "The divine functions of the *uji-gami* are undifferentiated, although they assume rather stereotyped forms in spite of the vagueness of the concept."

HITOGAMI

1. "It establishes a superfamily, super-clan, or wide circle of believers."
2. "The *hito-gami* type has an overt character in contrast to the covert quality of *uji-gami*—or comprehensive rather than exclusive."
3. "The *hito-gami* has a strong personality and particular function or functions."

6. Bellah, *Beyond belief*, pp. 118-123.

4. "There is the concept of a contractual relationship between the *uji-gami* and its own clan, family, or kinship group members."
5. "Adherents of the *uji-gami* are strictly limited to the members of these groups or associated groups."
6. "The authority or power of the *uji-gami* is directly reflected in the political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances of its adherents."
4. "The focus of the relation between the kami and men is on faith rather than on genealogy or geography."
5. "Believers in the *hito-gami* are, therefore, not restricted to the fixed social family as its transmitter or attendants."
6. "The authority and power of the *hito-gami* are directly reflected in the magico-religious power of its transmitter, his techniques of ecstasy, his socio-political and economic situation, as well as contemporary opinion."⁷

The *ujigami* is a group-centered deity (whether the group is the family, clan, or nation) with whom the *ujiko* ("clanchild") is related on the basis of real or fictive blood relationship. The charisma related to this type of kami is a "charisma of office" depending on the position of the person within the group. Ancestor worship is the liturgical form most characteristic of the *ujigami*.

In contrast the *hitogami* is usually related to individuals who are chosen by the will of the kami and who respond with personal faith and obedience. If a group is formed (and often one is), followers will be drawn to and kept in the group by the actions of the kami, usually through the one who was first chosen as a charismatic leader. Kami-possession and shamanism are the main liturgical forms for this type.

Next, we turn to the structure of religious groups and communities. A religious community is a group of persons who

7. *Folk religion in Japan: Continuity and change*, edited by Joseph M. Kitagawa and Alan L. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 32-33.

are united by myths and symbols that are accepted by them as of ultimate meaning and significance and through which their world is created and maintained. Again we follow Hori's two types of kami as productive of two types of religious communities with their own distinctive religious leaders, worship practices, and ethics.

The *ujigami*-type is based on a unity dependent on real or fictive blood relations. All persons of the same lineage form a religious community. This may be a household (*ie*) including all persons who are a part of that household whether they are actually related by blood or not. They are considered as "adopted" into that household and would be included in its religious activities. At another level the religious unit would be the clan (*uji*) which at first was probably an extended family but came to refer to a territorial unit. Of course, in traditional Japan most people who lived in the same village or subvillage were related to each other. A person has a life-long, unbreakable relationship to his *ujigami*. As is obvious, membership is not voluntary but is determined by one's birth and hence cannot be broken or given up on the basis of individual choice. In Japan there is another level of *ujigami*-type community—the nation. In spite of regional and family differences there is, nevertheless, a strong sense of national community in which the emperor stands as the kami-descended human representative of the *ujigami* (Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess) and each Japanese citizen as *ujiko*. To the extent that Shinto has been a national *ujigami*-type community it is a religion open only to those born into the group. Even when the emperor did not rule (especially from the twelfth to nineteenth

centuries), he continued to reign with "official charisma" as the heir of the one true imperial lineage. In summary, the structures of the religious communities based on the household, clan, and nation are homologous because they are all variations of one basic type—the *ujigami*.

Religious leaders are designated by their position in the community as determined by lineage, birthplace, or age status. The head of the household is usually the eldest male or his surrogate and his authority is passed on to the first son. It is his responsibility to receive, care for, and transmit the ancestral tablets and to be at least nominally in charge of the ancestral worship. The clan head was probably originally a political and religious ruler combined who possessed both official and personal charisma. Even when personal charisma was absent, he possessed official charisma based on his position in the clan as determined by lineage. The emperor is in the same position as a clan head except that he reigns over a nation which is structurally a clan. The Japanese have always been proud of the fact that the imperial lineage has never been broken in over 2,500 years (by traditional dating). The Chinese understanding of the mandate of heaven never became popular in Japan, for in Japan one reigns not by his individual virtues but by his being a member of the imperial family.

The worship practices are primarily what we term ancestor worship. The worship usually takes place at home for the household, at the *ujigami* shrine for the clan or territorial unit, and at the Ise Shrine for the imperial family. Of course other practices, some of which are Buddhist, have been taken into ancestor worship, but the basic pattern has not been radi-

cally changed. Therefore, some worship at temples, tombs, and other shrines has been adapted to the *ujigami*-type.

Ethics based on the *ujigami*-type are centered in standards and expectations of the group, usually unwritten, and enforced by social sanctions. Right and wrong are determined by the effect a certain action will have on the group. Hence, great value is placed on bringing honor to the family name, remembering the ancestors, providing for descendants and in general placing the welfare of one's household, clan, and nation above all other considerations, whether sub-group (personal) or trans-national. Filial piety as an aspect of ancestor worship is one of the chief ethical demands placed upon Japanese. In a narrow sense it refers to one's relations to parents but in Japan it has been broadened to include one's relations to any figure who fills the social role of parent (*oyabun*) toward a "child" (*kobun*). One can belong to any groups one chooses as long as membership in them does not hinder his proper performance as a member of household, clan, and nation.

A second type of religious community is that based on *hitogami*. These groups have historically been known as *kō*. Hori writes, "The term *kō* originated in the Buddhist term for 'lecture meeting.' However, in the course of Japanese history, *kō* has gradually changed in meaning to indicate those present at a Buddhist lecture meeting and the members of a religious fraternity. Finally, in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) the term *kō* lost its express religious significance and was sometimes used to mean a group organized for a common cause such as economic cooperation, mutual aid, or even amusement."⁸

8. Ibid., p. 38, n. 34 (adapted). Some *kō* were of the *ujigami*-type, but the

Members of a religious *kō* would join on a more or less voluntary basis. The group would center around a place made sacred by a *hitogami*, or some saving act of a kami, or a task given by a kami. The group would continue as the myth-symbol system held them together, but would disband when there was no longer an integrating center. Individual members would enter and leave according to their personal response to the myth-symbol system. The religious leader was often one who had been the original recipient or channel of the hierophany, and his or her leadership depended strongly on personal charisma. History has shown that *hitogami*-type groups often (but not always) take on the structure of an *ujigami*-type group as time passes. The leadership becomes hereditary, the charisma becomes more official than personal, and membership becomes limited to certain households or territories. However, the *kō* or voluntary group is an essential type in the structure of "traditional" Japanese religious groups.

Worship practices are usually determined by the revelation of the kami to the founder or to the followers. The place of worship may be a public location and is usually a place made sacred by the hierophany. Pilgrimages and other socio-religious activities are often the basis of extra-familial contacts and experiences.

The ethics of such *kō* are usually of minor significance since ethics are usually determined by the *ujigami*-type community. The *hitogami* may reveal new ethical ideals, but the group will confront great difficulties if it places its members in a loyalty dilemma as between *ujigami*-type groups and *kō*. As we have

present discussion is of the *hitogami*-type.

seen, the *hitogami*-type *kō* present no problems for a Japanese until they make demands that cause a person to betray his household, clan, or nation.

Vis-à-vis Japanese religious communities Robert Bellah writes in his discussion of the traditional Japanese value pattern: "Value is realized in groups that are thought of as natural entities. The community (*Gemeinschaft*, *kyōdōtai*) is the locus of value. These groups are thought to be integrated with the structure of reality and are thus endowed with a sacred quality. There is a divine-human continuity in which the symbolic heads of groups have an especially important place, being especially endowed with a sacred quality. One of their functions is to relate the group to the divine ancestors and protective deities. This pattern applies at many levels, e. g., family (and its ancestor worship), village (and the local deity, *ujigami*), and ultimately the whole country at whose head is the emperor (and above him the imperial ancestors). Science, ethics, philosophy—virtually all aspects of culture—are valuable only insofar as they contribute to the realization of value in the group, not as ends in themselves. Ethics consist mainly in acting as one should in one's group; there is no universal ethic."⁹

The nature of man follows naturally from our previous discussion of religious groups, for simply stated the individual's role, identity, and his very being are dependent upon membership in a group. As part of the Japanese value pattern just referred to Bellah continues, "Individuals exist because of a continuous flow of blessings from spirits and ancestors through

9. Bellah, *Beyond belief*, pp. 116–117.

the symbolic heads of groups. The individual is obligated to work in order to repay in small measure the blessings he has received and to sacrifice himself for the group if necessary."¹⁰ Of course, the *ujigami*-type group is the one primarily referred to. One's existence is created by the grace, strength, and sacrifices of ancestors, especially the parents, and one is constantly reminded of that. He owes them an obligation (*on*) that can never be repaid. One's role is defined in terms of his age and/or sex status in the household, clan, and nation. One thinks and acts according to his role in the group. He is almost never expected or allowed to make individual or private decisions, even those concerning his own personal affairs. In fact one might well raise the objection that in the traditional Japanese understanding of man there are no "personal affairs," only group affairs. Traditional Japanese religion has a public and communal function rather than a private and personal one. One's school, marriage partner, vocation, and house are chosen by the group for the effect they will have on the group. One will finally be buried and remembered as a member of the group. In a sense one's immortality or post-death existence is dependent on his having descendants to remember him and perform rites for him.

Closely related to the religious nature of man is the need for, hope for, and means of salvation. There is a particular symbolization of man in an ideal condition and man in an existential predicament separated from that ideal. Based on the importance of the group we can say that for the *ujigami*-type the ideal is to be a well-integrated, functioning, filial and loyal

10. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

member of the family, clan, or nation. One contributes and receives his share according to his status within the group. He upholds the family name and subordinates his personal desires to those of the group. He has temporal security where all needs can potentially be met, and he has the assurance of eternal security based again on the strength and continuity of the group. The most fundamental problem man faces is that of expulsion from the group because of his own anti-group activities or because of disintegration of the group through war, epidemic, etc.

In the *hitogami*-type the group per se is not as central as in the *ujigami*-type, so in the former man's basic problem is defined in broader terms. As in the *ujigami*-type, however, the features of this problem are defined in this-worldly terms. Four particular features have been of central concern in the Japanese religious tradition: sickness, sterility, poverty, and failure. These problems have more to do with the person than with his membership in a group. *Hitogami* often give help through the charismatic leader and the group members to individuals who need healing, success, prosperity, or fertility (for wife, animals, or crops). This salvation depends partially, at least, on the individual's faith and loyalty toward the *hitogami*. Importance is placed on the leader as a channel of the kami's power, whence magic, divination, spirit-possession, and exorcism are often employed. These problems are also dealt with under the *ujigami*-type, but there is a personal and individual dimension that leads one to seek other kami and other groups which will aid in these particular problems. The *hitogami*-type kami and groups are not necessarily exclusive of

ujigami-type kami and groups. In fact they usually supplement one another. This is why it is not typical of the Japanese religious mind-set to give up one system of religious symbols when another is adopted. The new ones are simply added on, thus giving Japanese religion a "layered" structure. The process of *shinbutsu shūgō* or Shinto-Buddhist syncretism is the best example of this phenomenon.

In summary, there are two types of kami, communities, and views of man and his salvation in traditional Japanese religion. Each type is based on its own distinctive myths and symbols, but they are both equally "traditional" and they are both a part of the religious myth-symbol system received by the Japanese of each generation down to the present. Since 1868 rapid social change, western influence, and modernization have had an effect on this received tradition. In order, however, to determine the extent and depth of change in the religious tradition we turn now to an analysis of religious "modernity" in Japan.

An Analysis of "Modernity" in Japanese Religion

Under the impact of modern western science, philosophy, and education there has been a decline of belief in and dependence on supernatural spiritual forces. The transcendent has become more immanent, the other-worldly more this-worldly, the absolute more relative, and the divine more human. The *ujigami*-type of kami has lost much of its traditional strength because of the decline of the three types of communities that have helped to sanction those symbols: the household or family, clan, and nation. The household structure has changed radi-

cally from an extended family to a nuclear family through high population mobility and urbanization. Apartment (*danchi*) living is especially destructive in its effects on the extended family because it excludes the grandparents. Since they are the ones responsible for much of the "religious education" in ancestor worship, in a nuclear family the children do not learn the traditional obligations and blessings of filial piety and ancestor worship. In the second place, village solidarity declines as more young people move to the cities for better jobs, more comfortable and modern life styles, and better chances of success. They may send money back to their families or they may return at New Year's and *bon*, but seldom do they resume permanent residence there or marry a local person. Since 1945 the myth-symbol system of a theocratic state, based on the emperor as a "living kami" and officially sanctioned through State Shinto, has been repudiated. The people who have grown up since World War II not only consider such myths, symbols, and rituals meaningless, they feel that they engendered or at least supported a destructive form of nationalism. However, the same people who reject the prewar emperor system and its concomitant militarism also acknowledge that there is no national myth-symbol system to replace it. Mishima Yukio's dramatic suicide in 1970 was at least partially to protest Japan's lack of a national myth-symbol system.

The *hitogami*-type of kami have also declined not only because of the general decline of faith in kami, but also because the shamanism, ecstatic possession, divination, necromancy, and magic connected with these kami are rejected as superstition at best and deceit at worst.

The religious community in modernity has already been discussed under the *ujigami*-type of kami. New types of groups have arisen to replace the older religious communities centered around both *ujigami* and *hitogami*. These groups may be comprised of a person's coworkers at a factory or office, or students in the same class in the university, or they may be voluntary groups organized for particular functions. The sense of loyalty and filial piety is often transferred to these groups. Conspicuous by their absence in these groups are kami of both the *ujigami* and *hitogami* types. The leaders of these groups are selected not on the basis of charisma from a kami but rather on the basis of family background, education, a special skill or knowledge, or the attraction of a dynamic personality. This might be called "charisma" but it is a secularized form and should be distinguished from the religious charisma of *hitogami*-type leaders. Needless to say, much of the social disorganization and the resultant personal anomie in modern Japan has been caused by the difficulty of a smooth transition from traditional to modern group life.

We have also already seen how the individualism of modernity has literally placed modern Japanese in a new and foreign world. Many problems are still defined in terms of one's group identification, but modernity has also raised a new problem of success (or failure) based on individual achievement. The individual must now find fulfillment in a kind of atomistic existence. Especially since 1945 people have defined their problems and sought solutions to those problems in economic terms. The way in which salvation is to be found is through one's own rationality, initiative, ability, and education. One's

environment, life, and history are controlled by rational planning. Factories produce material goods and hospitals care for one's physical and mental illnesses—both based on modern science and technology. The government through legislation or private businesses through fringe benefits provide medical care, education, retirement, and social security for citizens or employees.

Salvation is conceived of in radical this-worldly terms. There is a decline in expectation of supernatural intervention from an other-worldly sphere. Salvation is sought through rational and scientific means rather than through magic or prayer. The four basic problems mentioned above, viz., sickness, sterility, poverty, and failure, are dealt with in more rational and scientific ways. When sick, one goes to a doctor or hospital; sterility has also become a medical problem—though with family planning the lack of ability to produce offspring is viewed by some as a virtue rather than a problem. Poverty and failure are problems to be solved by better education or training or even rationalization of the economy. The tendency is for salvation to become secularized by which I mean the removal of the myth-symbol system of ultimacy. Not all modernity is secular, but there is a strong tendency within modernity to reject all traditional myth-symbol systems of ultimacy.

In conclusion, modernity has meant basically two things in Japan: *change* and *individualization*. Modernity accepts the fact of change and often identifies change with progress. It makes easily available to the general population ever-expanding conceptual and technical tools in order to facilitate change. Rapid

change entails the possibility and often the actuality of the disparagement or destruction of traditionally transmitted aspects of culture. One aspect of change is increased geographical and social mobility.

Interpersonal relations are placed on a more impersonal basis with contacts becoming more distant and mechanical. A person's contact with the political power structure is often through an impersonal bureaucracy or legal system. Communication is improved in quantity but is much less personal and often falls into the category of propaganda. There is increased individualization through liberal democratic ideology and urbanization. Ethics are more individualistic and group sanctions decline along with the general authority of groups. Universalism takes one beyond the confines of local groups just as individualism transposes the basic social unit from the group or sub-group to the individual. The individual is the subject of his world creation and maintenance. He must make his own decisions, determine his own values, and accept full responsibility for his actions.¹¹

An Analysis of the New Religious Movements

We must now ask how the new religious movements are related to all the changes that have taken place since 1868, and what the impact of modernization has been on them. Are the new religious movements too traditional on the one hand or too modern on the other, or do they represent a healthy tension

11. For six comprehensive "definitions" of modernity, see J. W. Hall, "Changing conceptions of the modernization of Japan" in M. B. Jansen, ed., *Changing Japanese attitudes toward modernization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 18-23.

between the two? Are they traditional enough to give the Japanese a sense of identity yet modern enough to make progress possible? Have they aided, abetted, or been indifferent to change? Does their newness reach the deep level of values, goals, and ends, or does it touch only the superficial and surface means, methods, and techniques? These questions cannot be answered until we view the new religious movements in the light of our definition of "tradition" and "modernity" at the myth-symbol system level. Below are given some of the recurring characteristics to be found in almost all of the new religious movements here considered.¹²

1. The leaders are usually founders or descendents of founders and serve as a focal point of loyalty and a mediator of the grace of the kami. They tend to have personal charisma, especially the women, and are living symbols of "success." They often come from a background of poverty, illness, hardship, failure, and frustration and have had a revelatory experience that changed their whole outlook on life, that actually produced a change for the better, and that gave them a com-

12. This discussion of the new religious movements is based mainly on the following English language sources: Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese history* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); H. Neill McFarland, *Rush hour of the gods*; Clark B. Offner and Henry Van Straelen, *Modern Japanese religions: With special emphasis upon their doctrines of healing* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963); and Harry Thomsen, *New religions of Japan*. I fully recognize the dangers and limitations of making generalizations about eleven separate religions under one rubric. Perhaps no statement I make about the new religious movements will be equally true of all eleven groups, and in every case the generalizations will have one or more exceptions. However, I do feel that there are enough similarities among the eleven groups to permit one to speak of them as having certain characteristics in common. The reader should understand that each of the following generalizations must be qualified and tested according to each individual group.

elling sense of mission to be servants of the kami to mankind. They are held in awe by the members but at the same time are very close to them.

2. The new religious movements are well organized and highly centralized. There is tight regimentation within the organization but also a sense of concern for each individual and his problems combined with an organization "ladder" allowing for advancement based on individual contributions and initiative. In many groups one enters by individual choice and as an individual. The groups provide an accepting atmosphere for people to talk with leaders and with their peers about intimate personal problems. Group membership provides believers with a sense of security and identity, and the optimistic "success" mentality produces hope, optimism, and enthusiasm in the members. They use effectively small group meetings and elaborate mass assemblies. The internal structure is both horizontal and vertical but with the vertical predominating, especially the *oyabun-kobun* relationship.

3. There is a geographical center, a sacred place from which directives and spiritual blessings proceed and to which believers go for pilgrimages, mass worship services, training programs, and service projects. (Many of the centers have been built by voluntary labor.) The centers have magnificent buildings and are at once a source of pride and a symbol of success.

4. The entrance requirements are easy and the groups are open to all. Entrance fees and dues are small, no great change in one's thinking or life-style is necessary for entrance, the doctrines are simple, the worship practices uncomplicated, and

the promises of the group very attractive. The teachings are eclectic, direct, and practical. Moral codes are general and easily obeyed. It has been said that the new religious organizations are easy to enter but difficult to leave, though changing groups is not uncommon. They are almost all lay movements with no qualitative distinction between the leaders and the members.

5. They are religious movements of salvation, this salvation being conceived in practical, this-worldly terms. Even the other-worldly, eschatological groups place a great deal of emphasis on the salvation here and now which will be a model or foretaste of the fuller salvation yet to come. Man's problems are usually defined in terms of sickness, poverty, failure, unhappiness, meaninglessness and purposelessness, bad interpersonal relations (especially at home and at work), and wrong mental attitudes. But they all believe that man and society are basically good and that a new way of thinking and a new fellowship will solve the problems. Glowing promises of health, wealth, happiness, and success are stock in trade for all the new religious movements. Faith healing plays a major role in most of the groups. Miracles are expected and often happen. Personal testimonies are one of the most effective means of propagation. They all assert that religion and daily life are inseparable.

6. The new religious movements are utopian, hope-filled, and optimistic. They make promises and through worship, faith, and corporate activity make those promises come true. They are optimistic about the future and feel that they are working together to bring in a new age. They participate to

a limited extent in the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the nation, though their remedies for social problems often betray the naïveté of their individualism and utopianism. They are so convinced of the value of their group that each member actively engages in bringing in new members. One method of propagation is by the “each one teach one” method of personal evangelism. Great use is made of popular literature (magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, etc.) since the Japanese are avid readers. They make good use of mass media. Most of the new religious movements are tolerant and consider themselves unique but not absolute.¹³

7. The new religious movements are made by and for the Japanese people. They are relevant to the needs and expectations of the Japanese. There is an underlying conviction that membership in the group makes one a better Japanese. Though many of them speak in universal terms, almost none have had any notable success (or made much effort) with non-Japanese.

Traditional and Modern Elements in the New Religious Movements

In the light of the previous summary view of seven recurring characteristics of the new religious movements what can be said about the matter of continuity and/or discontinuity with Japan's religious past? Following the previous analysis of tradition and modernity, let us examine the views of kami, religious community, man, and salvation in the new religious movements.

The kami of the new religious movements are predominantly

13. Sōka Gakkai with its intolerance of other religions and its political involvement through Kōmeitō presents a glaring exception here.

of the *hitogami* type. For the most part they come from the Japanese tradition and are thoroughly Japanese in character, even the ones thought to be universal gods of all mankind.¹⁴ Of the eleven groups considered here, all have some notion of deity, though in almost all cases the kami is not the central focus of the movement. This contention may be open to dispute since all these groups profess a belief in deity. My point here, however, is that the specific character of their kami is not clearly delineated and his activity is not central to the religious life of the groups. I suggest that in several of the groups their kami are not clearly named but are viewed more as an impersonal life force. The emphasis is on man and his potential power within rather than on a god's help from without. The group looms larger than the god in the process of salvation. The new religious movements clearly belong in the category of *jiriki* ("self-power") rather than *tariki* ("other-power"). Sōka Gakkai's view of itself as humanistic is another indication of the emphasis being placed on man rather than God. In *The Japanese and the Jews* Isaiah Ben-Dasan suggests that the central focus of Nihonism is not a god but humanity. He writes, "The word 'humanity' is the key, for the missionary is being treated as a member of the Christian branch of Nihonism, the central element of which is humanity, not a god."¹⁵ One might argue that this relative insignificance of deity in the new religious movements is a sign of the decline of trans-

14. The most notable exception to this limitation is Nichiren's view of the Buddha as based on the *Lotus sutra* (Japanese, *Hokekyō*), the view followed by Reiyūkai Kyōdan, Risshō Kōsei Kai, and Sōka Gakkai.

15. Isaiah Ben-Dasan, *The Japanese and the Jews*, transl. by Richard L. Gage, edited by Watanabe Shōichi (Tokyo: Kenkyūsha Printing Co., 1972), p. 66.

cendence and hence one impact of modernity. I agree with the former assertion but not the latter. I think that the kami in the new religious movements are no more and no less significant than *hitogami* in traditional Japanese religion. Japanese religion has never been strongly theistic although there have been countless kami in the pantheon. Kami are a part of life, not transcendent to it; they are spatial, temporal, occasional, and functional, not absolute and eternal. The central focus of Japanese religion has seldom been on a deity. The reason kami are not central to the new religious movements has to do with tradition, not modernity.

In terms of religious community each group can be regarded, in its beginnings, as an instance of the *hitogami*-type. That is, the group was a voluntary one based on the individual decision, faith, and commitment of the members. They greatly resemble the *kō* of earlier times. They are lay movements that are open to all, regardless of sex, age, social class, economic status, or moral condition. In most groups one enters and carries on his life there as an individual. One joins and leaves of his own volition. Within the group the atmosphere is rather egalitarian and one's status in the group is largely dependent on his own initiative. The geographical center for the group is usually a place where a special revelation from the kami occurred.

Although the new religious movements began as *hitogami*-type groups, there is evidence that some have moved toward an *ujigami*-type organization. Several of the groups have taken on some characteristics of a territorial *ujigami*-type community or have developed a hereditary form of leadership in the founder's lineage, with a corresponding shift from personal to official

charisma. In several cases the death of the founder (believed to be a living kami) raised serious problems which have been dealt with through a decision to recognize that authority and power are transmitted through the family line. The role of the leaders as "emperor substitutes" and the strong Japanese flavor of the groups suggests that the religious significance of the national community is far from dead. Also, the internal structures of the groups show many *ujigami* characteristics. The group tends to take on the structure of a family or clan in terms of hierarchical stratification and role differentiation. Though the individual is the basic unit in the new religious movements, there emerges (as time passes) a strong tendency to recognize the nuclear family as the basic unit. A person can join as an individual but he or she is urged to bring the rest of the family. Sōka Gakkai counts not individual members but households, strongly insisting that it must be a family religion. A necessary part of the worship takes place at home and ideally involves the whole family. In some of the groups traditional ancestor worship is fitted into the liturgical life of the group.

It is true that Japanese are more individualistic today than they were before 1868, making more personal decisions about marriage, vocation, and housing, and living in ways much less confined by social customs and traditions. However, the Japanese still find their security and identity within a group—a group which looks very much like a household. There are superiors such as parents and elders to whom one owes respect and from whom he can expect benefits, and there are inferiors for whom one ought to be responsible and from whom he can

claim respect. The more democratic horizontal type of social stratification which has been an insistent intruder in the last hundred years is usually rejected in favor of the characteristically Japanese vertical structure. Primary social relations in these groups are based on the age-old parent-child pattern in which one's contacts with those above and below him are much more meaningful than those with his peers. Nakane Chie makes this the theme of her book, *Japanese society*, in which she affirms both the traditional nature of the vertical system and its continuing presence in modern institutions like political parties, schools, business, and the new religious movements. She writes, "The astonishing success of these new religious groups, which have grown so large and so rapidly, seems to be attributable mainly to their system of vertical organization."¹⁶

The charismatic, shamanistic founder and leader provides another point of continuity with Japanese religious tradition, especially in the prominent place occupied by women. In Japanese mythology and early history there are numerous accounts of females who were not only spiritual but political leaders as well. Women sat on the throne until the eighth century, and some of the most influential political and religious leaders were women. Under Chinese influence women "retired," and it was not until the nineteenth century in the new religious movements that women once again emerged as religious leaders. The improvement of the position of women has been largely the result of western influence since 1868 and is a new element in Japanese life, but the role of women religious

16. Nakane, *Japanese society*, p. 61.

founders and leaders is a very traditional one. Also, the role of the charismatic religious leader, whether male or female, is a traditional characteristic of the *hitogami*-type of leader. Many of the founder-leaders were chosen by a particular kami, often unwillingly at first, and sometimes by a kami unknown to the person. The kami usually came with convincing and compelling power, and that event proved to be a decisive turning point in the person's life. The leader became the chosen agent for making the kami known and actually doing his will on earth. The leader was a channel for the grace of the kami and the means whereby the people approached the kami.

Pilgrimage is another traditional element which has retained its religious function. In many ways the social, cultural, and economic needs which pilgrimages clearly met in the premodern period, especially during the Tokugawa period, are no longer present. In the Tokugawa period religious pilgrimage was one of the few forms of travel available to most people. But restrictions on travel have long been removed, public transportation is comfortable and cheap, and in addition to actual travel one can "visit" many places in Japan through movies and TV. Modernity has removed many of the nonreligious reasons for pilgrimages, and yet they continue to survive—witness their popularity in the new religious movements. By examining the symbolism behind pilgrimages in many of the groups, one can surmise that there is a basic religious need which still must be met by going to one's sacred place. The modes of transportation may be different and more modern for present-day pilgrims, but at the myth-symbol level their pilgrimage is a very traditional act.

The nature of man is viewed somewhat more individualistically than in the traditional view, but, as we have seen, man is still seen predominantly as a member of a group, either of the *ujigami*-type or the *hitogami*-type. As in traditional religion the nature of man is defined in basically optimistic terms. Man is essentially good. Whatever problems he has are only temporary and can be solved by methods that are neither difficult, costly, nor unpleasant. The definition of man's problems is traditional, whether stated in terms of his lack of group identity or in terms of the more personal problems of sickness, failure, unhappiness, poverty, etc. Modern existential or psychological concepts such as anomie, anxiety, and meaninglessness, do not disguise the traditional character of man's dilemma.

The promise of an immediate solution to man's problems is one of the main attractions of the new religious movements. The power and grace of the kami (often equated with an impersonal life force) are made available primarily through the founder and secondarily through the group and other leaders who have received the founder's charisma. Salvation comes by the faith and loyalty of the believer, but his membership in the group and active participation in worship, study, social service, and evangelism are also necessary for salvation. Salvation is identified as the practical, down-to-earth improvement in life style that is experienced here and now. One does not have to wait for "pie in the sky by and by," but he can and does avoid punishment and misfortune (*tatari*) and gain benefits (*riyaku*) in the present. Specifically, one recovers from an illness, gets a salary raise, passes an entrance exam, finds a suitable spouse, etc. A future life, age, or world is seen only

as a continued improvement of the kind of personal and social life already begun in the group. The this-worldly character of salvation in the New Religions is not a sign of modernization or secularization. It is, rather, a very traditional way of being religious in Japan. Apparently modernity has had little effect on the way in which man's problems are solved. For example, in the *ujigami*-type the group still provides a strong sense of community, a warm fellowship, and an accepting atmosphere. The structure of the group provides a familiar setting where one can literally be "at home" by virtue of the *oyabun-kobun* vertical type of organization. In the *hitogami*-type a salient example of problem-solving is faith healing. In spite of the revolutionary advances in medical science, technology, and health services, more than a few Japanese still rely on magical techniques such as charms and amulets when sickness arises. Some of the groups have little or no use for modern medical technology and medicines, and they treat illnesses through faith healing, divination, and exorcism. Miraculous events are still a part of their world view, and personal testimony carries more authority than logical argument or scientific evidence.

The new religious movements are eclectic, syncretistic, and tolerant—characteristics strongly reminiscent of traditional Japanese religion.¹⁷ Most of the groups contain elements from Buddhism, Shinto, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and western philosophy, elements held together in an uncritical and often naïve way. Logical consistency and historical accuracy are hardly more present in the new religious movements than in traditional Japanese religion, especially folk religion.

17. The intolerance of *Sōka Gakkai* and *Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō* are exceptions.

Critical scholarship is **not** a highly valued activity, and these movements are more emotional and social than intellectual. This suggests that the new religious movements are to be viewed as a folk level traditionalism rather than an elite traditionalism.

What then are some of the modern elements in the new religious movements? I think that in spite of limitations already mentioned, the new movements reflect a view of and role for the individual qua individual that was not present in "traditional" religions. There is a greater degree of mobility, more opportunity for advancement on the basis of personal initiative and achievement, less emphasis on class, age, and sex difference, and an almost complete absence of distinction between laity and clergy. On a continuum the new religious movements would lie closer to the individualism end than would the older religions, but they are still strongly group-oriented. Perhaps Christianity has been too "modern" on this point of individualism to make any great numerical impact in Japan.

One aspect of the new religious movements not apparently present in traditional Japanese religion is the great emphasis placed on success, that is, having the biggest, best, and most of everything. Humility is not a virtue prized by these groups. This may partially be a result of a competitive economic system, especially in the postwar period. Traditionally the Japanese have been self-effacing and humble to a fault, but not so in the new religious movements. They are proud and enthusiastic about their group and its accomplishments. Also, traditionally the Japanese have been reticent (to say the least) to

reveal personal feelings or to talk about personal problems with strangers. One of the most important functions of the small groups in many of the new movements is to provide an accepting atmosphere where one can share personal concerns with other members and receive advice and support from them. One must admit that there has been a real "freeing-up" in the new religious movements that has not been traditionally present.

The new religious movements make effective use of up-to-date and sophisticated mass media techniques. Closed circuit television, tape recorders, public address systems, and other electronic devices are standard equipment along with modern furnishings in magnificent buildings, almost all recently constructed. The budgets and operating procedures are carefully planned for efficiency and economy, the activities are geared into a fast, urban pace of life, and they seem to work more on a time schedule attuned to the clock than is true of more traditional religions, especially at the folk level. In many ways a modern man from another part of the world would adjust more easily to the new religious movements than to the older organizations.

Conclusion

In conclusion we must stress once more the fact of change in Japan during the last century. In many areas of life there has been radical change leading to a severe loss of tradition. One can see clear evidence of modernity and secularism in Japan today at many levels and in numerous areas of life. However, I feel that our study has indicated the necessity for

qualifying such statements about change, modernity, and secularism when dealing with the new religious movements at the level of their basic myth-symbol religious systems. I do not believe that the new movements have experienced this loss of tradition or radical modernization. Modernization has been slow in coming, slight in degree, and only superficial in its penetration of the new religious movements.

According to the definitions given at the outset, the new religious movements have not been subject to *religious* change because the old myths and symbols of ultimacy have not been replaced by new ones. It is the traditional religious symbols that create and maintain the world of the new religious movements. Whatever change has taken place in the new movements has been of the evolutionary, not the revolutionary, type. Hence, one of the major characteristics of the new religious movements is the syncretism whereby any new elements introduced are made to fit into the basic myth-symbol system already present. The new movements are not secular but religious. The traditional myths and symbols of ultimacy have not been removed but are still meaningful foci for the believers. Modernization has affected the new religious movements, but I think it has been shown that the modern elements have not had the effect of destroying the traditional core of religious values.

We said earlier that the two elements necessary for orderly change were identity (tradition) and progress (modernity). The new religious movements represent the identity pole and have reasserted a form of traditional religion which has provided stability and hope for people caught up in a maelstrom of

social change. The new movements have been a haven of traditional values and norms, and they have revitalized certain major elements of the traditional Japanese myth-symbol system for people confronted by the frightening necessity of change. I contend that the new religious movements have been weak on the progress pole and hence have not been agents of change. Progress and modernization have come about through other sources. The new movements have grown up in the midst of change, but they have not taken the lead in effecting change.

H. Neill McFarland, in his *Rush hour of the gods*, uses Yinger's concept of "bridging sects" as the best functional description of the new religious movements. He claims that they serve as a point of contact, especially for the socially disadvantaged, between the old world and the new. They are like a pressure chamber in a time of rapid social change when one can move into a new environment at his own rate of speed. He writes, "There, regardless of qualifications, one can retain the security and comfort of the old and traditional and simultaneously experience the excitement of the new and modern."¹⁸ It seems to me that the new religious movements show a real genius in their ability to hold the old and the new, the eastern and western, and the traditional and modern in a balanced and creative relationship. This does not mean that they have adequately emphasized both poles—for I do not believe they have—but they have been highly successful in adapting a traditional myth-symbol system to a modern situation.

Robert Bellah in his epilogue to the book *Religion and progress*

18. McFarland, *Rush hour of the gods*, p. 231.

*in modern Asia*¹⁹ gives four possibilities for Japan as she faces the prospects of modernization : (1) conversion to Christianity, (2) reformism, (3) pure traditionalism, and (4) neo-traditionalism. The first, conversion to a western religion, would entail a rejection of the traditional Japanese myth-symbol system. The second, reformism, would necessitate a more or less radical reshaping and reforming of the status quo. The third, pure traditionalism, would be a reactionary affirmation of the received tradition unchanged. The fourth, neo-traditionalism, would accept tradition as a general norm but at the same time make use of certain elements of modernity that would not do violence to the essence of the tradition. The first two, conversion and reformism, would be strong on the progress pole but weak on the side of identity. The last two, pure and neo-traditionalism, would be strong on the side of identity but weak on progress. Bellah speaks of State Shinto as a form of nineteenth century neo-traditionalism by which the Japanese were able to provide an adequate national identity for themselves while modernizing at a breathtaking rate. This was instigated at the elite level although the masses followed and gave their support.

It seems to me that in postwar Japan with the demise of State Shinto and its myth-symbol system the new religious movements have assumed the role of folk (not elite) neo-traditionalism. They reject the other three types of religious responses to modernization, namely, (1) conversion, because they do not want to lose the traditional Japanese myth-symbol

19. Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Religion and progress in modern Asia* (New York : Free Press, 1965), pp. 168-229.

system ; (2) pure traditionalism, for this would mean *no* change and would put them behind the times, a position for which they criticize the older forms of Shinto and Buddhism ; and (3) reformism, because they want to live within the status quo, not change it. Bellah describes State Shinto as being “based neither on a serious assessment of modern culture nor on a searching re-examination of the tradition.” The sweeping technological and social changes introduced under its aegis “amounted only to a rationalization of means.”²⁰ I believe that this interpretation could apply equally well to the new religious movements. Whatever strengths they have, and there are many, it seems clear to me that none of these groups has given rise to a profound critique of modern culture or any meaningful rethinking of the Japanese religious tradition.

In spite of the appearance of modernity in the new religious movements I contend that their view of modernity is superficial, often naïve, and utilitarian in that it is based only on an appropriation of methods and techniques. They have adopted modern, up-to-date means but have left the ends and basic value system untouched. From the point of view of their belief in kami, religious community, man, and salvation, the new religious movements have uncritically accepted and affirmed Japan’s traditional myth-symbol system. This judgment is not to be taken in a pejorative sense. The new religious movements have met and are meeting vital needs of the Japanese people. They will continue to do so as long as there is a threat to the Japanese religious tradition and as long as the traditional myth-symbol system is meaningful.

20. Ibid., p. 213.