

Magic and Morality in  
Modern Japanese Exorcistic Technologies  
— A Study of Mahikari —

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Observers of Japanese New Religions are much perplexed by the unanticipated resurgence, especially among the Neo-New Religions (*shinshinshūkyō* 新新宗教) such as Mahikari 真光 and Agonshū 阿含宗, of belief in spirits, the decline of which had long been predicted as an unavoidable sacrifice to modernization. Contrary to some social science theorists who maintain that rationality—the sine qua non of all processes by which societies transcend primitive or feudal institutions—is antithetical to spiritism, what we see in Japan today suggests the very opposite. Rather than an archaic cognitive anomaly, contemporary spirit-belief might better be understood as an expanded rationality with its own modality of logic. Spiritism is not simply compatible with modernity but is also capable of enhancing the meaning of life in Japan's highly urbanized and industrialized society where often a sense of disconnectedness prevails that no dose of pure, scientific, or empirical reason appears able to cure.

Not only disinterested specialists but also those who actively preserve Japan's elite or established religions (*kisei shūkyō* 既成宗教), which, at least in principle if not in practice, have traditionally been antagonistic to spirit belief, are puzzled by its revival. Their consternation is articulated by SASAKI Shōten, a Jōdo Shinshū theologian, who laments that

we, who had been looking down on the new religions as pre-

modern, even primitive, and have made great efforts to show that our Buddhism can coexist with science, now are confronted with the idea that the true match for a scientific-technical world is spirit belief, the magical, pseudo-scientific, manipulative type of religion (SASAKI 1988, p. 32).

Elite religion, as Sasaki notes, has in the modern era aligned itself with elite culture by reasserting the intrinsic rationality of Buddhist theories of causality, without, it should be added, discarding the necessity of faith in the absolute efficacy of savior deities such as Amida whose compassion resolves the apparent contradictions of life. Nonetheless, traditional salvation religions, just as modern rationalism, appear to be ineffective in counteracting the trend in popular culture and religion toward belief in spirits, precisely because of their simplicity. Such spirits are increasingly regarded as a wrongly neglected link in the chain of cause and effect, and to recognize their existence seems to more satisfactorily interpret the complex world of today that the creative forces originally released by rationalism generated but no longer fully explain.

What follows below is not concerned with establishing whether or not spirits exist as scientific fact, but rather to explore the logic of, and the meaning derived from, the beliefs of individuals who have joined New Religions that regard their reality as indisputable. First, I will briefly draw attention to what current research has to say in connection with the revitalization of spirit belief. To sort this complex data out, I will differentiate, as H. BYRON EARHART has done in his most recent study of a Japanese New Religion (1989), between enabling and precipitating factors. However, as I am convinced that socio-historical forces alone cannot account for the reemergence of spirit belief, I will introduce the exorcistic ritual of Mahikari as an instance of innovation in Japanese spiritism that can, as such, be considered paradigmatic of a whole cluster of contemporary New Religions. Finally, in view of the fact that modern forms of spirit belief are an explicit challenge not only to modernity itself and to traditional Japanese salvation religions but also to Christianity, I offer some reflections on how the spiritism exemplified by Mahikari has universalistic aspects embedded in its Japanese particularity that have elicited a vigorous if not yet massive response from abroad.

*Mean Streets, Malevolent Spirits*

What enables spirit belief to emerge in present-day Japan in the first place? For, as far as the wider society is concerned, spiritism is unorthodox, an offense against reason, and a return to pre-modern thought.

The at-hand answer is that its antecedents are the worship of household divinities, the ancestors (*senzo* 先祖), and the pacification of wandering and angry spirits (*muenbotoke* 無縁仏, *onryō* 怨霊) that has characterized the totality of Japanese religion (with the possible exception of Christianity) in varying degrees at all levels of popular and elite religion from the earliest times until the beginning of modernization. Although transformed in a manner that shall be noted later, current spirit-belief arises out of this vast reservoir. The situation today, though, is less like the run-off of ages past than the overflow from a dam that has been stopped up too long.

This matrix of spiritism was a necessary precondition for the re-appearance of similar beliefs in modern society, but what precipitated their reawakening from a period of relative dormancy, considering the primacy of rationalism in Japan's furious pace of modern nation-building dating from the second half of the nineteenth century?

With the onset of modernization, the social cohesion of village communities broke down when the solidarity of individual households was weakened by the departure of second and third sons as emigrés to cities where the infrastructure of the newly industrialized, market-based economy of Japan was being developed. In rebellion against the anonymity of urbanized life and to counteract the arbitrary groupings of unrelated peoples whose interaction was mainly governed by competitive commercial instincts, utilitarian and communitarian religious movements emerged that promised to restore the communal support and solidarity of the old rural social order, albeit in the changed context of the city.

Chronologically, however, the first New Religions arose in the first half of the nineteenth century, before modernization, in village environments where one would assume that spirit belief was most deeply rooted. In point of fact, rural-based movements such as Tenrikyō 天理教 and Konkōkyō 金光教, which have never enjoyed a substantial urban following, were centered on parent-deities (*oyagami* 親神), which, though they did not deny the existence of ancestral

and other spirits, relegated them to a position of relative unimportance.

Beginning with the Meiji era, however, and with heightened intensity in the Taishō and early Shōwa eras, by which time the most dramatic aspects of demographic change in Japan were largely complete, such urban New Religions as Oomotokyō 大本教, Seichō no Ie 生長の家, and Reiyūkai 霊友会 had out paced older village-based rivals. Symptomatic of these newer urban movements was a renewed conviction that spirits exist, not merely benign ancestral spirits but also spirits so malevolent that even the benevolent parent-gods of rural Japan seemed weak in comparison.

Why, then, did this trend toward spiritism occur in tandem with the process of modernization? In his analysis of spirit belief in modern Japanese urban society, SHIMAZONO Susumu (1987) has traced this phenomenon to a number of factors, among which only a few can be mentioned here.

According to Shimazono, if spirits are factored into the environment as but one among many causal elements that can be organized, dominated, and manipulated, they can then complement, without competing with, the technological-manipulative frame of mind that scientific reasoning and rationalistic education foster. Belief in savior or parent-deities, on the contrary, cannot key into this modern attitude, because of its tendency toward uncausality, or the conviction that the will of God determines all the seemingly contradictory phenomena of life. The implication here is that the individual ego is not negated in spiritism, as it tends to be in traditional salvation religions and village-based New Religions. On the contrary, the I-Thou relationship with God, although present in spirit-belief, is less restrictive. There the ego is free to give full play to its powers of experiential and inductive logic to construct meaning in apparently happenstance situations without the necessity of introducing a compassionate God as *deus ex machina* (SHIMAZONO 1987, pp. 96-97).

Shimazono further argues that urban life, unlike rural life—at least as it used to be before modernization—is never static; it demands a constant input of new configurations of knowledge to keep abreast of change. But without the psychological backup of the traditional household religion, the pressure-cooker atmosphere of cities becomes nerve-wracking. There has consequently been an increased vulnerability among relocated branch-families in urban settings to fear of disturbances caused by spirits. Such spirits are

meaner and more malicious relative to the perceived threat in the surrounding environment.

But to live with a sense of resigned arbitrariness, that all is determined by chance or necessity (fate), is alien to the contemporary belief in spirits, just as it is to modern rationalism. Spiritism today functions in an urban environment more complex and uncertain than was envisioned by traditional salvation religions or pre-modernization New Religions. Yet it does empower individuals to live with more certitude, precisely because its expanded vision of rationality, which includes hidden factors of causality (spirits), does not deny the basic validity of natural or empirical chains of cause and effect.

The perceived inadequacy of rationalism is not that it fails to explain how events occur but rather that it abstains from saying why. Medical science, for instance, teaches that germs or bacteria cause illness, but according to the etiology of illness as understood by spiritism, people become sick because they ingest illness-causing agents at the behest of spirits. Spirit belief thus draws a tighter net of causality around the experience of what the world-at-large calls misfortune or plain bad luck.

There can be no question, however, but that involvement with malevolent spirits, especially those that inhabit this world, is regarded by the public-at-large as deviant behavior, even by many who continue to believe in the presence of ancestors who are near at hand. This bias, too, derives from modernization; it is not just a feeling, as I have often heard Japanese put it, that talk of spirits is “creepy” (*kimochi ga warui*). As Shimazono notes,

When rationalism seeps down to the masses, it carries with it the ascetical ideal of hard work and frugality. In order to survive within the mercantile economy of capitalism, one needs to succumb to the ascetical ethos, systematizing the things of life and investing energy in highly efficient economic activities. The ascetical ethos . . . rejects the expenditure of energies on sentimental behavior and emotional satisfaction. Things like belief in spirits are dispensed with as literally worthless. By the 1970s, however, the booming Japanese economy reached a critical transition point, marked by a decline in the “ascetical ethos”, that is, a tendency toward less preoccupation with production and more willingness to attribute value to introspective, emotional, or non-rational activities (SHIMAZONO 1987, p. 98).

This survey of trends favoring the reemergence of spiritism in contemporary Japan would be incomplete without alluding to the rebellion against modern rationality itself that is symptomatic of a wider circumference of Japanese society than is circumscribed by the Neo-New Religions alone. Reaction against modernization and its costs, pollution and environmental abuse, is gaining momentum among those who wish for a return to more natural life-styles. A not insignificant aspect of this back-to-nature boom is increased interest in holistic healing methods, triggered by dissatisfaction with Western medical science, especially the over-prescribing of medicine and impersonal patient-care systems in urban hospitals.

### *The Divine Magician-Physician*

The above observations have outlined how spirit-belief has not only been preserved in modern Japan but also transformed so that nowadays it dovetails neatly with the demands of urban life and even reinforces the values of industrial society. What has not yet been pinpointed precisely is the innovation in *tekhne*, skill, that sets as its objective the manipulation of means to exert control over the hidden spirits believed to be external to the self, for only a development in this connection could continue to fuel the resurgence of spiritism. As an instance of a significantly new spiritual technology, the exorcistic ritual of Mahikari called *mahikari no waza* 真光の業 (the Mahikari technique), or, more simply, *okiyome* お清め (purification) will be discussed below.<sup>1</sup>

Mahikari's institutional history spans no more than three decades, but its prototype, "world-renewal" religion (世直し宗教 *yonaoshi-shūkyō*), appeared first in the late nineteenth century with the advent of Oomoto (The Great Foundation). Originally, Oomoto pivoted around a parent-like divinity, Ushitora no Konjin 良ノ金神. He was believed to have returned to this world after aeons of enforced exile, having been overthrown by the collective power of lesser deities, under whose slack administration the world had declined into chaos.

Deguchi Nao 出口 直 (1837–1918), the foundress of Oomoto, saw evidence of the world's need of renewal mainly in the socio-political upheavals brought on by Japan's rapid industrialization. This radical

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of Mahikari ritualistic behavior in relation to secular technological processes, see MIYANAGA 1985.

emphasis was muted when her successor, Deguchi Onisaburō 出口 王仁三郎 (1871–1948), affirmed modernization and instead found proof of impending world catastrophe in an alleged upsurge of cases of spirit possession. Onisaburō revived the ancient mediumistic practice of *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神 (pacification of spirits–return to divinity), a ritual whereby individuals were exorcised of evil spirits which were then transformed into guardian spirits (守護霊 *shugorei*).

In one form or another, the world-renewal motif of the eclipse and return of the good god, combined with an exorcistic technique to dispel evil influences, characterizes the entire cluster of New Religions descended from Oomoto (e.g., Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教 [World Messianity] and Byakkō 白光 [White Light], including its most recent offshoot, Mahikari.<sup>2</sup>

The origin of Mahikari dates to 1959 when its founder, Okada Kōtama 岡田光玉 (1901–1974), according to his own account, was awakened from his sleep at five in the morning and inspired with a revelation from the Revered-Parent Origin-Lord True-Light Great God (Mioya Motosu Mahikari no Ō-kami 御親元主真光大神), who, like other world-renewal deities, had returned to this world after a time of withdrawal. Su-God, as his elegant name is abbreviated, who is a deity of yang-like 陽 attributes, austere, righteous, strict, and whose essence is fire 火 announced to Okada that he would no longer tolerate a world maladministered by inferior deities of yin-like 陰 attributes, sensual, apathetic, and lenient, whose essence is water 水. The priority of Su-God, as a deity of fire and light 光 (*hikari*) and preeminently of the sun 日 (*hi*), is to cleanse the world of the evil spirits that lesser deities could not constrain, and to purge the human body of defilement (*daku-doku* 濁毒, lit. “dirt and poison”) especially the toxins and wastes produced by modernization (pollutants, medicines, and chemical leftovers of processed foods) that result in illness and unnatural death.

Having chosen Okada to be the savior (救い主 *sukuinushi*), Su-God, the True God of Light (whence the organizational name, Mahikari [True Light], is derived), declared his intention of bathing the world in a Baptism of Fire (*hi no senrei* 火の洗礼), a healing light for the seed-people (*tanebito* 種人) who respond to it, but a burning and

<sup>2</sup> Although there are two Mahikari, Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan 世界真光文明教団 (Church of the World True-Light Civilization) and Sūkyō Mahikari 崇教真光 (True-Light Supra-Religious Organization), I do not differentiate between them, as the division mainly results from a successional dispute.

destructive light to those who hide themselves from it. If the imbalance between good and evil in the world cannot be corrected, Su-God will incinerate the world. 2000 A.D. is said to be the deadline, and, if not fulfilled, will provide scholars with interesting material for further study of what happens to sectarian societies when prophecy fails.

Out of this summary of Mahikari's mythological, messianic, and millennialist structure, the component to be isolated for more extensive analysis below is the diffusion of a curative divine-light, especially insofar as it has been ritualized into an exorcistic ceremony.

Aside from Su-God himself as the original source, True Light is emitted from his throne on earth, the shrine called Suza 主座,<sup>3</sup> and from the scroll inscribed with the characters "True Light" that hangs over the altar in every Mahikari practice hall (*dōjō* 道場), and from an amulet (*omitama* お御玉) worn by members (the efficacy, or thickness of the rays of this light is in descending order of listing). The world is said to be constantly flooded in True Light, but the practice hall is where its power is primarily put into effect as the purification ritual is enacted, during which an intricately standardized procedure is carried out. Members sign an attendance register on arrival at the practice hall, write a wish (generally accompanied by a donation), offer a prayer to Su-God, bow and clap in several sequences, greet other believers, pair off, intone another prayer, the Prayer of Heaven (*amatsunorigoto* 天津祈言), in classical Japanese with Shintoesque diction. Only then do they commence to purify one another with True Light, one person at a time in alternating active-passive roles. Considered to be the focal point of True Light, the palm of the hand is directed at the partner's forehead, behind which the primary soul (*shukkon* 主根) is said to be located. Possessing spirits are thought to reside here, and the purification ritual invariably begins with a ten-minute exorcistic phase, followed by thirty minutes or more of irradiating the body at various vital points to heal a variety of ills, from stiff shoulders to malignant tumors.

Of principle interest here is the exorcistic phase of purification. Insofar as recruitment is concerned, Mahikari promises quick and

<sup>3</sup> There are two rival claimants, administered by the two Mahikari respectively: one in Takayama, Gifu Prefecture, and the other in the Izu Peninsula, Shizuoka Prefecture.



miraculous healing, and recovery of health is a primary motivation of most first-time visitors to the practice hall. But health is a commonplace this-worldly benefit (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) of many New Religions, and to follow this further would be to digress. The Savior was quite explicit that evil spirits can be held accountable for about eighty percent of humanity's misfortunes, and it is therefore to the question of how spirits are purified that attention will be directed.

"I am the Divine Magician," Su-God declared to the Savior in one revelation (15/8/1961), and, in another, "human beings can become magicians," too (15/10/1960; OKADA 1982, pp. 129, 105). The source of this empowerment is the amulet, or *omitama*, which recruits receive after a mandatory three-day training course. How the amulet is thought to function is a matter of considerable dispute among scholars, but to *kamikumite* 神組手 (lit. "they who walk hand in hand with each other and God"), as Mahikarians are called, it encircles the wearer in protective light. Its energy has no half-life; unlike a battery, it never dies out. Even if the amulet lies disused on a shelf, it has a residual power, although senior members claim that frequent usage by a devout believer will enhance its effectiveness (i.e., the thickness of its rays). Unless it is defiled (e.g., dropped in dirt or water or stepped on), the *omitama* will accompany a *kamikumite* into the afterlife, for it is now customary for the amulet to be cremated with a deceased member. The magic of Mahikari, in short, is that the amulet requires neither belief nor faith to be activated. The "Try it and see" advice of *kamikumite* to newcomers is not just pragmatic (or scientific as Mahikari would have it) but symptomatic of the manipulative art or technique of the magician.

The amulet is thus a shield against harmful influences from the outside, but spirits already residing in one's body can only be dislodged by undergoing the exorcism ritual called *okiyome*, or purification, the invariable format of which runs as follows: The preliminaries described earlier (prayer, etc.) having been completed, the active performer raises a palm over the forehead of the partner in the passive role, discharging True Light (originating either from the altar scroll if the pair are sitting in the practice hall or from the amulet itself if elsewhere). When the primary soul is being cleansed, the passive participant may begin to sway from side to side. A defensive response to True Light called spirit-movement (*reidō* 靈動) is considered proof of possession.

Insofar as Mahikari is concerned, possession is an induced or

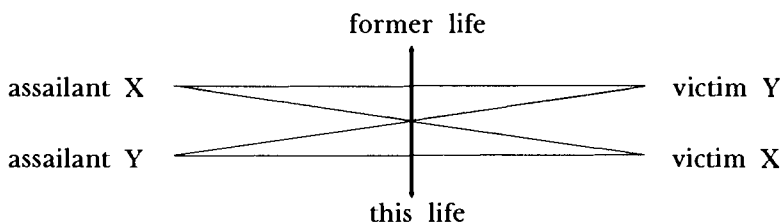
learned behavior. That is to say, it occurs only inside the practice hall, and few kamikumite exhibit abnormality in workday life before participation in the exorcism ritual. The experience of possession is lucid; members are conscious throughout and remember afterwards what happened. Although kamikumite often speak of “hair-raising” first-visit spirit-movements, in most cases these begin to surface only after an individual has been in the practice hall three months or more—ample time to observe and master the required routine.

Spirits that become manifest during purification are liminal. They are malevolent and therefore dangerous, but they are not absolutely evil either (deities, it should added, do not possess). They belong neither to this world nor to the after-world. Their proper place is the astral world (*reikai* 霊界) where they await a rebirth to be determined according to their merits by the tutelary deities of Su-God. It is characteristic of Japanese spirit-lore in general and of Mahikari as well, that aggrieved spirits who hold grudges against the living, or who are hungry and cold without the warmth of human flesh, are believed to roam the world of the living in search of appropriate victims. The difference is that Mahikari links the alleged increase in the number of such spirits to the disruption of natural lifestyles due to modernization.

Possession is not, however, an arbitrary misfortune; there is always an explanation based on cause and effect logic—no matter how forced, eccentric, and irrational it may seem to non-believers. The original *casus belli* is reconstructed as follows: When the spirit movements of a kamikumite become pronounced, a staff member trained to perform spirit investigation (*reisa* 霊査) interrogates the manifesting spirit (who speaks or gestures with the mouth or body of the passive participant) and from its responses pieces together a diagnosis, a process that may take months or even longer. Admonition (*osatoshi* お諭し) is an essential element of the ritual, for the spirit must be told to return to the astral world because to torment the living will only make its destiny worse. Each session is concluded with the command “*Oshizumari!*” (Peace! Be still!).

The originality of Mahikari is mainly its radical re-identification of who the real victims and assailants in an instance of possession are, as they are unmasked during the purification ritual. Possession is indeed a crisis, but the word “possession”, which is suggestive of intent to harm, is problematic in the context of Mahikari. Following the analysis of MIYANAGA Kuniko (1983), a pattern that can be found

almost invariably in accounts of spirit-investigations is that the victim of possession in this life was the assailant of the aggrieved spirit in a previous life. To redress this wrong, the victim in the past becomes the assailant in the present. The exchange of roles can be diagrammed thus:



“The assailant,” as Miyanaga puts it, “has to experience the misery of the victim by himself being victimized by his original victim” (1983, p. 222). In this light—True Light, as it were—possession is to be understood less as punishment than as a plea for the redress of a wrong. What appears, then, to be a crisis is actually the initiation of reconciliation.

Possessing spirits are generally resentful spirits, less often ancestors, and only rarely animal-spirits. To illustrate this process, the third-person testimonial (*taiken* 体験) of a kamikumite will be narrated below, primarily because of its brevity, even though it concerns the spirit of an animal. Entitled “Miss Doggie’s Story,” it runs as follows:

A middle-aged woman, the mother of two children, visited a [Mahikari] center for consultation because her husband began to have an affair with another woman three months earlier. Immediately she was given a purification ritual. Her possessing spirit was identified as a female dog she had kept in her family for seven years.

Under spirit investigation, [the spirit of the dog said:] “When I was kept in her house, she threw water over my men [male dogs] and blocked me from fulfilling my natural desire to preserve my bloodline. She even locked me up inside the house, so I barked and bit around in vain to let her know I wanted intercourse which I understood was my right given by the divinity. But, she was totally oblivious to my communication. After all I had to leave this present world for the astral world [i.e., died], because of too much frustration. As my resentment remained as strong as before, I possessed her body for revenge. I also drove her good husband to go to another woman to let her know the

importance of compassion and harmony. However, she did not reflect on her own misdeed but wished to get her husband back. She is too selfish. Please, make her know that even a dog has this much [sense]." This was an opinion that Miss Doggie stated with a sad and annoyed expression.

[In giving admonition, the teacher says:]

Your agony is the result of your own defilement. Do understand it and try to be engaged in spiritual discipline and ask for a divine pardon. Furthermore, do not forget about the kindness given by your mistress for seven years. Go back to the astral world.

[The problem was resolved, the woman's husband returned, and the story ends with a moral:]

This story tells us that we must have compassion and sincerity for all the living beings and spirits (MIYANAGA 1983, pp. 216ff.).

Possession in the Mahikari context is usually homeopathic and frequently concerned with sexual karma (*shikijō-innen* 色情因縁). As the above testimonial indicates, Miss Doggie, resentful of being constrained while in heat, reciprocates by denying her master the normal sexual relations she had enjoyed with her husband, who begins to chase other women. The sequence of role-exchange is exactly as diagrammed above: The victim (Miss Doggie) resents the assailant (her master), and after death possesses the assailant, who in turn becomes the victim. Reconciliation is achieved through spirit-investigation, and knowing what originally went wrong—no matter how outrageous it may seem—results in mutual compassion. Their bondage to one another is thereby terminated, the dog-spirit returns to the astral world, and husband to wife. "The real magic of the [exorcism ritual]", as Winston DAVIS observes, "lies in the fact that some people emerge from the experience in greater control of their lives, and with their health restored" (1980, p. 153).

It has already been observed above that evil is not understood in Mahikari to be absolute. Possessing spirits are not intrinsically demonic; their salvation is also the salvation of the kamikumite. In the overall monistic structure of world-renewal religion, there is no room for a rigid dichotomy between good and evil, even where Su-God himself is concerned, for he is the totality of yang (strict) and yin (lenient) tutelary deities and human spirits (*wakemitama* 分御霊, divided spirits), who in the process of creation were refracted from his originally unitary essence. World-renewal deities, beginning with Oomoto's Ushitora no Konjin, have all undergone a process

of self-discipline (*shūgyō* 修業), to refine themselves or, as it is often said, polish their souls, so that they become even better at being gods. They are not less than divine for having had to do so, for the critical quality is their capacity for readjustment. Cosmic imbalances can and do occur—the present age is one such instance. Likewise, the emphasis in Mahikari is on renewal through harmonization, not punitive retribution.

If divine beings occasionally stand in need of self-correction, so much more so do the children of God (*kami no ko* 神の子), as their human offspring are called in the idiom of world-renewal religion. The process of moral reformation usually commences before an individual becomes a kamikumite, when the onset of crisis (prolonged illness, cold human relations, business difficulties, etc.) is sensed. Most first-time visitors to the practice hall arrive in a state of anxiety, having experienced an impasse in life and hoping for a breakthrough. Once the individual has been recruited, trained, and given okiyome, the experience of spirit-seizure almost comes as a relief, for it signifies that the crisis is beginning to be resolved.

Symptomatic of crisis-resolution by spirit-investigation, is that neither party, the possessing spirit or its victim-in-this-life, demands repentance (*zange* 懺悔) of the other. Despite the often terrifying stories that circulate in Mahikari, what spirits require is that their victims own up to their mistakes. Genuine malicious intent is rare, if not unknown. Exorcism reveals wrongs that have been committed almost invariably out of ignorance, as in the case of the woman who did what any sensible pet-owner should do—restrain her dog from breeding indiscriminately. Saving knowledge is thus a new awareness of mistakes that could have been avoided, if one had only known better (MIYANAGA 1983, p. 251). What kamikumite learn from their experience of exorcism becomes the basis of their operational, day-to-day morality, and to hear them speak of a newfound concern with altruistic love (*rita-ai* 利他愛) as a result of their purification is not uncommon.

Once kamikumite have become sensitized to the reality of the spirit-world, they remain wary of further signs of disturbance. It is imperative, however, that seizures decrease in frequency and intensity after the loose ends of an investigation have been tied together, otherwise the power of Su-God could be called into question. Repeated possessions are therefore rare. But precisely why the ritual is therapeutic is problematic in the extreme, and the symbolic

projection of repressed guilt has been one line of interpretation provocatively discussed by Winston DAVIS (1980, pp. 115-60).

Externalization of nearly all life's problems is indeed distinctive of Mahikari (and of much of world-renewal religion in general) and differentiates it from heart-renewal religions (*kokoro-naoshi shūkyō* 心直し宗教) such as Rishō Kōseikai 立正佼成会 which internalize difficulties encountered in the outside world. Whether despite or because of the exorcism, numerous kamikumite among the many I have known claim to have been subjectively renewed, if not always absolutely healed in an objective, empirical, or scientific sense. I see no reason to dispute this, considering how little we know of the mind and how it functions. Nonetheless, the dropout rate among kamikumite is high, estimated at eighty percent, and remains high at all ranks, from fresh recruits to senior members, especially if a dilemma arises between trusting Su-God or modern medicine. As of yet, little is known about these dropouts, but many of them, as MIYANAGA suggests (1983, p. 254), must have difficulty overcoming the dread of spirits to which Mahikari has exposed them.

#### *The Last Opening of the Celestial Rock Door*

Religion in Japan has long been geared to the satisfaction of specific human needs and the fulfillment of personal wishes; if religion is to enhance this life, its benefits must be tangible, not delayed until the after-world. In modern urban society, this expectation has, if anything, been heightened. Deprived of the solidarity of the household system mentioned earlier, and often engaged in occupations that do not guarantee life-time employment, the clientele of New Religions seeks an instantaneous pay-off to its investment in religion in terms of this-worldly benefits—a pragmatic attitude the wider society finds only slightly less repugnant than spiritism itself. Mahikari's self-understanding vis-à-vis other established religions arises out of this general orientation: religions that do not deliver the required goods and services (better health, financial rewards, personal happiness, etc.) have outlived their usefulness.

It was noted above that modernity has induced in Mahikari a sense of imminent cataclysm, the Baptism of Fire, toward which the world is accelerating. To slow this headlong rush toward self-destruction so that humanity might develop the spirituality to avert catastrophe, Su-God established the great historical religions of the world,

which Mahikari calls brake-religions (*bureiki-shūkyō* ブレイキ宗教). The vitality these religions once had, however, is no longer available, for they have declined into mere teachings (*oshie* 教え) disinterested in salvific action against possessing spirits. Considering the danger to which these worn-out religions are exposing the world, Su-God elected Okada to be the savior by revealing to him the supra-religion (*sūkyō* 崇教) of True Light, a religion of action and not only talk, in comparison to which the established religions (in a word-play on the character “religion” [*shūkyō* 宗教]) are ugly teachings 醜教 and group-insanity 衆狂.

Critical as it is of the established religions, Mahikari sees itself as the agent of their renewal and not at all discontinuous with them. As such, the Mahikari attitude toward other religions is symptomatic of world-renewal religion as a whole and its myth of Su-God is but a variant of the withdrawal and return of the good god found in Oomoto, as mentioned earlier. All such world-renewal myths pivot around a motif originally derived from *Kojiki* 古事記, an early Japanese chronicle which includes the story of Amaterasu who hid within a cave in the High Plain of Heaven to protect herself from the impertinence of her brother Susano-ō and other kami. As she is the solar-deity, her withdrawal is naturally catastrophic, and her subsequent return is world-renewing.

In the modern revision of the *Kojiki* myth, to which has been added millennialist connotations, the present age is the final opportunity for humanity to open the Rock Door of Heaven (OKADA 1986b, p. 8). This act of emerging from hiding is expressed in a spatial metaphor as the coming of God from the rear (*ura*) to the fore (*omote*) of salvation history. God has, however, spoken fragmentarily during his absence through messengers, the founders of the world’s great religions. Paralleling the polarity between “front” and “rear” is therefore another pair of opposites: “revealed truth” and “concealed truth”. What has thus far been revealed in the existing religions has proved insufficient to brake the downward spiral of humanity, and now is the critical moment to “put on the throttle” in renewal of the world.

In the idiom specific to Mahikari, this is the era of unification of the five religions (*sūmei-godō* 崇盟五道 [Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity are implied]), which can be reinvigorated by the practice of exorcism and healing: “[Mahikari no waza] is the wondrous method to revive the Five Major Religions

and all other teachings” (OKADA 1986b, p. 12). It will be seen below that Mahikari does indeed actively engage Christians, among others, to practice the purification ritual as Christians. Orthodoxy in the overall structure of the Savior’s teachings was, however, a priority almost as high as orthopraxy, and Okada invested immense energy in unveiling what he considered to be the esoteric parts of other religions, Christianity in particular. Okada saw himself of the agent of its renewal in part because he believed he had had an intimate association with Jesus Christ in a former life—a not at all unprecedented claim in world-renewal religions (see YOUNG 1989a)—and that he was the Spirit of truth (*shinri no mitama* 真理の御霊) whose coming Jesus had prophesied (Jn. 15:26; OKADA 1986a, pp. 89–90). With this license, a nationalistic view of world history centered on Japan, and utilizing a discredited pseudo-scientific etymological art called *kotodama* 言霊 (lit. “word-spirit”), the arcane catalog of Okada’s “concealed truths” fills several Mahikari volumes. A prominent theme is that Moses and Jesus were Japanese-Jews (*nikkeijin* 日系人, lit. “Japanese descendants”) and that both died in Japan.

Insofar as public relations are concerned, Mahikari refers to the process of religious revitalization as a return to the origin (*moto-gaeri* 元帰り), Su-God, whereby the religions again become what they were intended to be when they began. The esoteric knowledge described above is largely kept by Mahikari to itself, and kamikumite are initiated into such matters mainly at the intermediate and advanced levels of training. Nonetheless, a smarter-than-thou attitude toward Christians and followers of other religions is pervasive. Moreover, if the public (*omote*) position is that Mahikari is helping religions recover their original efficacy, in private (*ura*) it teaches that the religions, as presently constituted, are beyond repair and that Christians and others ought to “jump ship” while they still can:

Those who have become awakened, start departing. Depart.

It is the time of Heaven when the karmic fate has come for religions to let men depart from religious denominations and sects to become ones of Supra-Religious Teachings as soon as possible (OKADA 1982, p. 148).

And while Mahikari emphasizes to recruits that Christians who practice the purification ritual can continue to affiliate with their churches, its prayerbook contains a spell to ward off missionaries (1986b, p. 19) and the following hymn in which a Christian might



well find reason to be disassociated from further church involvements:

It is a falsehood [*itsuwari*] to call oneself a disciple of Jesus without the spiritual training of saving others by exercising the Art of Spiritual Purification with True Light (OKADA 1986b, p. 139).

Insofar as my own experience of kamikumite goes—which, though extensive, is not yet a basis for generalization—no one of Christian background, once recruited, has stayed in the church for long afterwards. A breach is always effected, though my evidence points to the personal predilection of the individual as much as to admonition from Mahikari. As the following account indicates, the believer's experience of the exorcistic ritual is decisive:

Ms. Nakata used to go to a Protestant church. Although she thinks that the Savior, Okada, was greater than Jesus Christ, she continues to regard herself as a Christian. She likes to point out that when Jesus cast out evil spirits in the country of the Gerasenes (Luke 8:26–33), the spirits entered a herd of swine that went berserk and drowned themselves. Okada, on the other hand, was able to save not only the demoniacs, but the demons themselves (DAVIS 1980, p. 168).

*The True Jingle Bells of God are Ringing Far and Wide*

真の神来电鈴は鳴り渡る

[makoto no jinguru-beru wa nari-wataru]

The Savior was fond of the Christmas tune, “Jingle Bells,” and—with a play on its phonetic characters in Japanese: *jin* 神 (God), *guru* 来 (or *kuru*; coming), *beru* 電鈴 (bell)—it has become a metaphor of Mahikari's overseas missionary expansion. Evangelism in foreign parts is ardently encouraged, and in North and South America, the traditional fields of missionary endeavor by Japanese New Religions, Mahikari has made more rapid progress than, for instance, Nichiren Shōshū 日蓮正宗, in enlisting recruits from outside of Japanese immigrant communities. Under the leadership of a Latvian-born kamikumite, Andris Tebēcis (b. 1943; see TEBĒCIS 1982), Mahikari's advances in Australia and New Zealand have been carefully consolidated. One hears of wholly unexpected routes of diffusion: under the new Soviet policy of glasnost, liberalized travel restrictions will permit a party of Latvians to undergo primary *kenshū* (training) in

Mahikari's Singapore practice hall in 1990 to be conducted by Tebēcis.

As is often the case with new religious movements world-wide, Mahikari in the West has been especially effective in recruiting disillusioned or disaffected Christians. But the Francophone nations of black Africa and the Caribbean, where a colonial syndrome is still prevalent, are the spheres of Mahikari's most spectacular progress. French, Swiss, and Belgian missionaries first introduced Mahikari to the Ivory Coast, the Congo, and Zaire, from which it spread to French Caribbean islands such as Martinique and Guadalupe where African slave-culture and spiritism continue to flourish (see HURBON 1980).

Even in the post-colonial context, the equilibrium of traditional culture is precarious, threatened both by modernity and the Christian monotheism of established, Western-educated elites. In these areas, Mahikari and its corollary, Japanization, is to a certain extent displacing Christianity and Westernization as a role-model. Those who see themselves as victims of colonial ideologies, who in private adhere to the beliefs and practices of African primal religions but in public profess abhorrence of them in order to secure educational and occupational privileges, are now enabled to find in Mahikari an alternative legitimation of indigenous ways. Associated abroad with the immense prestige of Japanese economic power, Mahikari reinforces the values of technological society toward which developing nations aspire at the same time that it preserves and transforms pre-modern spiritism. In short, as Laënnec HURBON (1986, p. 158) says:

Mahikari is a way of renewing links with the traditional heritage;  
but at the same time it is an instrument for criticizing modernity,  
and it can rid the individual of his inferiority complexes.

Over the past several years, I have collected a number of testimonies and life-histories from African kamikumite in Tokyo, from which the following has been selected (and abbreviated) in order to exemplify the pattern of meaning such individuals find in Mahikari:

Jean, a Congolese in his mid-30s, studied at the Sorbonne and recently graduated from Tokyo's Keiō University with a doctorate in economics that he hopes will qualify him for a position with the finance ministry in Brazzaville. As an intellectual, it would seem he has radically assimilated Western values (and a degree of Marxist

ideology) through his education abroad, but this process actually began at home where he was raised a Jehovah's Witness. From the Witnesses Jean acquired a church-and-culture-in-conflict attitude, the "ascetical ethos" of the discipline of hard work, and a conviction that those who believe in the Bible will be immune to spirit possession.

This faith in the Witnesses' teaching was shattered when two of Jean's brothers died in circumstances he felt so strange he could comprehend them only as an act of traditional sorcery—the curse of a neighbor with whom his family had been feuding over several generations. Convinced that the Witnesses were helpless to prevent him from becoming the next victim, Jean took initiation into the mysteries of the Rosicrucians, who are active in the Congo, but was likewise disappointed. While consulting practitioners of traditional magic, Jean's latent, indigenous world-view underwent reconstruction, and he became resentful of having to disguise his belief in spiritism in order to excel in the mission-school system.

Jean described to me his first experience of the Mahikari purification ritual, performed by kamikumite he met after coming to Japan for advanced studies, as an "electric shock" from head to toe. Indeed, his reaction was so virulent that kamikumite advised him to receive purification for shorter periods and at longer intervals than is usual, so malevolent was his possessing spirit thought to be. His spirit-seizures are nowadays less violent than they were when he was recruited several years ago, and Jean feels that spirit-investigation will eventually reveal the breach between his family and its assailants. While he awaits the final exorcism, Jean is confident that the power of True Light is superior to both the good and evil forces of African primal religion, but—most significantly—that Mahikari, unlike Christianity, fulfills rather than destroys what he proudly calls his *négritude*.

While the penetration of Mahikari into black Africa requires far more systematic research than has been possible here, we who have been assuming—as the Jōdo Shinshū theologian, Sasaki Shōten, quoted at the outset of this study—that Japanese New Religions such as Mahikari are pre-modern and outdated, are now confronted with the possibility that spirit-belief is not only a match for modernized Japan but also for modernizing Africa.

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