

## Organizational Mediums : A Case Study of Shinnyo-en

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Among the new religious movements<sup>1</sup> of present-day Japan, many religious bodies<sup>2</sup> have been founded by leaders properly referred to as charismatic. These founders have been regarded by their followers as possessing a special ability to communicate with spiritual beings.

This ability, however, is not always limited to founders. In some bodies, this spiritual ability is attributed to followers as well. For example, in the early period of Reiyūkai history,<sup>3</sup>

The original Japanese version of this paper may be found in Morioka 1978, pp. 71-95. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to the leaders and members of Shinnyo-en who kindly allowed me to participate in their meetings and extended me many courtesies between June 1974 and October 1975. This experience provided the basis for the M.A. dissertation *Shinshūkyō kyōdan no reindōsha: S kyōdan no jirei o chūshin ni* 新宗教教団の霊能者—S教団の事例を中心に [Mediums in new religious organizations: A case study of Shinnyo-en] that I submitted to Seijō University in 1976. I would also like to express my thanks to the Rev. and Mrs. Matthew H. Kull of the English Academy of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Seijō, Tokyo for their assistance in correcting an earlier draft of this translation and to David Reid, editor of the *Japanese journal of religious studies*, for his assistance with the final translation.

1. With regard to the term "new religious movements," this paper follows the definition proposed by Earhart. He identifies them as "(1) chronologically, those movements that appeared from late Tokugawa [about 1800] or early Meiji [about 1870] to the present; (2) in origin, those movements that arose as renewal or 'revitalizing' forces; (3) in formation, those movements that led to permanent socio-religious organizations" (Earhart 1970, p. 6).
2. The term "religious body" is here used in accordance with the definition suggested by Morioka, namely, "a group that is self-sufficient, or claims self-sufficiency, in respect of doctrine, ritual, and organization" (Morioka 1975, p. 132).
3. Reiyūkai (literally, "society of friends of the spirits") was founded by Kubo Kakutarō and Kotani Kimi in Tokyo in 1925. It has a membership of approximately 2,700,000. This group is noted for its services for ancestral spirits. From Reiyūkai, many groups have split off and formed their own organizations, e.g., Rishō Kōsei-kai, Myōchikai, Bussho Gonenkai, etc. On early Reiyūkai history see Murakami 1975, p. 217.

branch heads attracted followers by means of their power to function as mediums. Again, in PL Kyōdan today, there are people called *hiro'oya* or *oyasama* (both terms refer to parent figures) who are believed to possess a divinely given "sacred gift" and to engage continually in religious disciplines by means of which they communicate with the supernatural and are thus enabled to cure the sick.<sup>4</sup> This group also teaches that any member has the possibility of becoming a *hiro'oya*. Yet again, in the group called Kishinkai<sup>5</sup> there is a special class of members known as *reikanja* ("persons who sense the spirits"), who possess the power, it is said, to call forth ancestral spirits that have been unable to enter the realm of enlightenment and hence wander in confusion and despair.

In this paper, people recognized by the groups to which they belong as possessing spiritual powers of this kind will be referred to as "organizational mediums." Such mediums exist not only in the few groups just mentioned but in many of Japan's new religious bodies. They exist not in their own right, but as subordinates of the charismatic founders.

4. PL Kyōdan (literally "religious organization for perfect liberty") was originally established as the Hito-no-michi Kyōdan ("the way of man religious organization") by Miki Tokuharu in Osaka in 1924. After World War II, the founder's son and the organization's second leader, Miki Tokuchika, gave the group its present name. PL Kyōdan has a membership of approximately 2,600,000 families. It teaches that "life is art" and expects its followers to attach importance to self-expression. The group has twenty-one precepts, among which occur the following: (1) "Life is art," (2) "The whole life of the individual is a continuous succession of Self-Expressions," (3) "The individual is a manifestation of God," (4) "We suffer if we do not manifest ourselves," etc. (PL Kyōdan 1951, pp. 2-3; cf. McFarland 1967, pp. 130, 132-133; Offner and van Straelen 1963, p. 202).
5. Kishinkai (literally, "association of rare hearts") was founded by Iijima Shōkichi and his wife, lay Buddhists, in 1953. It has its headquarters in the city of Atsugi. Mrs. Iijima had earlier been an organizational medium of Shishinkai, a religious organization established by a former branch leader of Reiyūkai. Kishinkai has a membership of some 30,000 families. The group adheres strictly to the *Lotus sutra* and requires its adherents to hold services for ancestral spirits. Cf. Umehara 1974, p. 55.

Outside their groups little is known of them, but inasmuch as they are regarded as capable of direct communication with suprahuman beings, they can hardly be ignored in a consideration of Japan's new religious bodies.

The purpose of this paper has to do with the way these organizational mediums function within the dynamics of their respective and, as it were, self-sufficient groups. In general it may be surmised that what is distinctive in the structural features of each religious body will correlate with distinctive patterns in the functions of the mediums. This paper, however, being a case study, will focus on the organizational mediums of one religious body, the Shinnyo-en. I will try to clarify their position<sup>6</sup> within the group and the role they perform by virtue of their position. The methods employed are those of participant observation in the group's rituals, analysis of its publications, and interviews with two of its mediums (one a woman, the other a man).

#### THE OBJECT OF RESEARCH.

*Shinnyo-en organization and teachings.* Shinnyo-en, an association for lay Buddhists, literally means "garden of absolute reality." The organization is a religious juridical person under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and stands in the tradition of the Daigo branch of the Shingon or True Word school. It was founded in 1936 by Itō Shinjō and his wife Tomoji in a suburb of metropolitan Tokyo, the city of Tachikawa, where its headquarters is still located.

In terms of organizational strength, Shinnyo-en claims 177 local bodies (13 of which are incorporated as religious

6. Position and status are often treated as interchangeable terms. Kinch, however, has proposed the view that "position" merely specifies one's location in relation to other persons within a social system, whereas "status" adds to position a hierarchical value (Kinch 1973, pp. 125-127). This paper follows Kinch's definitions and distinguishes between the two.

juridical persons), 999 instructors (of whom 630 are women), and 238,985 members (Bunkachō 1975, p. 27). It puts out both a monthly and a quarterly publication, the combined circulations of which amount to 70,000.

As to organizational network, in addition to the headquarters in Tachikawa, it has 3 centers (Tokyo, Hyōgo, and Ibaraki) and 11 branches (2 in Tachikawa and 1 each in Akita, Ishikawa, Nagano, Tochigi, Tokyo, Osaka, Mie, Hiroshima, and Hawaii), so these are the places where its members tend to cluster.

Doctrinally, this group relies solely on the *Great nirvana sutra*, the sutra said to contain Gautama's last teachings. The aims of the group are: (1) to realize happiness for all mankind, (2) to pursue genuine world peace through refining "the buddha-nature innate in all human beings," and (3) to seek the state of "religious rapture" or *jōraku gajō*<sup>7</sup> said to be taught in the *Great nirvana sutra*.

If the foregoing may be taken as the visible layer of Shinnyo-en teaching, then what constitutes the foundation layer is Shinnyo-en belief in a "spirit world." In this spirit world dwell the deceased members of the Itō family (namely, Mrs. Itō and two sons) together with guardian gods who protect Buddhism. Of these, the growth of Shinnyo-en as a religious organization stems from the functions attributed to the two prematurely deceased sons, who are said to take on themselves, through the mediums, the woes that should fall on the members and in many ways save them from misfortune. Through the "substitutionary suffering" of these sacred beings in the spirit world, the "divinely mediated transformation" spoken of in the *Great nirvana sutra* is, we are told, strikingly exhibited.

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7. In striking contrast to the *anātman* or non-self principle of Buddhism proper, Shinnyo-en teaches that "religious rapture" or *jōraku gajō* means "to live with Buddha forever in the bliss of nirvana" (Shinnyo-en n.d., p. 6; cf. Yamanaka 1973, pp. 171-172).

*Shinnyo-en mediums.* The way Shinnyo-en introduces its mediums to outsiders can be seen in one of its pamphlets. Here we read that “the true righteousness of the Buddha is made evident through the *sesshin shugyō* [translated by Shinnyo-en as ‘heart to heart training’ but in this paper rendered as ‘the discipline of spiritual guidance’], which enables one, while living, to be reborn in the realm of joy and to develop her or his buddha-nature” (Shinnyo-en n.d., p.6). And precisely what is this “discipline of spiritual guidance”? In a booklet of teachings published by Shinnyo-en, it is explained as follows:

The discipline of spiritual guidance, in plain terms, is meant to enable people to acquire the Buddha-spirit. The spirit thus acquired is actively manifested in daily life as a spirit of service and altruistic love. In order to make this spirit known to as many people as possible, Shinnyo-en has nearly two hundred *reinōsha* or “mediums” who perform roles of great importance. In Shinnyo-en the ability to serve as a medium, acquired through practice of the Buddha’s teachings, is a distinctive form of spiritual leadership, but mediums are by no means unique people. Men and women, old and young, they serve in many ways in ordinary society, occupying all kinds of positions (Shinnyo-en Kyōgakubu 1974, p. 1). As may be seen from this statement, Shinnyo-en mediums: (1) are designated *reinōsha* (literally, “spiritually adept persons”), (2) possess special ability in spiritual leadership, (3) are involved in the “discipline of spiritual guidance,” and (4) come from all kinds of social positions. In referring to these *reinōsha*, Shinnyo-en writings sometimes use the English word “mediums.” For example, “the discipline of spiritual guidance through mediums is without parallel” (*Naigai jihō* 1975, p. 8), and “Shinnyo-en mediums do more than just communicating with the spirits of the dead” (Itō 1974, p. 210).

The paragraph cited from the booklet of Shinnyo-en teachings shows that the mediums and the discipline of spiritual guidance are indivisible. Moreover, Shinnyo-en claims that

one of its distinctive teachings is that “the members, as a result of the discipline of spiritual guidance carried out in reliance on the mediums, are united in the perfect nirvana spirit” (Shinnyo-en Kyōgakubu 1968, p. 24). It appears, therefore, that the primary role of the medium is to be sought in the “discipline of spiritual guidance.”

Before taking up this matter, however, I propose to take a brief look at Shinnyo-en history with particular reference to the emergence of mediums and their continuance to the present day.<sup>8</sup>

#### SHINNYO-EN HISTORY

*Initial period.* Itō Shinjō, known to Shinnyo-en adherents as the *kyōshu* (“head of the sect” or “founder”), was born in Yamanashi Prefecture in the year 1906, the second son of a farmer. His father was also a skilled diviner and his mother a devoted member of Tenrikyō.

At eighteen, he went to Tokyo, where he found daytime employment and attended night school. As time permitted, he participated, we are told, not only in a Nichiren Buddhist training center but also in services at a Pentecostal church. After completing his military service, he took a position, from about age twenty-three, as a technician in an aircraft company. During the course of his work, he gradually assumed the role of advisor to his fellow workers, drawing on the divinatory techniques handed down in his family.

Tomoji, the founder’s wife, who died in 1967 and is known to Shinnyo-en adherents as the *enshu* (“head of the garden” or “foundress”), was a second cousin of the founder. Born in 1912 in the same prefecture and district, she was the eldest daughter of a local merchant. Because of her father’s death when she was four years old, she and her siblings were

8. The Shinnyo-en “medium” category actually includes not only those considered in this study but also the founding couple and their children.

raised by their grandmother. This grandmother, employing her own daughter (Tomoji's aunt) as a medium, cured people possessed by fox-spirits. Thus in the background of Tomoji's own subsequent activities as a medium, the influence of these women seems to have played an important part.

Introduced to one another by this aunt, the founder and Tomoji were married in 1932 and established their home in the city of Tachikawa near his place of work. Not long after, however, he fell ill and was unable to work. It was at this time that he came to feel that he should turn to religion. At the recommendation of a Buddhist priest of his acquaintance, he and his wife put their faith in Acala (Jps., Fudō Myō'ō), the Tantric god of fire. For the next three years, they both devoted themselves to the study of esoteric Buddhism. During this period, he continued to practice divination in his own home, some forty to fifty people calling on him for this service. As for Tomoji, "her sensitivity gradually improved so that she became increasingly able to rely on spiritual beings to divine the causes of illness, and to see visions" (Shinnyo-en 1975, p. 48).

At this juncture the founder began to consider whether to resign his position with the company and devote himself full-time to religion. But he was opposed by his wife, who worried about how they could provide for their two children, so he gave up the idea. His faith in Acala remained strong, however, and on 28 December 1935 he enshrined in their home a statue of Acala attributed to the Kamakura period sculptor Unkei (d. 1223). From the first of the new year, he and his wife together started daily cold-water ablations and entered upon ascetic exercises in earnest.

Finally, on 3 February 1936, the day their vows were completed, Tomoji "saw," in the altar where a fire to Acala burned, a vision of her husband wearing priestly vestments and sitting at a sutra stand. As she prayed, day gave way

to night, and the next morning, at early dawn, she fell into a deep trance.<sup>9</sup> In that state she received from her aunt, who happened to be visiting, her power to act as a medium. Because of this experience, Tomoji became aware that she should devote her life to religion, and she who had earlier opposed the idea of her husband's quitting his job now urged him to do so.

This time, however, it was he who showed reluctance since the aircraft industry, because of mounting military activity, was then starting to prosper. As he irresolutely continued at his job with the company, his wife and children were prostrated, one after the other, by high fevers. He took this as a warning from the Buddha, a message that he should become a man of religion. In order to decide his course, he had his wife sit before the statue of Acala, and when she entered a state of trance, he spoke thus with her, or more accurately, with the divinity through her:

"Please, wait just three months. We need money to build a hall where we can offer you worship properly."

The divinity's response to this request was to shake her head and declare, "No!"

"You mean I should quit my job right now?"

At this, her hands, till then clasped in a lotus position above her head, came undone as she nodded vigorously, saying, "Yes! Yes!"

I stared at my wife and thought to myself, "The Buddha is heartless." But it was the Buddha's will. I had to obey (Itô 1974, pp. 9-10).

Four days after his wife had thus received the power and right to act as a medium, the founder quit his job, and he and his wife together started a new career devoted entirely to religion. Tomoji, then twenty-four and in straitened circumstances, was responsible on the one hand for managing the household and, on the other, for serving as a "me-9. *Nyūshin jōtai*, a state that allegedly makes it possible to communicate with suprahuman beings.



dium of salvation” whenever people came to the founder to have their fortunes told.

Eventually, the people who relied on the founder as a diviner and on his wife as a medium began to increase in number, and it was deemed necessary to establish an organization that would have some standing in law. The group first affiliated with Shinshōji temple in Narita, a Shingon temple dedicated to Acala, as a voluntary religious association bearing the name Risshōkaku. At the same time the founder undertook ascetic training at Daigoji temple in Kyoto, head temple of the Daigo branch of the Shingon school.

But just as these things were happening, the Itō's eldest son, a child of less than two years, died of illness. That a religious leader from whom they had expected “tangible benefits” should lose a son apparently shook the faith of a number of followers, who thereupon left the group. But at a service on the hundredth day after his death, the spirit of the dead son “answered” his mother and thereafter, according to Shinnyo-en teaching, enabled her to enter into “immediate trance.” In this way Shinnyo-en weathered what can be regarded as its first crisis. The number of adherents increased, and in 1938 it built and moved into its present center. In the same connection, it gave up its previous status as a religious association and became affiliated with the Daigo branch of Shingon Buddhism as the Tachikawa Acala Church — though under the wartime Religious Organizations Law its name was officially changed to the Shingon Sect Tachikawa Acala Church.

At length, the ravages of war reached Japan proper, and Tachikawa too was subjected to air raids, but the Shinnyo-en building escaped destruction. Tradition has it that throughout the war years the founder and his wife shared with their followers vegetables they themselves had raised and quietly persevered in their faith.

*Time of growth: The appearance of mediums.* The end of the war in 1945 saw the end of the Religious Organizations Law and thus of the "Shingon Sect" into which Shinnyo-en and the various branches of Shingon Buddhism had been required to consolidate. On 28 December 1945, with the promulgation of the Religious Juridical Persons Ordinance, religious freedom was guaranteed, so the following year, 1946, marked a fresh start for many religious organizations.

In that year Shinnyo-en, holding its "First Festival to Celebrate the Founder's Birthday" and issuing its first publications, undertook a number of new ventures. But what is particularly notable is that this year saw the appearance of the first "organizational medium."

This event took place when a female member of the group received from Itō Tomoji the power and right to act as a medium. This woman, who presently holds a position of responsibility in Shinnyo-en, describes what happened at that time as follows:

I became a member of Shinnyo-en in June 1945 and a medium on 4 November 1946. At that time I was working in the pharmacy of Juntendō Hospital in Tokyo..., and there were perhaps ten or more nurses there who were also "children of the way." On 3 November, our day off, I went with them to visit the hallowed ground [the grave of the Itō's eldest son, located in Tama Cemetery, Tokyo], and after we got back they all celebrated my birthday. But when I sat down to eat, suddenly I felt faint, and I remember going to a corner of the room and lying down. The chatter of my friends, the things of this world, somehow seemed to be taking place at a remote distance.... Eventually, I came to my senses.

The next day, the 4th, was a Saturday. The tale of what had happened the night before spread like wildfire among the hospital nurses, and those who opposed our faith, ostensibly speaking to one another but actually intending to be overheard, talked excitedly about "perverse religion" and "fox-spirit possession." Hearing these defamatory remarks and seeing their insulting smiles, I

thought to myself that if I took the day off I would give them even more to talk about, so I steeled my heart and continued work as usual....

After finishing the morning shift, I finally made it to Tachikawa. It was as I was paying my respects to Father and Mother Itō that it happened. I came into touch with the Buddha-bodies of the founding parents, radiant with the color of gold, and instinctively I stepped backwards and bowed three times. When the eyes of the heart are closed, we don't worship buddhas even if they are at our elbow. That very day I received, and humbly accepted, their order to become a medium (Itō 1974, pp. 169-171).

Two days later, Shinnyo-en instituted a month-long period of ascetic training called the *makoto kiso gyō* ("fundamental discipline of truth"). During this period, the Itō's eldest daughter, then thirteen years old, became a medium, and in April 1947 her ten-year-old brother and six-year-old sister likewise became mediums.

In 1948 what is now known as Shinnyo-en changed its name from the Tachikawa Acala Church to Makoto Kyōdan. In April of the same year, the forerunner of its present missionary training institute was established, and those in positions of leadership began to give lectures on Buddhism. Again, in October 1948, Shinnyo-en celebrated its "Tenth Anniversary Festival," came to have under its authority a branch temple in Ibaraki Prefecture, and otherwise showed signs of mounting activity.

In 1950, however, a time of "ordeal" befell Shinnyo-en. It started when a young man who had formerly held a position of responsibility in Shinnyo-en was punished during one of the ascetic training sessions and lodged a complaint against the founder. As a result, the founder was jailed for forty days and sentenced to seven months imprisonment (with a three-year stay of execution equivalent to a period of probation). According to Shinnyo-en, the truth of the matter was that this young man, feeling wronged by the founder's words of remonstrance, was in this way trying

to get revenge. At all events, this incident set Shinnyo-en reeling.

But on 3 April 1951 the Religious Juridical Persons Law was promulgated, and Shinnyo-en, taking its present name, made a fresh start. Simultaneously, it also changed the name of the "fundamental discipline of truth" to the "discipline of spiritual guidance." Its certification as a religious juridical person under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education took place in May 1953.

In July 1952 the Itōs lost their second child, a fifteen-year-old boy, as a result of illness. He and the eldest son who died during the initial period are known to Shinnyo-en followers as the *ryōdōji sama* (holy brothers), and from the viewpoint of doctrine, both occupy an important position (see above, p. 416). In August 1954 their two sisters, at ages twelve and eleven, also received the right and power to be clairvoyants. Every member of the founding family has thus become a medium.

As may be seen from the opening of new branches in many parts of the country, the decade beginning with 1955 was a time of expansion for Shinnyo-en. This expansion was accompanied by an effort to develop a systematic body of doctrine. The founder's lectures on the *Great nirvana sutra*, which currently occupies a central place in Shinnyo-en doctrine, began in February 1956, and its book of doctrine was published in May 1958. A conspicuous increase in organizational mediums also took place about this time. For example, twelve members became mediums during the course of the year 1959. This is a remarkable change from earlier times when only one or two mediums came into existence per year. What occasioned this change, however, is not clear. At any rate, some sixty-one persons became organizational mediums during this decade. These, added to the nine who became mediums in the preceding decade, make a total of seventy organizational mediums who were

carrying on activities as of the end of 1964.

The decade beginning with 1965 saw the construction of a modern headquarters building and the beginning of overseas missionary work, symbolized by the opening of a branch in Hawaii. The number of mediums that came into being during this period amounts to ninety-eight. At present, therefore, there are about one hundred seventy Shinnyo-en people acting as organizational mediums.<sup>10</sup>

As may be seen from this account of Shinnyo-en history, it was the act of legitimation first performed by Itō Tomoji that brought the organizational mediums into existence and explains their continuation to the present day. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find in the literature of the group any statement as to why the first organizational medium was created. It can be said, however, that the decision to take the step of forming organizational mediums was a momentous one in the process of Shinnyo-en development.

This section has traced approximately forty years of Shinnyo-en history. The next section will consider what Shinnyo-en mediums do now.

#### THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL MEDIUM

*A doctrinal view of the medium.* As mentioned above, the primary role of the medium is to be sought in the “discipline of spiritual guidance.” It is well to begin, therefore, by considering the meaning of the term “spiritual guidance.”

Shinnyo-en teaches that spiritual guidance means “to take one’s subjectivity and look at it objectively.” It goes on to say that this becomes possible when one’s soul is reflected in “the mirror of the medium” (Itō 1974, p. 244).<sup>11</sup> Concretely, this takes place when the mediums and those

10. The number of mediums who have withdrawn from Shinnyo-en is not clear. It is said that five left the organization in 1958, but that they later came back.

who seek spiritual guidance sit facing one another in a situation called *eza* (to meet while sitting). The words spoken by the mediums during spiritual guidance are called *reigen* ("spiritual utterances"). Shinnyo-en teaches that these spiritual utterances, "the secrets of the Buddha," are expressed through mediums empowered by the three now-deceased members of the founder's family and by the guardian deities of Buddhism. It further teaches that those who accept this spiritual guidance will find that the "raging fires of desire, wrath, and foolishness" are quenched and the way to the Buddha-nature opened. It teaches that they will find in this guidance precious instruction from the spirit world, instruction that leads people to "religious rapture" (*Naigai jihō* 1974, p. 8). From these teachings it appears, therefore, that the primary role of the medium is to deliver, during the time of spiritual guidance, the spiritual utterances that allegedly contain directives from the spirit world.<sup>12</sup>

Spiritual guidance performed for the sake of believers is of various kinds.<sup>13</sup> In the next section I shall introduce

11. Spiritual guidance is divided into two stages: "discriminatory spiritual guidance" (*usō sesshin*), where the focus is on the Buddha, the medium serving as a mirror, and "non-discriminatory spiritual guidance" (*musō sesshin*), where what is acquired in the first stage is brought to life in daily existence through striving in every connection to "train for bodhisattvahood." Strictly speaking, therefore, what is described in this section is the stage in which the medium is directly involved, the stage of "discriminatory spiritual guidance."
12. Shinnyo-en teaches that even though the role of mediums rightly includes taking on themselves the bad karmic connections of those who come to them, this part of their task is performed on their behalf by the holy brothers. Its mediums can therefore carry on their spiritual guidance without anxiety.

One of the two mediums interviewed contrasted the fortunate state of Shinnyo-en mediums with that of Buddhist ascetics. The latter, he said, come to an unhappy end because they go through life taking on themselves other people's karmic burdens, but can never get rid of them.

The mediums, therefore, in order to execute their role, require the "support" of the members of the founder's family now existing in the spirit world.

the kind known as *kōjō sesshin* – the most ordinary form, but the one in which the meaning of this practice to believers is most evident.

*Kōjō sesshin.* In order to participate in *kōjō sesshin* (“spiritual guidance for the sake of improvement”), a member has to meet certain requirements. She or he must have attended Shinnyo-en services at least six times, and during those times must have heard one sermon by the founder.<sup>14</sup> In addition, an application to participate on a given day must be submitted prior to that day’s services. On the form provided, the applicant gives the name of the Shinnyo-en group he or she belongs to, fills in his or her name and address, and presents the form, together with a “meditation fee,” to the person in charge. In exchange the applicant receives a dated and numbered ticket.

After the sutra reading and testimonies, there is a short break, immediately following which those participating that day form two circles of about sixty persons each, sitting in the order of their ticket numbers.<sup>15</sup> It also happens

13. Four kinds are distinguished: (1) *kōjō sesshin* (“spiritual guidance for the sake of improvement”), for followers who have no special problems demanding solution but, for their own self-improvement, are required to participate in this kind at least once a month; (2) *kōjō sōdan sesshin* (“spiritual guidance and consultation for the sake of improvement”), the kind for followers who have not been able to meet the once-a-month requirement and for those who encounter problems when carrying on missionary work; (3) *sōdan sesshin* (“spiritual guidance and consultation”) and (4) *kantei sesshin* (“spiritual guidance and expert opinion”) are alike in that both are for followers who need to solve problems, but number 4 is particularly for those who are reduced to choosing between only two alternatives. In this case the medium employs the same kind of divinatory techniques long ago learned by the founder.

These four kinds of spiritual guidance are arranged in order of increasing difficulty.

14. These requirements were established in September 1974. Prior to that date, attendance at three services was sufficient. The change was made necessary, according to Shinnyo-en, because of the increase in members and in requests to participate in *kōjō sesshin*.

that those participating for the first time form a line inside one of the circles, while experienced participants wait their turns behind them and, if the novices cannot understand the spiritual utterances, act as interpreters for them. At any rate the participants are seated in a circle; silently, with eyes closed and hands clasped before them, and seated in a formal posture, they await the mediums.

In two or three minutes the mediums appear. They neither wear special clothing nor carry implements. Entering a circle, they assume a formal sitting posture, face the object of worship, and make manual signs symbolic of entrance into the buddha realm while intoning a chant (the *goshinpō no ketsuju* or “chant for self-protection”). The teaching is that through this ritual action they immediately enter into a state of trance. After this chant they raise their clasped hands high and bend over backwards three times. This apparently signifies that they have now become spiritual vessels. In this state of trance, and on the basis of their “clairvoyance,” “inspiration,” and “bodily expressions” (spontaneous physical motions), the mediums communicate a spiritual utterance to a member. From time to time the entranced mediums also move about with their eyes closed, raise their arms over their heads, or thrust their clasped hands up into the air.

There are six to eight mediums per circle. The time needed per member is about three minutes. On finishing with one, the medium moves on to the next, whereupon the member puts his or her numbered ticket in the medium’s pocket. The mediums are thus responsible to collect every ticket, for in this way records can be kept as to how many persons each medium has guided.

15. From August 1975 the number of *kōjō sesshin* circles was doubled, and from October of that year, people waiting their turn were asked to assume a formal posture and “enter into an attitude of prayer.” It is not inconceivable that these rules may have strengthened the impression that *kōjō sesshin* is a matter of spiritual training.



From beginning to end, one session of *kōjō sesshin* takes about two hours. As the number of people in a circle diminishes, the person in charge so informs the mediums, and at an appropriate point, they once again face the object of worship, intone their chant, and make manual signs symbolizing their return from the state of trance. Then they leave the room.

According to Shinnyo-en teaching, the spiritual utterances of the mediums are instructions from the spirit world. It appears, however, that they do not regard themselves as having become one with or communicated with the world of spirits. For example, one of the interviewed mediums says that what happens in spiritual utterance is not that "the Buddha" or some spiritual being speaks to her, but that her own state of inspiration or clairvoyance is expressed in words. But besides the example of this one person, the fact that the mediums get together a few days after each session to discuss their cases makes it evident that even though they speak of being in a state of trance, this is by no means a state in which they lose consciousness or, in the usual sense of the word, become possessed. On the contrary, their words and actions while in this state follow fixed forms. Mediums that deviate from these forms are not to be seen. Because the spiritual guidance session is led by mediums like these, its atmosphere is far removed from that of "shamanistic uproar" (Oguchi 1951, pp. 51-54).

What has been described here, however, pertains only to the state of affairs in spiritual guidance sessions of the present day. In the early period of Shinnyo-en, people reportedly used to fling themselves about during these sessions and fall prostrate in response to "the action of the spirit" (Itō 1974, p. 15). It appears, therefore, that changes have taken place in the form of the spiritual guidance sessions. Unfortunately, however, I do not have access to data that would permit me to trace these changes with precision.<sup>16</sup>

In the next section, therefore, I propose to consider the meaning of the role performed by mediums with particular reference to present-day spiritual guidance sessions. In doing so, I shall focus primarily on the content of their spiritual utterances.

*The role of the medium.* To begin with, it should be noted that the spiritual utterances of the mediums are by no means inscrutable. On the contrary, their manner of expression is marked by a certain tone of persuasion. So far as the *kōjō sesshin* is concerned, the content of their spiritual utterances can be roughly divided into three types.

First is the type in which members are called on to reconfirm their commitment to Shinnyo-en teaching. "Take in every bit of the teaching and devote yourself to it," "Isn't there something in the teaching that you have refused to accept?", "Are you helping others to find salvation?" and the like are examples of this type of spiritual utterance.

Second is the type in which people are asked whether there are, among their family members or near-relatives, persons who have died an unhappy death. For example, one elderly medium sat facing the present writer and began to tremble, saying, "It's so cold, so cold." She said this indicated the presence of a spirit who had died by drowning and asked me if anyone among my relatives had died such a death. On another occasion, a different medium of advanced years told me that she was aware of a spirit among my maternal ancestors who had died in infancy.

The third type has to do with the state of health of living people, including the person addressed. One member says that the cause of her husband's death was that he refused to pay attention to a sickness pointed out to him during

16. According to Shinnyo-en, behind the change from the "spiritually violent" form of session in which people flung themselves about to the refined form of the present day, there is the great sacrifice of the holy brothers who went to the world of spirits.

*kōjō sesshin*.<sup>17</sup>

Spiritual utterances with contents of these kinds occur frequently in the words addressed to Shinnyo-en members during *kōjō sesshin*.

Shinnyo-en teaches, moreover, what it calls “the doctrine of lifting karmic burdens.” This is the doctrine that continuous repetition of the “lifting of karmic burdens” is essential to attaining “the great blessing of *jōraku gajō*” (religious rapture).<sup>18</sup> Indispensable to this lifting of karmic burdens is spiritual guidance – also spoken of as “the method of prayerful austerity that makes people aware of karmic burdens and of what their attitude should be.” For example, in the spiritual guidance sessions I attended, the spirit of the person who died by drowning and that of the one who died as an infant, both “indicated” by spiritual utterance, were (to the medium) clearly the cause of the evil karmic burdens surrounding my life.<sup>19</sup>

The mediums who communicate these spiritual utter-

17. It is held that the mediums are able to sense pathological conditions that ordinary people can never become aware of on their own.
18. In Shinnyo-en, karmic connections do not necessarily have a bad meaning. For example, becoming a member of Shinnyo-en is spoken of as laying hold of a karmic connection that is difficult to acquire. But in the case of “lifting karmic burdens” or “dissolving karmic entanglements,” the karmic connections involved are of course negative ones. Concretely, the steps involved in lifting karmic burdens are as follows: (1) the medium indicates a bad karmic connection to the member during a spiritual guidance session, (2) the member, in order to get rid of this entangling bad connection, performs what is called an *osegaki* (literally, a rite to feed hungry ghosts). This is one kind of ritual observed in Shinnyo-en for the spirits of the dead. What the member does is to apply to the central office, using a prescribed form, for a service for the repose of the unhappy spirit of whom the member has become aware at the suggestion of the medium. By means of this request to the organization for an *osegaki* and by means of the member’s own “movement of the heart” on behalf of this unhappy spirit, the bad karmic entanglement indicated by the medium is dissolved, the lifting of a karmic burden completed. Shinnyo-en warns, however, against the easy assumption that a single *osegaki* is enough to rescue the spirit and lift all karmic burdens.
19. During spiritual guidance, mediums sometimes indicate the presence of “hindering spirits” who seek to interfere with the member’s pursuit of faith. In this situation, according to Shinnyo-en, such spirits must be exorcised by the founder through performance of a fire and incense ritual.

ances are thus indispensable to believers in the lifting of karmic burdens, one of the ways through which believers are saved. But when one examines these spiritual utterances closely, it becomes evident that yet another role is performed by the mediums. For there are spiritual utterances that do more than merely point out karmic burdens. "Are you helping others to find salvation?" and "Take in every bit of the teaching and devote yourself to it" are merely two examples of speech and behavior intended to educate and guide believers so as to increase their commitment to Shinnyo-en. Furthermore, if a member fails to do what is recommended during a spiritual guidance session, the mediums, in accordance with Shinnyo-en teaching, will point out the same feature again and again. In view of these facts, it seems clear that the mediums, in addition to the role they perform by virtue of the spiritual power they allegedly possess (namely, the communication of spiritual utterances), perform an educative, directive role. The former role may be considered primary and the latter secondary, but even this secondary role, as will be shown below, is one of considerable significance. The next section will treat the question of how these mediums, who play so essential a role in the activities of the organization, are trained.

#### THE MAKING OF A MEDIUM

*The process of becoming a medium.* In Shinnyo-en today it is held that anyone, provided only that she or he is a member, can become a medium. In its publications, as if to give evidence for this position, the phrase "anybody can be a medium" often occurs. At this point, therefore, I propose to outline the process by which one becomes a medium in Shinnyo-en.

To begin with, Shinnyo-en has set up for believers a four-stage series of "spiritual ranks." Their names are *daijō*, *kangi*, *daikangi*, and *reinō*. Doctrinally, each rank is explained

as follows:

*Daijō* ("Mahayana" or "the large vehicle"): to attain the rank of arhat. The spiritual state in which, as a result of spiritual training, one determines to become an upholder of the Buddhist law.

*Kangi* ("joy"): "the first step toward becoming a bodhisattva," that is, the "joy" stage of life among the ten positions along the bodhisattva way. Since the way being followed is that of Mahayana Buddhism or the way of the arhat, it always involves the joy of accepting the teaching and the determination to follow it. Practice is a necessary part of this way. Cerebral understanding alone does not open the door to the stage of joy.

*Daikangi* ("great joy"): "a bodhisattva among bodhisattvas." To attain the spiritual state in which one's buddha-nature truly dwells in the ten realms of the bodhisattva world (the realms of hell, famished ghosts, animals, berserk devils, humans, heaven, glory, self-enlightenment, bodhisattvas, and buddhas), strives to perform altruistic deeds on the basis of the joy of humble service to the group, and delights in being with the Buddha.

*Reinō* ("spiritual adept"): to practice the disciplines of the ten stages. In other words, to become a medium (*Naigai jihō* 1969b, p. 8).

The persons who attain these various ranks are called "Mahayana people," "joy people," "great joy people," and "mediums." In other words, the word "medium," as stipulated at the outset of this paper, connotes more than just a *position* within Shinnyo-en. It also connotes, as the preceding citation shows, a doctrinally supported hierarchy of values which makes it possible to use instead the term *status*.<sup>20</sup> The emergence of a medium in Shinnyo-en means, then, that a member has risen through the system of statuses that the organization calls spiritual ranks and attained the status of medium.

What requirements must one meet in order to ascend in spiritual rank?

The teaching is that a member must strive earnestly to

20. On the distinction between position and status, see above, n. 6.

accomplish the “three steps” (*Naigai jihō* 1969b, p. 8). By “three steps” is meant “helping (or leading) others, service, and joy.” Concretely, this means winning new members, participating in volunteer activities, and donating money. Thus even though it is maintained that all have an equal chance to become a medium, one of the basic requirements is that one must be a zealously active member.

In addition, the decisions as to members’ advancement in spiritual rank are made by a special continuing body, the *sōshōeza* or “promotion determining group,” which only those who have completed a prescribed set of activities are permitted to attend. At the meetings of this body, the top-ranking mediums give spiritual guidance to the participants, and those who impress them as qualified are selected for advancement in spiritual rank. Then the names of those assigned to each rank are printed in the organization’s publication.<sup>21</sup>

In light of these considerations, it might seem possible to understand the status of medium as a reward bestowed on members for contributions to the organization. In fact, however, there are two other statuses that appear to have been instituted as ways of rewarding people. One is what Shinnyo-en calls “the upper ranks” (occupied by people who have led others to join the group and stand as their “parents of the way” and the like), the other that of *fukyōshi* or “missionary.”<sup>22</sup> In principle, the selecting of people for one or the other of these statuses is heavily influenced

21. The names of those in the Mahayana rank are not published. The reason given is that members attaining this rank each month are too numerous to publish.
22. In Shinnyo-en a school for the training of missionaries has been developed, and lectures are given on Shinnyo-en doctrine, history, and missionary methods. Members allowed to enter this school take three years to complete the prescribed course of study. At the end of that time, they are granted some kind of missionary status, depending on their test results, success in mission work, academic career, social standing, and the like. The system of missionary ranks is called *sōkai* or “stages in Buddhist discipleship.”

by their activity record. In contrast, in the selecting of people for the various spiritual ranks, Shinnyo-en teaches that though the activities record is important, in the final analysis everything depends on the evaluation the mediums make during spiritual guidance sessions. For this reason it sometimes happens, they say, that some people, no matter how assiduous in performing the "three steps," never make it, whereas others of whom it was never expected do become mediums. According to Shinnyo-en, all is left to "the discretion of the spirit world" which has depths that human knowledge cannot plumb.

Since attainment of each spiritual rank is by the decision of mediums engaged in spiritual guidance, a mystical measure, the status of medium as the supreme status in the system of spiritual ranks appears to be the one status in the entire system that has been "mysticized" and to which religious authority attaches.<sup>23</sup>

*The legitimacy of the medium.* A member who becomes a medium is said to possess "the capacity for spiritual leadership" or "spiritual power." With regard to this spiritual power, Shinnyo-en sets forth the following exposition:

(1) Divine power (spiritual power) is accessible to all (*Naigai jihō* 1969a, p. 8). (2) The divine power with which the medium is equipped refers to the six divine powers Gautama expounded: the miraculous power to see things invisible to the physical eye, the miraculous power to hear things inaudible to the physical ear, the power to see into others' hearts at will, the power to comprehend the past at will, the power to fly to different realms at will, and the miraculous power to terminate and consume defiling attachments. During spiritual guidance, each of these

23. With regard to mystical rank and its effects, Duncan indicates that "everything that augments class rank and mystic quality and makes them more attractive also promotes the dignity and solemnity of one's vocational position and status" (Duncan 1974, p. 120, retranslated from Japanese).

powers comes into play as needed, awakening people (those who receive spiritual guidance) from their delusions and leading them to nirvana or enlightenment (*Naigai jihō* 1967, p. 12).

From these two expository statements it is clear that the spiritual power Shinnyo-en mediums are said to possess is identical with the six divine powers taught in Buddhism in the past.

In addition, Shinnyo-en mediums incorporate the spiritual power deriving from the divinatory skills handed down to Itō Shinjō and the spiritual power Itō Tomoji received through her grandmother and aunt.<sup>24</sup> Because they have such an illustrious lineage, Shinnyo-en mediums are presented to members as altogether different from “shamanistic mediums who can work wonders, but have no foundation in truth” (Itō 1974, p. 146).

This set of teachings about the mediums clearly serves to attest their legitimacy. Moreover, it emphasizes that Shinnyo-en mediums, as opposed to the magico-religious professionals one finds in the cities, are people who possess authority.<sup>25</sup>

The mystical method of selecting people for advancement in spiritual rank and this legitimization of the medium’s function, in combination, serve to exhibit repeatedly to members the status of the medium.

How, then, does a medium obtain this legitimate spiri-

24. In Shinnyo-en, the spiritual power transmitted to Itō Shinjō is called “spiritual power in the heavenly spirit line,” and that transmitted to Itō Tomoji “spiritual power in the earthly spirit line.” Its mediums belong to one or the other of these two lines, but Shinnyo-en holds that this makes no difference in respect of what they actually do.
25. As indicated, in the Shinnyo-en of the present day it is emphasized that its mediums are quite different from magico-religious professionals. In the 1957 edition of *Ichinyo no michi* [The way of the Buddha], however, one medium wrote, “I too am a spiritualist. I often receive messages from the spirit world and am led to understand what they really mean” (Itō 1957, p. 275). From this it appears that in the Shinnyo-en of that day there was no particular emphasis on a distinction between the two.



tual power?

Shinnyo-en maintains that spiritual power is not something one suddenly acquires on becoming a medium. By the same token, it also maintains that even members who are not mediums may, on occasion, be granted miraculous spiritual power.

Nevertheless, members selected to become mediums receive, after selection, twelve to eighteen months of instruction so as to be enabled to carry out spiritual guidance. This training reportedly takes place in special assemblies attended only by mediums. Here new mediums receive spiritual guidance. According to one of the mediums interviewed, as one participates in these sessions time after time, spiritual utterances begin to come naturally to expression, and when this happens, the preceptors give all kinds of advice. He further says that training is also given so that there will be a certain uniformity in the "clairvoyance, bodily expressions, and inspiration" that provide the occasion for spiritual utterances. Precisely because they receive training of this kind, the words they speak and the actions they perform while in the trance state tend to follow fixed patterns.

To put it more precisely, members selected by top-ranking mediums to become mediums themselves are still something less than mediums at the time of their selection. They become mediums only by going through this period of instruction and through learning, in spiritual guidance sessions, what forms of behavior to adopt. In other words, only on completion of the course of training in how to act as a medium can they be recognized as mediums in Shinnyo-en.

*The organizational character of the medium.* Those who thus become mediums "can enter the trance state only in places sanctified by the founder." In principle there is a limitation, then, on where they can manifest spiritual power. In fact, however, one comes across situations where the

spiritual power allegedly possessed by a medium “goes to work” in her or his daily life.<sup>26</sup> With regard to this spiritual power’s going into action outside the sanctified places, the Shinnyo-en interpretation is that this signifies not a deviation from the doctrinal restriction noted above, but a way in which such power naturally manifests itself in order to guide and help people. But if spiritual power thus manifests itself outside the prescribed locations, this suggests that mediums can act as mediums at any time.

Furthermore, one of the requirements that must be met in order to establish a new branch is that a medium must have come out of the same district. This stance on the part of Shinnyo-en, in view of the example of the early Reiyūkai, has to be assessed as one that involves a large element of risk.<sup>27</sup>

In reality, however, Shinnyo-en is so organized as to make this risk a diffuse one, if not to eliminate it altogether. In the first place, as indicated in the previously cited words,

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26. Thus on the very first occasion that I interviewed one medium, she asked me if I suffered from heart disease. I denied this, but as we continued our conversation, I mentioned that I had been on tenterhooks for two or three days, wondering if she would grant me this interview. On hearing this she replied, “Now I see. For two or three days now my own heart has beat fast, and I’ve been feeling funny.” She interpreted this as a manifestation in her own experience of the anxiety I was going through over whether I would get to interview her. In other words, the bodily manifestations that were supposed to appear only when she was in a state of trance came to expression, she felt, in the course of her daily life.

27. Between 1930 and 1960, a number of organizations got their start by splitting off from Reiyūkai. As to the reason for these schisms, it has been indicated, first of all, that in the Reiyūkai of that period, people in positions of responsibility and rank-and-file members alike acted as kami-possessed mediums to foretell good and bad fortune, etc. For this reason, people of pronounced “shamanistic character” grew confident of their own abilities, and there arose a tendency to free themselves from the control of the organization (Oguchi et al. 1955, p. 219). It would seem, moreover, that the fragility of Reiyūkai’s vertical structure played a role. In any case, Reiyūkai is a vivid example of a religious body that failed to take its mediums into its organizational structure.

namely, that mediums “can enter the trance state only in places sanctified by the founder,” there are restraints imposed on the appearance of aberrant mediums and on arbitrary behavior by the mediums. For example, the selection of people by the “promotion determining group” mentioned above, though left to the discretion of the top-ranking mediums, in effect functions as a checkpoint where candidates who seem likely to jump the traces can be filtered out. Again, three times a month the mediums themselves receive spiritual guidance, mutually “refining their hearts” and “striving to keep their hearts from defilement.” In a word, training in the norms of the organization is steadily carried out. From these two examples one can readily see that such restraints do in fact exist.

In the second place, for mediums to rest content with their status is made organizationally unfeasible. Thus, for example, as may be inferred from this writer’s frequent use of the phrase “top-ranking mediums,” in addition to ranks among followers (spiritual ranks, stages of discipleship, and upper ranks), there are ranks among mediums.<sup>28</sup> In principle, to occupy the top rank in one status system by no means guarantees a top position in another. Thus even after becoming a medium, there is room for advancement, and people are urged to strive for the next goal. In connection with this second point there is a paradoxical supporting doctrine, namely, that “it is precisely because of our deep-rooted karmic burdens that the Buddha, imposing arduous disciplines on us, has made us into mediums.”

28. The top rank among Shinnyo-en mediums is that occupied by the founder. Next come the members of the founder’s family. Beneath them mediums are ranged in order of the kinds of spiritual guidance they are qualified to give. At the top rank are those qualified for *kantei sesshin*, then those qualified for *sōdan sesshin*, thirdly those qualified for *kōjō sōdan sesshin*, and finally those qualified for *kōjō sesshin*. (On the meanings of these terms, see above, n. 13.)

In the third place, despite their activities, mediums are not openly made objects of appreciation. For example, in giving testimonies as to their experiences, members rarely express gratitude to the mediums who gave them spiritual guidance and were presumably indispensable to their salvation. Expressions of gratitude for salvation through spiritual guidance are almost invariably offered to the Buddha, to the members of the founder's family who dwell in the spirit world, or to the founder himself. In connection with this third point there is also a supporting doctrine, namely, "rely not on human beings but on the law," that is, put your trust not in people (in this case, mediums) but in the cosmic principle of Buddhism.

Taken together, these conditions have the effect, as mentioned, of diffusing the risk. Also, in connection with the second and third points, a metaphorical expression should be noted, namely, that "the founder has polished every facet, the medium only one." In other words, the mediums can never surpass the founder. Moreover, they pursue the goal of nirvana or enlightenment taught by Shinnyo-en and are expected to press on with interminable spiritual disciplines.

In these respects the mediums of Shinnyo-en have, in effect, an organizational character. For the present at least, heretical mediums, those with "defiled hearts," apparently constitute no problem.

#### CONCLUSION

In the context of the new religious bodies of Japan, this inquiry has focused on the mediums of one particular body, Shinnyo-en, and sought to determine what kind of beings they are. To assume that research on the mediums of one group alone can lead to an explanation of the mediums in all groups is of course impossible. Much remains to be done.

With regard to the mediums of Shinnyo-en, it was found

that from the perspective of doctrine their *primary* role was to communicate utterances from the spirit world in spiritual guidance sessions. It was also found that they performed a *secondary* role as educators and directors. Through face-to-face contacts the mediums bring about an internalization of doctrine in the group's members, and this in turn strengthens the cohesiveness of the entire organization. In this sense they can be regarded as change agents.<sup>29</sup> These change agents, because they themselves are shaped by various kinds of doctrinal and institutional conditions and act accordingly within the organization, are distinguished by their organizational character and also by the way they bind the attitudes of members to the religious body.

29. The term "change agent" was first employed in a laboratory experiment on small groups. Subsequently, it has been used by a number of scholars analyzing innovation diffusion. One of these scholars, E.M. Rogers, has defined the change agent as "a professional who influences innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency" (Rogers and Shoemaker 1971, p. 35). This paper, following Rogers, defines the change agent as "a specialist who influences members' attitudes, guiding them in a direction deemed desirable by his or her change agency."

## GLOSSARY

<i>daijō</i> 大乘	<i>makoto kiso gyō</i> まこと基礎行
<i>daikangī</i> 大歡喜	<i>musō sesshin</i> 無相接心
<i>enshu</i> 苑主	<i>nyūshin jōtai</i> 入神状態
<i>eza</i> 会座	<i>osegaki</i> 御施餓鬼
Fudō Myō'ō 不動明王	<i>reigen</i> 靈言
<i>goshinpō no ketsuju</i> 護身法の結誦	<i>reikanja</i> 靈感者
<i>hiro'oya</i> 祐祖	<i>reinō</i> 靈能
Itō Shinjō 伊藤真乘	<i>reinōsha</i> 靈能者
Itō Tomoji 伊藤友司	Reiyūkai 靈友会
<i>jōraku gajō</i> 常樂我淨	<i>ryōdōji sama</i> 両童子様
<i>kangī</i> 歡喜	<i>sesshin shugyō</i> 接心修行
<i>kantei sesshin</i> 鑑定接心	Shinnyo-en 真如苑
Kishinkai 希心会	<i>sōdan sesshin</i> 相談接心
<i>kōjō sesshin</i> 向上接心	<i>sōkai</i> 僧階
<i>kōjō sōdan sesshin</i> 向上相談接心	<i>sōshōeza</i> 相承会座
<i>kyōshu</i> 教主	<i>usō sesshin</i> 有相接心

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