

The Living Kami Idea in the New Religions of Japan

SHIMAZONO Susumu

SOURCE OF THE NEW RELIGIONS

The conventional classification. The new religious organizations or “New Religions” of Japan are generally classified as Buddhist- or Shinto-derived. This way of classifying them starts from the existence of certain “big” historical religions to which the New Religions can be thought of as related by virtue of their objects of worship, rituals, scriptures, doctrines, and the like. This does not mean, however, that the New Religions actually sprang from Buddhist or Shinto bodies. Only rarely do we find founders of the New Religions whose ideas and practices were shaped by one of the established Shinto or Buddhist organizations. If they did have substantial contact with them, this contact had little to do with the quest for salvation that focused and shaped their subsequent activities.

In recognition of the fact that most new religious organizations are syncretistic, there is also the classification “Other Religious Groups.” Again, however, this does not mean that the New Religions have no common source, or that they are simply ad hoc mixtures of disparate elements. On the contrary, reflection suggests that they do in fact spring from a common source, namely, folk belief (*minkan shinkō*). Only by reference to the formative influence of this stream

This paper originally appeared under the title “Ikigami shisō ron: Shinshūkyō ni yoru minzoku ‘shūkyō’ no shiyō ni tsuite 生神思想論～新宗教による民俗「宗教」の止揚について [Theoretical reflections on the idea of the living kami: The transformation of “Folk Religion” into New Religions] in *Shūkyō Shakaigaku Kenkyūkai* [Association for the Study of Religion and Society] 1978. It is presented here in slightly revised form.

of tradition is it possible to explain why the similarities between New Religions are far greater than those between them and the historical religious bodies (see Tsushima et al. 1978).

Dilemma and aim. Scholars have frequently suggested that the New Religions took their rise from folk belief. But when they seek to develop a line of thought based on this view, they often find themselves in a dilemma. This dilemma arises from their acceptance of the conventional idea that folk belief, with its general amorphousness, and salvation-oriented religion, with its clear-cut doctrines and organizational structure, are two completely different faith-systems.¹ On this basis there seems to be no possibility of a transition from the one to the other. If salvation-oriented religion and folk belief in the usual sense of the term are regarded as discontinuous, one can no longer claim that the salvation-oriented New Religions sprang from folk belief – or is obliged to confess that if they did, their emergence can only be considered an inexplicable “leap.”

In order to avoid this dilemma, scholars have glossed it over by taking refuge in the idea of abnormality. They have treated the New Religions either as abnormal phenomena that burst forth in periods of social disorder or as products of the extraordinary creativity and originality of their founders.²

-
1. For example, “Folk religion (*minkan shinkō*) is essentially indigenous primitive religion ...” and “Folk religion, unlike the institutional religions, has neither doctrines nor organization; it neither seeks to win converts nor to propagate a faith. It is, rather, something transmitted as a matter of custom among people bound together by community or kinship ties” (Miyake 1972, p. 121). It should be noted that what Miyake calls “folk religion” is referred to in this paper as “folk belief,” a term here used in a more limited sense, as will soon become clear.
 2. Terms such as “social crisis,” “anomie,” and “charisma” have been employed in sociological formulations of this idea of abnormality. See, e.g., McFarland 1967, Hori 1968.

The aim of this paper is to develop a theory as to the origin of the New Religions that will explain, without recourse to the idea of abnormality or the idea of an inexplicable leap, how they emerged from folk belief in the comprehensive meaning of the term.³

The concept of Folk Religion. In Japanese folk belief, the elements from which the New Religions emerged, far from being mere survivals of primitive religious consciousness, took shape within history through contact with the salvation-oriented religions. These elements, standing between the salvation-oriented religions and folk belief and mediating between the two, will here be spoken of as "Folk Religion" (*minzoku shūkyō*).

The concept of Folk Religion refers to a faith-system that remains related to its foundation in folk belief but, in consequence of continuing contact with salvation-oriented religion, is to some extent characterized by salvation religion-type organization, doctrines, and rituals. Folk Religion is comprised of three loosely connected components: (1) religious centers (large Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines), (2) magico-religious leaders of the common people (*minkan shūkyōka*), and (3) village-level associations, first those that engaged entire villages in festivals and the like, and later, the voluntary religious associations, notably the *kō*, typical of the closing years of the Tokugawa period. Of these three, the itinerant, semiprofessional, magico-religious leaders were, on the one hand, guided and to some degree organized by the religious centers where messages

3. "Folk belief" and "folk religion" are usually used almost interchangeably to embrace not only the amorphous magico-religious ideas and practices of the common people but also their semiprofessional religious specialists and the fluid network of institutions they serve. In this paper, however, I distinguish folk belief from Folk Religion. The former is used to refer to the magico-religious ideas and practices of the common people. The specific meaning here assigned to the term Folk Religion is introduced in the next section.

of salvation were tied up with ascetic disciplines. On the other hand, they had connections with the village-level associations for and through which they performed religious rituals, acted as healers, and guided delegations of villagers on pilgrimages to the religious centers.

In the next few pages attention will focus on a dimension of Folk Religion that is of great importance in understanding the emergence of the New Religions, namely, the dimension of shamanism and living kami belief. Using Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō as examples, I will try to trace the process by which Folk Religion shamanism and living kami belief, going through an inner transformation, gave rise to the New Religions.⁴

Shamanistic awakening. Most founders of New Religions, especially those dating from the mid-nineteenth century, took their spiritual orientation from the belief system of Folk Religion. Nakayama Miki (1797-1887), the founder of Tenrikyō, and Akazawa Bunji (1814-1883), the founder of Konkōkyō, were by no means exceptions to this rule. In both cases it was in the context of shamanistic rituals deriving from Folk Religion that they underwent their dramatic religious conversions.

Nakayama Miki's "great awakening" took place when she was forty-one. In order to cure the lameness of her only son, a shamanistic ritual called *yosekaji* was performed. A *yosekaji* was a ritual held at the home of the afflicted person in the presence of family, kin, and members of their voluntary religious association or *kō*. In prayer, a magico-religious leader of folk rituals (a *yamabushi*) asked

4. With reference to shamanism and living kami belief in Japan, see Miyata 1970, Sasaki 1972, and Blacker 1975. On Tenrikyō and its founder, Nakayama Miki, see Straelen 1957, Tenrikyō Overseas Mission Department 1966, Headquarters of Tenrikyō Church 1967. On Konkōkyō and its founder, Akazawa Bunji (also known as Kawate Bunjirō and Konkō Daijin), see Schneider 1962, McFarland 1967.

a supernatural being to descend on a woman previously chosen to serve as the medium. When she had entered a trance-like state of possession, the leader would call on the spirit to disclose the cause of the affliction and how it could be cured. Thus the main role was that of the magico-religious leader. On this occasion, due to the absence of the regular medium, Miki filled in for her. An extraordinary kami descended on her, and her family had to agree to let her continue thereafter as the "Shrine of God."

In much the same way Akazawa Bunji, at the age of forty-two, had an experience of religious awakening during a shamanistic ritual held for the purpose of curing his own illness. This time the one who became possessed in the presence of the sick man and his relatives was another magico-religious leader of folk rituals (a *sendatsu*) devoted to the kami Ishizuchi. It is surmised that this man (Bunji's brother-in-law) was a member of the Ishizuchi *kō*, and that as a devotee of Ishizuchi he had made pilgrimages to mountain shrines, trained himself by means of ascetic disciplines, and learned the technique of becoming a medium. The dialogue with Ishizuchi carried out with his brother-in-law acting as medium not only led to Bunji's recovery from an acute illness but also stirred him profoundly and made him aware that this and other kami looked on him with benevolence.

Controlling the spirits. These cases are typical of the shamanism found in the Folk Religion of the mid-nineteenth century. In this context it was believed that illness resulted from the will of a capricious and arbitrary supernatural being, and that in order to bring illness under control, it was necessary to hold a shamanistic ritual in which someone would act as the spirit medium.

A shamanistic ritual was by no means a routine event. Occasioned by a special crisis, it was a highly unusual service that brought together many people, entailed consider-

able expense, and involved people in religious experience at a degree of intensity they never ordinarily encountered. The persons who fulfilled the role of medium, brought supernatural beings under control, and indicated what was to be done were the semiprofessional mountain and village priests of popular religion such as the *yamabushi* of the Tōzan sect of Shingon Buddhism and the *sendatsu* of Ishizuchi. Through various centers for traditional religion and through contact with religiously skilled people in various lay organizations, they trained themselves in ascetic disciplines and in the performance of magico-religious rituals. Thus they acquired, it was thought, this power to control the spirits.

Exceptions to the usual pattern. During these shamanistic Folk Religion rituals, Nakayama Miki and Akazawa Bunji heard messages from highly distinctive kami who did not fit the usual pattern. It was this experience that led them to devote their lives to religion. But they themselves, it should be noted, also failed to fit into the usual pattern of the magico-religious leader. As a result, their subsequent religious activities likewise differed from those of traditional Folk Religion.

Miki was called “the kami of childbirth of Shōyashiki” [her home village], and Bunji was called “Konjin, the kami of Ōtani” [his home village]. Both performed simple shamanistic rites and, by virtue of their direct communication with a supernatural being, gave their clients instructions intended to rescue them from their troubles. Miki and Bunji, however, unlike the *yamabushi* who first attended Miki or the *sendatsu* associated with Bunji, had no connection either with the traditional religious centers or with the network of *kō* organizations. Nevertheless, neither sought immediately to form a new religious center or develop a formal organization. They simply waited for people

seeking help from kami rumored to be effective (*hayari-gami*), clients from their own and other villages, to search them out. For the rest, at least in their early periods, they did not follow any hard-and-fast line. Bunji, for example, first consulted Konjin at a chapel set up by his brother, later erecting his own chapel to Konjin beside his brother's. Moreover, a number of Konjin chapels seem to have come into existence in the same district about that time. Before long, with the emergence of devoted client-followers, Bunji was giving them permission to erect chapels of their own. In this way chapels came to be built throughout the area, and the belief was that in them one could communicate directly with the kami and learn his will. Miki provides a less conspicuous example, but she too, in her early period, gave followers permission to build chapels where they could consult the kami, and the rituals that ensued were typical of those for kami newly in vogue. Toward the end of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), many organizationally independent shamanistic practitioners of this type appeared, some of whom, together with their previously unorganized, informal groups of followers, were later legally organized by the State as Sect Shinto groups.

Routinization and living kami belief. The shamanism of these independent practitioners, when contrasted with that of Folk Religion, was at once more immediate and more closely related to everyday life. Their activities were not subject to the control of traditional religious authority. Their power to control capricious and arbitrary supernatural beings did not have its main source in the rites and ascetic disciplines of traditional religion. As over against the mediatory power possessed by these traditional authorities, the power each such practitioner personally possessed to bring the spirits under their immediate control played a far bigger role.

Again, the place where these independent practitioners performed their rituals for those who came to them for help was identical with the place where they led their daily life. Moreover, as the number of clients increased, the physically demanding trances of their early periods gradually gave way to more subdued trance states that put less strain on the body. In some cases there was then no clear indication of any trance state whatever. This means that the distinction between the ordinary state and the divine state was obscured. These independent shamanistic practitioners thus came to be regarded as divine not merely when in a trance state but at all times, in their entire persons. This is when they start to be called "living kami."

Living kami belief is a consequence of the simplification and routinization of Folk Religion shamanism. Eventually, during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and in connection with the Meiji government's regulations concerning religious organizations, living kami belief spread first to the "town practitioners" (*machi gyōja*) who attracted clients in what became the churches of Sect Shinto, and then to a sizable number of people who styled themselves "founders" and set up little "religious bodies."

Two kinds of shamanism. In tracing the religious careers of Nakayama Miki and Akazawa Bunji, I have sketched two forms of shamanism: the older Folk Religion form carried on by magico-religious leaders of the common people who linked traditional religious centers to local voluntary religious associations, and the newer form (the form embodying "living kami belief") represented by the independent shamanistic practitioners. Though there are important differences between the two, they are at one in the belief that through the spiritual power of certain specialists, capricious and arbitrary supernatural beings can be led to reveal themselves directly in a medium, and that this medium in

turn possesses the capability of bringing under control the spirit that has entered him or her. According to this belief, on each occasion one seeks relief from distress, the medium must reenact his or her role, for nobody can know the wills of these beings over long periods of time. Consequently, their wills must continuously be determined anew. This belief in the medium as one who must perform his or her role repeatedly lies at the very foundation of Folk Religion and constitutes the basis from which the New Religions took their rise.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW RELIGIONS AND
THE IDEA OF THE LIVING KAMI

Importance of doctrine and ritual. Scholars sometimes suggest that the swing from "folk belief" to New Religion was marked by the development of a body of doctrine and a world view. To be sure, the formation of every New Religion includes the formation of doctrines and a world view. But whether the formulating of a body of doctrine and a world view, whatever the content, can transform folk belief into a salvation-oriented religion is a matter that calls for further examination.

Among the Sect Shinto groups formed during the latter part of the nineteenth century were Shinto Shūseiha and Taiseikyō, groups that were quick to elaborate scholastic doctrines but in fact were so deeply suffused with folk belief elements that they can hardly be called New Religions. There were also many magico-religious leaders who devised world views embodying delusions of grandeur and set up "religious bodies" that lasted no more than a generation. One can infer, therefore, that when a new religion is being formed, the body of doctrine and the world view formulated are by no means incidental. The task before us is to identify the doctrinal and ritual elements intrinsic to the emergence of the New Religions.⁵

Three doctrinal and ritual elements can be specified as playing an essential role in the emergence of the New Religions from Folk Religion. Again, Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō provide the material.

The idea of the Parent God. In the New Religions of the late Tokugawa period, one doctrine that took shape with particular clarity was that of a supernatural being who is as close to human beings as a parent to children, a being whose will is characterized not by capricious arbitrariness but by order and consistency. The being Tenrikyō calls Tenri-O-no-Mikoto and the one Konkōkyō calls Tenchi-Kane-no-Kami typify this kind of Parent God (*oyagami*). The Parent God, they believe, governs everything in heaven and on earth, indwelling and working in all that exists, filling the world with unlimited grace.

Verily this universe is the body of God the Parent, and the world is lapped in the divine grace, even to the darkest corner (Headquarters of Tenrikyō Church 1972, p. 42).

Although one is not aware of the presence of Kami, one exists in His presence. Whether you are fertilizing a field or walking along a pathway, the divine presence of *Tenchi Kane no Kami* fills the whole world (Headquarters of Konkōkyō 1973, p. 28).

The Parent God sustains the lives of human beings, his children, defends their endeavors, and controls their destinies.

We are born in this world by the grace of God the Parent and live daily in comfort, because we lie in His warm bosom, between the embrace of heaven and earth, and are sustained and nourished by Him at all hours of the day and night (Headquarters of Tenrikyō

5. Some scholars who stress the difference between "folk belief" and New Religions suggest that it is the universalistic element that distinguishes the latter from the former. See, e.g., Murakami (1962) and Morioka (1978). I do not disagree with them on this point, but suggest that we need to look for the seeds of this universalistic orientation in the soil of Folk Religion and then examine the specific forms it took in the New Religions that grew on this soil.

Church 1972, p. 42).

Tenchi-Kane-no-Kami is the Essential Parent of all mankind. All people are children, brought into being and kept alive by him, surrounded by his divine virtue. They would not exist except for him (*Konkōkyō kyōki* 1954, p. 1).

This idea of the Parent God who makes and keeps people alive and works in all times and places, though set forth in the opening pages of Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō writings and later taken over by other New Religions, is by no means completely absent from the earlier Folk Religion. In Folk Religion the same idea was constantly, if unobtrusively, present as one aspect of the kami concept. Priests and scholars of Ryobu Shinto, Ise Shinto, Yoshida Shinto, and National Learning, borrowing Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist terminology, sought to give doctrinal expression to this aspect, but the result was usually too abstruse for lay people to comprehend or live by. During the late Tokugawa period, a series of amorphous religious movements like *Fujikō*, *Okagemairi*, and others connected with a wave of newly popular kami made this facet of the kami concept more prominent, made it something ordinary people could begin to comprehend. Subsequently, the New Religions of the period immediately prior to the Meiji Restoration refined it into a doctrine that had profound connections with many aspects of the daily life of ordinary people.

Saving rituals. From the point of view of religious consciousness, what made possible the emergence of this doctrine of the Parent God was the overcoming of the idea of supernatural beings as willful and unruly. Only a consciousness that people and supernatural beings, through continuous communication, are capable of coming to understand one another can conceive of a Parent God as a coherent and consistent being. And what gave rise to this consciousness, and to a clear-cut idea of the Parent God, were the

new rituals introduced by the New Religions. In the first part of this paper, attention focused on the shamanistic medium and the related rituals of Folk Religion that served as a basis for the emergence of the New Religions. These early rituals, in which a supernatural being would make his will known on many occasions and through many mediums in order to help those in distress, eventually came to an end. In their place, new types of saving rituals were devised, such as what Tenrikyō calls *tsutome* and *sazuke*, or what Konkōkyō calls *toritsugi*.⁶ These rituals then became central in the daily life of the believer. Followers believe them to generate a special power that makes it possible for them to communicate with the kami and obtain release from suffering. In determining the character of these

6. *Tsutome* is a kind of ritual that is at once a form of discipline and an expression of prayer. It is conducted by singing from the Book of Sacred Songs (*Mikagura uta*) and performing simple manual gestures (*te odori*) to the accompaniment of musical instruments. One may distinguish three types of *tsutome*: one performed by believers daily, morning and evening, before the altars in their churches and homes; one performed by certain people on a specified day once a month in every church; and one performed secretly once every month at the headquarters by special persons wearing masks that symbolize the gods of creation.

Sazuke too is a term that embraces several types of ritual in principle, but in practice it refers primarily to a magical ritual of exorcistic healing. As incantations similar to the hymns in the Book of Sacred Songs are chanted and manual gestures performed, a sweeping motion is made over the affected part. This ritual is performed by a core group of devout believers called *yōboku* or "missionaries" who have taken special instruction after graduating from a course consisting of a series of seminars (*besseki*).

Toritsugi is a ritual of mediation between a follower and the Parent God conducted by a Konkōkyō priest. In every Konkōkyō church, the head priest sits behind a low desk on the right-hand side of the sanctuary from morning till evening, consulting with followers who come to get advice or to express appreciation, noting the main points in a Book of Prayer Memoranda, giving guidance to those in trouble, and returning to those who bring monetary offerings rice that has been sanctified before the altar. His function is often compared to psychological counseling. Every day, morning and evening, the church head uses the Book of Prayer Memoranda in offering prayer to the kami, transmitting the believers' requests and expressions of gratitude to the Parent God, Tenchi-Kane-no-Kami.

organizations, these rituals are generally recognized as playing a role of considerable importance.

In these saving rituals, several features have been taken over from the shamanistic, living kami belief of Folk Religion. *Tsutome* and *sazuke* give rise to a mysterious, near-ecstatic state similar in psychological effect to that produced by the experience of possession. In *toritsugi* the reverence people show to the head priest is analogous to the reverence shown a living kami, and the words he speaks are to some extent regarded as the utterances of the kami himself. In these respects, such saving rituals appear as a straight-line development from the shamanistic, living kami belief of Folk Religion. The New Religions appear to have routinized mediumistic rituals and enlarged their role. In these saving rituals, however, supernatural beings do not manifest themselves, and there is no medium who announces their will. This is what distinguishes the rituals of shamanistic, living kami belief from the saving rituals.

True enough, in their early periods these organizations did give recognition to mediums in their churches, but little by little, this function was eliminated. Eventually people came to believe that the living kami way of shamanistic possession and the way of saving ritual would not mix, that the observance of these standardized rituals of salvation was the true way, and that the practice of entrusting oneself to a medium was highly suspect.

The idea of the living kami. In connection with the devising of saving rituals in the New Religions of the premodern period, there is another idea that played a role of no little importance. This idea or teaching relates to the question as to how it is that saving rituals can be regarded as communicating human feelings and desires to supernatural beings. This is the question as to the foundation for the salvation offered.

In the shamanistic, living kami belief of Folk Religion, this foundation was provided primarily by the direct manifestation of a supernatural being in a medium, an event that took place each time a medium was consulted. In the New Religions it is the doctrine of the founder as a living kami that provides this foundation. Tenrikyō explains the term *tasuke ichijō no michi* ("the divine way to save mankind," the term itself embracing both *tsutome* and *sazuke*) as follows:

God the Parent, out of His parental solicitude to make mankind realize the *yōkigurashi* [the joyous life], appeared in this world, taking the Foundress as His Temple. He revealed through Her lips the whole truth concerning His creation, so that He might give the reason for the initiation of the marvelous way of *tasuke-ichijō* for them (Headquarters of Tenrikyō Church 1972, p. 16).

Konkōkyō teaches that *toritsugi* originated because of a request from the kami that came to Bunji when he was forty-six.

Universally, mankind is troubled. A man such as you with sincere faith in Kami should help them through your mediation [*toritsugi*] between Kami and them. To serve people is Kami's fulfillment. Kami is Kami because of man, and man is man because of Kami (Headquarters of Konkōkyō 1973, p. 4).

The founders, then, according to these accounts, were specially charged by the Parent God to reveal his will by developing saving rituals for mankind. Apart from them, salvation cannot reach human beings, and after them, no new truth will be revealed. Each founder constitutes the sole path of communication with the divine. Their power to save has its foundation in this idea. In the last analysis, the petitions people express through the saving rituals are communicated to the Parent God through the living kami founder, the one and only mediator.

This idea of the living kami founder who binds together the human and the divine is closely linked to the idea of

the shamanistic living kami in Folk Religion. The Tenrikyō designation of Miki as the *tsukihi no yashiro* (the Shrine of God) or *oyasama* (the divine mother) and the Konkōkyō designation of Bunji as the *ikigami Konkō Daijin* (the living kami, the great god Konkō) indicate that each founder is believed to manifest the relevant kami in her or his own person. This is clearly an extension of the shamanistic, living kami belief found in Folk Religion. In fact, at first it is hard to see any difference at all between the living kami belief of Folk Religion and the living kami belief of these New Religions.

Critical in differentiating the one from the other is the presence or absence of the idea that the living kami figure is one selected by a supernatural being to serve as the sole intermediary between human and divine. In Folk Religion the belief is that supernatural beings make their wills manifest repeatedly and through many channels; in the New Religions the belief is that the kami manifests himself through the founder alone.

In order to distinguish this concept of pluriform and recurring kami manifestations from that of exclusive and non-recurring kami manifestations, I shall refer to the former as "living kami belief" and to the latter as the "living kami idea."

These three elements (the idea of the Parent God, saving rituals, and the living kami idea), all of which are essential to understanding the emergence of the New Religions, are closely interrelated. Only in combination could they synthesize New Religion out of Folk Religion. But of the three, the most important element appears to be the living kami idea, for it is this idea, or teaching, that stands as the ultimate foundation for the salvation-belief central to the New Religions.

ATTENUATION OF THE LIVING KAMI IDEA

Mythologization versus humanization. The living kami idea is neither a result of speculation nor an abstract doctrine. It has its roots in, and gives conceptual expression to, the salvation-oriented faith that came into being by virtue of the religious experiences of the founders. By fighting against the sufferings and afflictions that beset them, the founders achieved a profundity of character that enabled them to withstand life-shaking doubts and all-engulfing despair. It is this profundity of character from which their salvation-oriented faith takes its rise. Those who came in touch with them, directly or indirectly, learned to overcome their own despair, to live with hope. The joy of the salvation they experienced they shared with others. Thus religious fervor spread from founder to new proselytizer and from proselytizer to new member. An identifiable network was brought into being.

What gave this network a clear and continuing identity was the institutionalization of the Parent God idea, the saving rituals, and the idea of the living kami. These elements, originating in the religious experience of the founders, served as the media through which salvation-oriented faith was transmitted. So long as these media remained firm, it is quite understandable that a given salvation-faith would continue to function effectively even after the death of its founder.

A founder's demise by no means rules out the possibility that these mediating elements may continue to develop thereafter and even to exercise greater influence than the founder. The history of religions is a veritable museum of such examples. Consider the founders of the various religions. In many of the historic religions, the image of the founder, after death, is embellished with legend and myth, inflated, cast in a new radiance. Each is portrayed in doctrine as the spiritual leader of an entire society, and

this image is engraved in the hearts of people across many generations. Even today these founders are regarded as more than human by great sections of the world's population.

In the New Religions of Japan, on the contrary, this mythologization of the founder, after his or her death, seems rather minimal. The founder's image fades to some extent, but he or she is not surrounded with radiance. In time, the living kami founder whose image undergirds the power of the experienced salvation tends to fade and become more and more indistinct. So far as this image is concerned, the living kami idea, far from leaving the founder behind and developing as an independent power in its own right, has gradually lost strength and momentum.

Crisis salvation versus ethical salvation. This attenuation in the image of the founder can be understood as the consequence of a change in the structure of the members' religious consciousness brought about by the institution-alization of the movement. The first generation of followers was for the most part comprised of people who had joined because they or those close to them had experienced salvation from concrete suffering. On the basis of this experience, they may have regarded the living kami, the pillar of their salvation, as the chief support of their life. But for people of the second and later generations, people who were members of the group from birth, the experience of salvation was necessarily something weaker. The image of the founder as the living kami manifested in the experience of relief from immediate distress becomes increasingly obscure. This is closely related to the fact that the main concern of the New Religions has been to provide rescue for people in a state of critical distress. This concern has differentiated the New Religions from religions oriented to ethical salvation from sin, religions that find

their concerns in the ethical issues of daily life. It follows, therefore, that a clear-cut image of the founder as the living kami who undergirds salvation in the midst of day-to-day life becomes more and more difficult to grasp. From the second generation on, as followers come to place greater weight on moral practice in daily life, the image of the founder tends to deviate from that of the living kami who undergirded the experience of salvation. Recent Tenrikyō literature, for example, gives stronger expression than before to the symbol of the *hinagata* or Divine Model (the life of Nakayama Miki), holding that “in the the path of Her life we find models for our proper way of living, and that by following them every one of us can enjoy a joyous life” (Tenrikyō Overseas Mission Department 1966, p. 287). Similarly, Konkōkyō theologians present their founder as “a man of sincerity and a seeker after the true way of life, one who through his own experience discovered the solutions” to the eternal problems and sufferings of mankind (Konkōkyō Honbu Kyōchō 1972, p. 5, my translation). Little by little, therefore, followers seem to have given shape to a perspective we may call “the founder as a fully human being,” a moral model for believers in their daily lives.

This humanized and moralized image of the founder as one who has “graduated” from the status of living kami, though congenial to those born into the group, is a bitter pill to recent converts full of the experience of how they have been helped and afire to win others. Even they, however, cannot acquire a clear-cut image of the founder as the living kami because he or she is already dead, so there is no way to experience directly the power of a personality that allegedly did wondrous things and made possible their salvation. New believers come to feel that the source of their salvation lies in the saving rituals or in the persons of those charismatic enough to draw them and others into

the group. The specific gravity of the Parent God/living kami compound that earlier served as the object of worship gradually changes in such a way that greater density attaches to the Parent God than to the living kami founder. No direct attack is made on the divinity of the living kami, but neglecting her or him amounts to much the same thing.

Objective, comparative understanding. From one angle, attenuation of the living kami idea connects with a growing awareness that the living kami is not the only and absolute mediator. This awareness is stimulated, first of all, by an increase in historical knowledge about the founder. Scholars, journalists, and people of various professions, by inquiring into a founder's sociocultural background and distinguishing psychological traits and by comparing him or her with other founders, seek to portray a founder as a historical figure in as objective a manner as possible. Intellectuals in the New Religions, in addition to receiving influences from the outside world, are usually eager to establish an empirically verifiable image of the founder of their group and to reformulate doctrine accordingly. As a result, they themselves build up collections of resource materials concerning the founder and seek to accumulate factual knowledge. Their intention may be to resist the encroachment of objectivism and relativism, but the result is that the objective, comparative approach makes ever deeper inroads.

From another angle, this attenuation also connects with the doctrine of Tennoism. This doctrine, forced on the people by the State after the Meiji Restoration, told of a unique figure, the emperor (and the imperial line), who, though not attributed with saving power, was presented as directly related to the kami. Moreover, during the relatively free Taishō period (1912-1926) and following the

elimination of Tennoist ideology after World War II, many founders made their appearance and many New Religions advanced their mutually exclusive claims side by side. Information about these conflicting claims on behalf of persons held up as superhuman beings, each of whom was supposed to be *the* divine leader for all the people of Japan, was disseminated through the public education system and the mass media, thus becoming matters of common knowledge. Even rank-and-file members of the New Religions were obliged to recognize the founder of their group now as a subject of the Empire, now as one founder among others. These pressures strengthened the tendency toward objective and comparative understanding.

The hard core of devout followers, to be sure, by no means ceases to present the founder as a mystical, superhuman being. But geographical and historical propinquity makes it difficult even for those inclined toward a mystical, superhuman orientation to withstand the objective, comparative orientation. Within the group, in this way, the awareness grows that the founder, however eminent, is no more than one historical figure among others. To the extent that this awareness becomes predominant, the founder ceases to be regarded as the sole living kami chosen to mediate between man and the divine.⁷

I hope I have shown how the living kami idea that came into being with the rise of Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō during the late Tokugawa period gradually but necessarily became attenuated. It may be added that in the New Religions that followed, it was only rarely that the living kami idea came to fruition. To generalize, one can probably go so far as to say that among the New Religions of the present day,

7. This process by which a group's image of its founder comes to be humanized can be observed in biographical studies of the founder's life carried out by Konkōkyō theologians. See Shimazono 1979.

the living kami idea plays only an insignificant role. To venerate a living founder or leader is, of course, still widespread, and it is beyond dispute that this veneration draws heavily on living kami belief. In this context one can still find evidences of the belief that the words and deeds of a charismatic person have the power to save followers from their present troubles and guide them into a new path of life. But in most cases we cannot apply the term "living kami" to such leaders, for they do not enter into trances and act as mediums, the feature that in earlier days undergirded the belief in living kami, and those who offer them veneration have long since discarded the notion that the founder was divinely chosen as the sole mediator between man and the kami realm.⁸

The earlier New Religions, exemplified by Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō, came into being by virtue of an inner transformation in Folk Religion. In that connection, the belief that direct communication with supernatural beings took place on many occasions and through many mediums narrowed down to the belief in the founder as *the* living kami. Then the New Religions devised their own saving rituals. With the growth of the New Religions and the diffusion of these rituals among widening circles of followers, the belief in the efficacy of possession rituals performed by shamanistic mediums moved to the periphery of the Japanese religious consciousness. The living kami idea, however, was unable to replace it at the center of this consciousness. Today, few Japanese people believe either in pluriform communication with supernatural beings through shamanistic mediums or in communication with the supernatural through a single living kami. The history of Japan's New Religions gives evidence of a diminution of the belief in direct communication with the divine.

8. These observations may be understood as examples of the decline of belief in charisma in modern societies. See Wilson 1975.

The fundamental reason for this diminution of belief in supernatural beings who belong to a different dimension but manifest themselves directly from time to time in the human dimension is probably to be sought in the larger historical process that comprehends the secularization of Japanese society. From this perspective, the transformation in Folk Religion that led to the emergence of the New Religions comes into view as an internally initiated change that found a place within the secularization process.

REFERENCES

- BLACKER, Carmen
1975 *The catalpa bow: A study of shamanistic practices in Japan*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Headquarters of Konkōkyō
1973 *The sacred scriptures of Konkōkyō*. Konkō-chō, Okayama-ken: Headquarters of Konkōkyō.
- Headquarters of Tenrikyō Church
1967 *Life of Oyasama, foundress of Tenrikyō*, manuscript edition. Tenri: Headquarters of Tenrikyō Church.
1972 *The doctrine of Tenrikyō*. Tenri: Headquarters of Tenrikyō Church.
- HORI Ichirō 堀 一郎
1968 *Folk religion in Japan: Continuity and change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Konkōkyō Honbu Kyōchō 金光教本部教庁 [Headquarters of Konkōkyō]
1972 *Gaisetsu Konkōkyō 概説金光教* [An introduction to Konkōkyō]. Konkō-chō, Okayama-ken: Konkōkyō Honbu Kyōchō.
- Konkōkyō kyōki* 金光教教規 [Constitution of Konkōkyō]
1954 Privately printed.
- McFARLAND, H. Neill
1967 *The rush hour of the gods: A study of new religious movements in Japan*. New York: Macmillan Co.
- 410 *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6/3 September 1979

- MIYAKE Hitoshi 宮家 準
1972 Folk religion. In *Japanese religion: A survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs*, HORI Ichirō 堀一郎 et al., eds. Tokyo: Kōdansha International.
- MIYATA Noboru 宮田 登
1970 *Ikigami shinkō: Hito o kami ni matsuru shūzoku* 生き神信仰～人を神に祀る習俗 [The belief in living kami: The custom of worshiping men as gods]. Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō.
- MORIOKA Kiyomi 森岡清美
1978 *Minshū shūkyō no kyōso ni okeru karisumasei* 民衆宗教の教祖におけるカリスマ性 [Charismatic qualities in the founders of popular religions]. In *Tetsugaku to nihon shakai* 哲学と日本社会 [Philosophy and Japanese society], IENAGA Saburō and KOMAKI Osamu 家永三郎・小牧治, eds. Tokyo: Kōbundō.
- MURAKAMI Shigeyoshi 村上重良
1962 *Kindai minshū shūkyōshi no kenkyū* 近代民衆宗教史の研究 [A study of the history of popular religions in late Tokugawa Japan], 2nd ed. Kyoto: Hōzōkan.
- SASAKI Kōkan 佐々木宏幹
1972 *Shāman: Kamigami to ningen o tsunagu mono no shisō to kōdō* シャーマン～神々と人間をつなぐ者の思想と行動 [The shaman: The thought and behavior of those who mediate between gods and men]. *Nihonjin no shūkyō 2: Girei no kōzō* 日本人の宗教 2: 儀礼の構造 [The religion of the Japanese people, vol. 2: Ritual structure], TAMARU Noriyoshi 田丸徳善 et al., eds. Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppansha.
- SCHNEIDER, Delwin B.
1962 *Konkōkyō: A Japanese religion*. Tokyo: International Institute for the Study of Religions.
- SHIMAZONO Susumu 島蘭 進
1979 *Konkōkyōgaku to ningen kyōso ron: Konkōkyō no hassei josetsu* 金光教学と人間教祖論～金光教の発生序説 [Konkōkyō theology and the study of

the founder's inner life: An introduction to the emergence of Konkōkyō]. *Tsukuba daigaku tetsugaku shisō gakkei ronshū* 筑波大学哲学思想学系論集 4: 101-128.

Shūkyō Shakaigaku Kenkyūkai 宗教社会学研究会 [Association for the Study of Religion and Society], ed.

1978 *Gendai shūkyō e no shikaku* 現代宗教への視角 [Perspectives on present-day religion]. Tokyo: Yūzan-kaku.

STRAELEN, Henry van

1957 *The religion of divine wisdom: Japan's most powerful religious movement*. Kyoto: Veritas Shoin.

Tenrikyō Overseas Mission Department, ed.

1966 *Tenrikyō: Its history and teachings*. Tenri: Tenrikyō Overseas Mission Department.

TSUSHIMA Michihito, NISHIYAMA Shigeru, SHIMAZONO Susumu, and SHIRAMIZU Hiroko 対馬路人, 西山 茂, 島蘭 進, 白水寛子

1978 The vitalistic conception of salvation in Japanese New Religions: An aspect of modern religious consciousness. In *Proceedings of [the] Tokyo meeting of the International Conference on Sociology of Religion 1978*. Tokyo: Organizing Committee for [the] Tokyo Meeting of CISR. Reprinted with minor changes in the *Japanese journal of religious studies* 6 (1979): 139-161.

WILSON, Bryan R.

1975 *The noble savages: The primitive origins of charisma and its contemporary survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press.