

Japanese Pentecostalism and the World of the Dead:
A Study of Cultural Adaptation
in Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai*

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Indigenization in the Japanese Cultural Context

Indigenization has been defined as the process whereby foreign-born religions are transformed through contact with native religion and culture.¹ In the case of Japan, the syncretistic beliefs and practices of folk religion constitute the native culture to which foreign-born religions have been forced to adapt. Folk religion has been referred to as the comparatively stable “substructure” of Japanese religion (HORI 1968, p. 18). According to MIYAKE (1972, p. 122), “it is within the frame of reference provided by folk religion that the organized religions have made their way into Japanese society. Only as they accommodated themselves to folk religion and its implicit norms did

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¹ This is the definition provided by MORIOKA (1972, p. 52) in a passage where he distinguishes between “acculturation” and “indigenization.” According to Morioka, in studies of acculturation the central focus or concern is to what extent the native culture has changed under the influence of a foreign religion. Studies of indigenization, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with the nature and degree of change in the foreign-born religion through contact with native religion and culture.

the institutional religions find acceptance and begin to exercise influence on people in their daily life."²

It has long been recognized that the ancestral cult is a central feature of Japanese folk religion. In its classical or traditional form, the ancestral cult refers to the "belief in the superhuman power of the dead who are recognized as ancestors, and the rituals based on this belief" (MORIOKA 1984, p. 201). Ancestors were originally understood as the founder of a household (家 *ie*) and successive household heads. Thus, ancestor veneration was essentially a patrilineal phenomenon. Studies have indicated that modernization and urbanization have modified both the family structure and conception of ancestors in significant ways. Nevertheless, the concern with ancestors and appropriate care for the deceased is still a dominant feature of contemporary Japanese religion and culture.³

The histories of two foreign-born religions in Japan, Buddhism and Christianity, provide us with ample material for the study of cultural transformation through contact with this native tradition. Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that Buddhism found a niche in Japanese society by accommodating its doctrines and rituals to indigenous folk religion and its concerns for the proper care for ancestral spirits (WATANABE 1958, pp. 102–32; MORIOKA 1972, p. 55; REID 1981, p. 9). In fact, the dominant role of Buddhism in the care of the dead through its various rituals has earned it the popular designation "funeral Buddhism" (葬式仏教 *sōshiki bukkō*).⁴

In studying the process of cultural transformation in the case of Christianity, it is helpful to adopt CALDAROLA's (1979) distinction between "spontaneous" forms of Japanese Christianity and "controlled" expressions of Christianity that are closely related to various Western churches. In recent years several studies have appeared which focus upon this process in established Japanese denominations that are still related to Western churches. REID (1981; 1989) has analyzed the manner in which members of the United Church of

² HORI (1968, pp. 2–3) similarly writes that "the temptation to accommodate folk religion has really been the weak point of institutionalized religion in the history of Japanese religion from ancient times to the present."

³ Regarding change and continuity in the ancestral cult see, for example, SMITH 1974, pp. 220–26; MORIOKA 1984, p. 206; HARDACRE 1984, pp. 101–103; and KŌMOTO 1988a, p. 49 and pp. 71–74.

⁴ In my previous research (1988; 1989a) I have given some attention to the problems faced by Japanese Buddhism in North America precisely because it is tied to this cult of the dead.

Christ in Japan have adapted Christian practices to indigenous ancestral rituals. Similarly, NISHIYAMA's (1985) study of the Anglican Church revealed that the ancestral cult has significantly transformed the practice of Christianity within this denomination. DOERNER's (1977) survey of a Roman Catholic parish likewise showed that numerous accommodations have been made to indigenous beliefs and practices related to the dead.⁵

One would expect that more substantial adaptations to this ancestral cult might be made in "spontaneous" Christian movements that are unrelated to Western churches and their concerns for doctrinal and ritual purity. In *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (1979) CALDAROLA provided a helpful analysis of indigenization in two "spontaneous" movements: the Mukyōkai 無教会 (non-church movement) and Makuya 幕屋 (Tabernacle of Christ), also known as Genshi Fukuin 原始福音 (Primitive Gospel). This study, however, did not consider the nature and process of adaptation to the native ancestral cult. Furthermore, Caldarola's study ended with the following inaccurate generalization: "Makuya is the *only* movement to indigenize Christianity—traditionally an upper-class religion—in the Japanese lower classes. By emphasizing its pentecostal aspects, the Makuya has ingeniously succeeded in fostering the continuity of a Japanese folk-religious tradition dominated by shamanism, magic, and miracles" (1979, p. 208) [emphasis mine].

In fact, however, there are a number of other indigenous movements that have made similar cultural adaptations, and at least one of these, the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai イエスの御霊教会 (Spirit of Jesus Church), has met with equal or better success in attracting members from among the less educated population.⁶ The remainder of this paper will briefly sketch the development of this movement and analyze the indigenous features that have appeared as a result of adaptations to Japanese folk religion and the ancestral cult.

⁵ The Roman Catholic tradition, of course, has a more natural affinity to the ancestral cult than Protestant forms of Christianity because of its long practice of "offering liturgical prayers and Holy Mass for the dead" (BERENTSEN 1985, pp. 196–98).

⁶ Such indigenous movements include Kirisuto Shin Shūkyōdan (Christ Heart Union), Kirisuto Dendōdan (Christian Evangelistic Association), Sei Iesu Kyōkai (Holy Jesus Church), and Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai (Spirit of Jesus Church). Regarding the last movement, I was informed that only the Japanese "Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai" is acceptable to the church. Since the name was given in a revelation from God, the English rendering "Spirit of Jesus Church" is not permitted. In all foreign missionary contexts, the Japanese designation "Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai" is used. For that reason, I will use "Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai" throughout this paper.

Origin and Historical Development

The founder of the Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai, Murai Jun, was born in 1897, the second son of a Methodist minister. Raised in this Christian environment, he went on to study theology at the Methodist-related Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo. During this period Murai was deeply troubled and considered suicide. In 1918, while riding a ferry boat in Okayama Prefecture, Murai made the decision to jump overboard and end his life. It was at this moment that he experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in a powerful way and began speaking in tongues. This experience erased all of Murai's doubts concerning religious faith and gave him a new strength and vision for Christian mission.

Murai dropped out of Aoyama Gakuin and became an evangelist, eventually becoming a pastor in the Japan Bible Church (Nihon Seisho Kyōkai). In 1933, the pentecostal experience that had changed his life spread throughout the membership of his small congregation in Nishisugamo, Tokyo. This pentecostal movement gained a distinct identity in 1941, when Murai refused to have his congregation absorbed into the United Church of Christ (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan), a church organized as a result of the government's attempt to control religious minorities during the Second World War. This was also the year that his wife, Murai Suwa, received a revelation from God in which the name Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai (Spirit of Jesus Church) was given to them as an official church designation.

Like many other Christian denominations in Japan, Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai did not experience significant growth until after the Second World War. In 1950 the head church in Tokyo was built and two years later a Bible school established to train pastors. In 1953 Murai registered his church with the government, making it a legal religious body (宗教法人 *shūkyō hōjin*). By 1958 Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai had grown to a membership of 28,000 and become the third largest Protestant denomination in Japan (IGLEHART 1959, p. 339).⁷ All of this was achieved without the direct assistance of

⁷ "Protestant" is a designation which Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai members reject. They maintain that they are neither Catholic nor Protestant, but a recovery of the authentic "primitive" church. In any case, outsiders tend to classify this church as "Protestant," though often adding that it is "heretical" in its rejection of the doctrine of the trinity and in its practice of baptism for the dead.

foreign missionaries. This church continued to grow steadily on into the 1970s and has reported phenomenal growth for the past decade.

It is necessary to point out, however, that statistics for Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai are less than reliable and must be viewed critically. While case studies have revealed remarkable church growth for the Japanese context (ANZAI 1977), statistics for the church as a whole cannot be accepted at face value. According to church headquarters there are currently 420,000 general members (240,000 men, 180,000 women). Membership is based upon "water" and "spirit" baptism.⁸ Anyone who has attended a meeting and received both forms of baptism (the latter being authenticated by speaking in tongues) is counted as a member. There are over 300 ministers (60 percent women), close to 200 churches, and over 400 evangelistic house churches. The church has most recently clarified these statistics by indicating that there is an "active membership" of 23,283;⁹ that is, individuals who regularly attend meetings and are engaged in church activities of one kind or another. Church representatives maintain, however, that the larger figure accurately reflects the number who have been "saved" through Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai.

An examination of church attendance indicates that the figure for "active membership" is the most helpful for understanding the actual strength of this movement. One rural church in which I conducted fieldwork reports a membership of over six hundred (including four house churches). Regular attendance at weekly meetings in the mother church was from three to fifteen people, while close to fifty might attend the annual memorial service for the dead in August. Similarly, the Tokyo district reports a membership of over 80,000. Attendance at weekly services in the main church averages around 500. In addition, there are some twenty house meetings on various days throughout the week with attendance ranging from ten to thirty. There are also ten house meetings for children that meet through the week. Attendance is greatest for the annual conference (大聖会 *daiseikai*) for pastors and laity, with approximately 1,800 attending.

⁸ On more than one occasion I have inquired as to whether the membership statistics included "baptisms for the dead." Church leaders indicated that such baptisms were recorded in a separate category and had nothing to do with their membership statistics.

⁹ The recently published *Dictionary of New Religions* (新宗教事典 *Shinshūkyō jiten*, INOUE et al. 1990, p. 680) uses the "active membership" figure of 23,283.

It might also be helpful to recognize here that Japanese religiosity and understanding of membership are quite different from Western notions. As a rule, Japanese do not commit themselves to one particular religious organization; rather, they participate in the annual festivals and rituals of both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples throughout the year. Regular weekly attendance at religious meetings is the exception rather than the norm in Japan. While this church strongly discourages participation in Buddhist and Shinto rituals, their understanding of membership seems similarly undemanding. From my limited observation, there is little pressure placed on members to attend meetings. As long as one has received "water" and "spirit" baptism, other obligations are viewed rather lightly.¹⁰ Hence, the small number of regular attenders at Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai meetings does not seem to bother leaders. Members can attend services and rituals which seem important to them through the year and life-cycle just as other Japanese visit Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples for special events or rituals.

Leadership and Organizational Structure

The observations above regarding membership are clearly related to the organizational structure and definition of clergy and laity responsibilities. Although Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai has a bishop, the role is largely a symbolic one. The current bishop, Murai Suwa, is the wife of the deceased founder and is highly respected by pastors and members alike. Nevertheless, the role of bishop carries no "official" political power. There are no church councils or meetings over which to preside. As bishop, Rev. Murai symbolically represents the authority of the church and officiates at the communion service each year at the annual conference.

The actual control of the church is in the hands of each local pastor. A phrase one commonly hears in the church to express this socio-political reality is *bokushi ichinin shugi* 牧師一任主義, which in essence means that each pastor is entrusted with the responsibility for a local church. No outside interference is permitted. The laity

¹⁰ Comparison with membership in another new religious movement might be helpful here. In his study of Sūkyō Mahikari, for example, DAVIS (1980, p. 7) writes: "I would estimate that although as many as one million amulets have probably been distributed to new members, the de facto membership probably numbers about 100,000 to 200,000 or even less."

in each local church are under the authority of the pastor and have no official role in church government. There are no congregational meetings and no lay leaders (elders or deacons). Neither is there a treasurer.¹¹ The pastor is in charge of the finances of the local church. Members, of course, are urged to tithe; but the use of church funds is determined by each pastor. In sum, Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai is a streamlined religious organization with no committees or bureaucracy.

The responsibilities of the laity are summed up in the often heard expression: *hitsuji ga hitsuji o umu, soshite bokushi ga yashinau* 羊が羊を産む, そして牧師が養う. Roughly translated, sheep are expected to give birth to more sheep and the pastor is expected to shepherd the flock. The choice of images here is important. As “sheep,” laity have only a passive role to play. One leader suggested that pastors viewed themselves as a family of priests, much like Aaron and the Levitical priests in the Old Testament.¹² They have been “set apart” from ordinary believers for their priestly activities. In order to train pastors for this “high” calling, a two-year Bible School program is maintained in the church headquarters in Tokyo. Each year there are ten to twenty students attending the training program. The Bible and the writings of founder Murai Jun form the content of the curriculum. After completing the two-year course, graduates assist in the work of the head church or engage in new church development.

It should be noted here that the relatively high status and power of pastors in this church is significantly related to the growth of this movement. Religious diffusion over kinship ties is particularly evident at the leadership level. ANZAI's (1977, p. 42) study of the growth of Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai in Okinawa revealed that the founder of the church in that area effectively passed on the faith to his family. Following his death, his wife continued to work in the church, one daughter and one son became pastors, and two daughters became wives of pastors in this movement. In my study

¹¹ One pastor reminded me in an interview that it was Judas, the “treasurer,” who caused Jesus so much trouble. In other words, it is best not to entrust laity with heavy responsibility in financial matters.

¹² The strong influence of the Old Testament is also apparent in other areas of Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai. For example, this church observes the Sabbath as the primary day of worship (although they still hold meetings on Sunday). Also, “unleavened bread” must be prepared for communion.

of a church in Shikoku, I discovered a similar pattern. The pastor's father had converted to Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai from an Assemblies of God congregation and became a pastor in the movement. Two of her brothers and one sister also became pastors. At the present time, three nieces or nephews are serving as pastors and two nieces are in the Bible School preparing for pastoral work. If this pattern is the norm, one can understand why this movement has experienced significant growth.

Dispensational and Pentecostal Connections

Although the historical link has not been established, the influence of dispensationalism upon the theology of the founder is unmistakable.¹³ An examination of Murai's *Seisho shingaku* (聖書神学, Biblical theology) and *Kirisutokyō annai* (基督教案内, A guide to Christianity) reveals that Scofield's notes must have been a handy reference in his Bible study. Figure 1, adapted from these publications, presents the dispensational and eschatological theology of this church. From the fall of humankind into sin, four thousand years elapse before the coming of Jesus Christ. His death, resurrection, and ascension are followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the period of grace, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. Unlike traditional dispensationalism, however, Murai and his church maintain that the signs, miracles, and tongues which accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament story are still present and will be until the end of the church age. The church age ends with the rapture of true

¹³ Dispensationalism is a theological system that emerged among Plymouth Brethren in England and Ireland in the 1830s and subsequently spread in North America. It became the dominant system of scriptural interpretation in fundamentalist circles and is still popular in evangelical and pentecostal churches (KRAUS 1983, pp. 327–30). Dispensationalists emphasize eschatology and divide Biblical history into distinct periods (dispensations) during which God dealt with humanity according to different covenants or conditions. C.I. Scofield (1843–1921), an American pastor and Bible teacher, published his dispensational and premillennial Bible in 1909 and popularized the view that there are seven dispensations: “These are Innocence (before the Fall), Conscience (from the Fall to Noah), Human Government (from Noah to Abraham), Promise (from Abraham to Moses), Law (from Moses to Christ), Grace (the Church age), the Kingdom (the Millennium). The close of the Millennium ushers in the Eternal State” (J.D. DOUGLAS 1974, p. 303). It seems probable that Murai Jun was exposed to dispensationalism by American missionaries or Japanese Bible teachers who had adopted this approach to Biblical interpretation.

Christians. After a seven-year period of tribulation, Satan is cast into hell and Jesus Christ returns to earth with his followers to establish the millennial kingdom. At the end of this period, Satan is released for a short period before the final judgment. The human race is then divided into those who will live eternally with God and those who will be cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment. The old heaven and earth are destroyed, and the new heaven and earth, the eternal home of the people of God, are finally revealed.

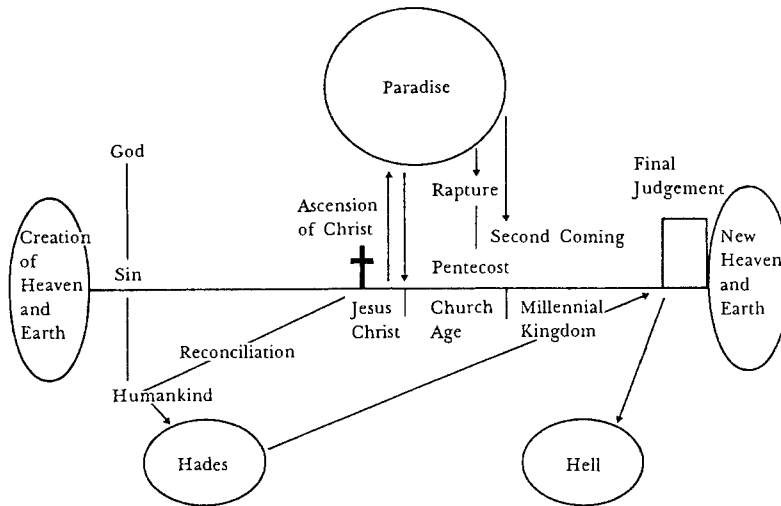


Figure 1. Cosmology of Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai

To this eschatological framework are added the usual features of pentecostalism. Like other pentecostal groups, Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai rejects intellectualism and emphasizes the importance of religious experience. Speaking in tongues, anointing with oil, dancing in the spirit, miracles of healing, and revelations from God are all basic components of everyday religious life. The symbolic world of the “believer” is filled with spirits, signs, miracles, and wonders. Miracles of healing and religious experience, rather than intellectual or theological sophistication, are key characteristics of this church. Church services usually include scripture reading, singing, glossolalia, and anointing with oil for healing and blessing.

Anyone familiar with dispensationalism and pentecostalism in North America will not be surprised by this synthesis of beliefs. Murai and his followers, however, have adapted this theology to

various features of Japanese folk religion, creating a new indigenous expression of Christianity. It is this aspect of *Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai* that I would like to focus on in the remainder of this study.

Cultural Adaptations in Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai

One unique feature of this group appears to provide an effective point of contact with traditional Japanese religiosity: its practice of baptism for the dead. While *Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai* dissociates itself from the traditional practice of ancestor veneration, it seems to have found a functionally equivalent ritual which meets the needs and concerns of Japanese for their ancestors. According to church representatives, the ancestral cult is nothing other than “idol worship” and violates the second commandment (Exodus 20). The rejection of traditional practices, in some cases, is “symbolized in its burning of ancestor tablets” (ANZAI 1976, p. 69). In spite of this negative evaluation of traditional practices, this church by no means neglects the ancestors. Their understanding of “household salvation” (Acts 16:31–32) is interpreted from a Japanese cultural perspective and linked to baptism for the dead (I Corinthians 15).

The Japanese household includes both present and past members (ancestors). Through the ritual of baptism for dead ancestors (先祖の身代わり洗礼 *senzo no migawari senrei*), the blessings of salvation can extend not only to future generations but to past generations as well. In *Seisho shingaku* considerable emphasis is placed on this teaching; according to MURAI (1952, pp. 32–33), the Biblical teaching of the salvation of the dead has been hidden from the church since the second century, when the church no longer practiced “water” and “spirit” baptism. “It is in these last days,” Murai writes, “that this great mystery has been revealed to *Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai*.”

The salvation of ancestors is explained as follows: the spirits of all those who died without salvation and without receiving water and spirit baptism are presently in Hades (see fig. 1). Although their bodies decay in the grave, their spirits can be saved through the forgiveness of sins. The authority to forgive sins, Murai maintains, has been forgotten by the modern church along with all the signs, miracles, and wonders that characterized the early church. Through the ritual of vicarious baptism, the good news of the forgiveness of sins is communicated to the dead and their spirits are transported from Hades to Heaven. Believers are assured that all their doubts

and misgivings regarding the state of their ancestors can be resolved through this ritual of baptism. This ministry to the dead is simply carrying on the work begun by Jesus Christ when he descended into Hades and preached to the imprisoned spirits (see I Peter 3:18–22).

How does this work out in practice? Members can request baptism for ancestors at the time of their own baptism or later when they become concerned about the salvation of those who have gone before. One simply states the name and one's relationship to the ancestor and then receives baptism by immersion on their behalf.¹⁴ This understanding of vicarious baptism is expressed clearly in a hymn by that title in the church's *Rei sanka* (霊讃歌 Spirit Hymns).¹⁵

Vicarious Baptism

I

The spirits of our long-sleeping ancestors
 Still now are weeping in sorrow
 Spring passes, summer comes, autumn goes and winter comes
 But Hades is eternally winter's dead of night.

II

Like the never-ending shadowy darkness of Hades
 Tears are flowing
 Crossing over the river of death, the anguish of that day
 Even now they are in the bitter harbor.¹⁶

¹⁴ It is significant to note here that the church also performs baptism for *mizuko* 水子 (literally, "water-child"), or aborted and stillborn children. In this way, Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai is responding to the felt needs of Japanese women to deal with the sense of guilt and the curse associated with the spirit of a *mizuko*. See HOSHINO and TAREDA (1987) and YOUNG (1989) for helpful discussion of the growing trend of *mizuko kuyō* 水子供養 (memorial services for aborted or stillborn children) in contemporary Japanese religion.

¹⁵ This is a collection of 166 hymns all said to have been received from heaven by Tsuruhara Tama, a woman who was active in the early years of this church. Since these hymns were given in a revelation directly from God, no changes are permitted. One sociologist (ANZAI 1980, pp. 277–88) has commented upon the "indigenous" character of this hymn book and suggested that these songs do not have the melodies and rhythms of Western hymns, but are more like Japanese folk songs. A young Japanese woman to whom I showed this hymn was similarly impressed. She was immediately struck by the Buddhist influence upon the lyrics and the Japanese-sounding melody.

¹⁶ The imagery of these last two lines, the "river of death" and the "bitter harbor," reflects the Japanese Buddhist expression for dying, *Sanzu no kawa o wataru* 三途の川を渡る. In expressing the sorrow in the world of the dead, the author of this hymn is clearly drawing upon

III

The ship which goes out knows no bottom
 Sinking deeper and deeper in the depths
 Still now the salvation of our ancestors is closed
 Eternal spirits anguishing ceaselessly.

IV

Evil spirits come like a whirlpool
 Frantically seeking salvation
 Faintly hearing the splash of water
 The mysterious work of atonement in songs from heaven.

V

By and by the gates of Hades are opened
 Through the name of Jesus
 The substitutionary baptism of descendants in the world
 Oh, what immeasurable grace!

VI

Oh, the cries of joy reverberate
 Our ancestors have been saved
 The light of grace shines all around
 The songs of the angels thunder throughout heaven and earth.

According to the church, through vicarious baptism the spirit of the dead is released from Hades and is transported to Heaven, where he or she prays for family members remaining on earth. Just as a dead person is transformed into a benevolent ancestor through Buddhist memorial services, the *Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai* transforms their dead through baptism into benevolent ancestors who perform intermediary prayers (執り成しの祈り *torinashi no inori*) on their behalf.

Concern for the dead does not end with the ritual of baptism. The *gōdō irei sai* (合同慰霊祭, united festival for comforting of the spirits) is also an important service in all churches. According to

this cultural heritage. In the last line of verse II, my translation of the term “bitter” is from the Japanese word *urami* 恨み. It is interesting to note that in Japanese folk religion wandering spirits often “are said to be suffering from the emotional state of *urami* – bitterness, ill will, enmity, spite or malice” (SMITH 1974, p. 44). Individuals suffering misfortune in this life often see the cause in the “*urami*” of some unpacified spirit. In order to pacify such spirits, individuals follow the instructions of shamans to perform memorial services or make special food offerings.

one church representative, the significance of this service is that it is an occasion when the spirits of the dead join with those believers remaining on earth in common prayer to Jesus Christ. This emphasis certainly resembles the role of the Buddhist Bon festival held annually throughout Japan. The idea of reunion and fellowship with the dead is a central motif of this celebration. There is some variation in the observance of this service from church to church. In one church on the island of Shikoku, for example, this service is held each August. Members bring a list of deceased family members for inclusion in prayer.¹⁷ This timing is not without significance. The Bon festival is also held throughout Japan in either July or August. In the Tokyo Church, memorial services are performed numerous times throughout the year according to the requests of members. This often follows the Buddhist custom to perform memorial services (法事 *hōji*) for the dead after so many days, months, and years. Although there is no incense, Buddhist altar, or ancestor tablets, the *gōdō irei sai* is clearly the functional equivalent of the Buddhist memorial service that Japanese view as important for showing proper respect to ancestors and to assure their eternal peace.

The concern for the dead is also manifested in the annual *daiseikai* 大聖会, a meeting lasting several days, held annually in each district or region. In the Kantō District, for example, a memorial service is observed during the *daiseikai* each May for the founder and pastors who have died. In addition to the general memorial services for the dead, the Tokyo church (headquarters) also observes annually in March a special memorial service for the founder and first bishop of Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai.¹⁸

Comparison with other New Religions

Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai is hardly unique among the New Religions in giving attention to the needs of ancestors. An examination of almost any of the New Religions will reveal a similar emphasis upon rituals that enable their members to cope appropriately with the dead. Many of these movements have drawn from traditional folk

¹⁷ This, along with records of those "baptized vicariously," resembles the practice of Reiyūkai members in keeping a death register or Book of the Past (過去帳 *kakochō*) [see HARDACRE 1984, pp. 65–66].

¹⁸ REID (1981, p. 28) has observed a similar pattern of "ritual respect" accorded founders of other Christian institutions in Japan.

religion common ideas concerning the ongoing relationship between the living and dead. Health problems, business failures, and personal problems are frequently attributed to the failure of descendants to properly care for their ancestors. If appropriate rituals are not performed, the ancestor suffers and cannot achieve "buddhahood" (成仏 *jōbutsu*) or lasting peace.¹⁹ Until the needs of the ancestors are met through rituals and offerings, the ancestor will more than likely function as a malevolent spirit and bring a curse (祟り *tatari*) and problems upon the descendants. If descendants perform the proper rituals, then the ancestor becomes a protective spirit and brings blessings upon the household. The lands of the living and the dead are in this way interdependent and linked symbolically through ritual behavior.

While there are certainly "new" elements in the New Religions, their relative success in contemporary Japan is certainly due in part to their effectiveness in relating to the "old" concerns for ancestors and spirits of the dead. The central place of ancestors and spirits in new religions has been noted in numerous studies (KŌMOTO 1988b). HARDACRE's (1984; 1986) research indicates that both Reiyūkai and Kurozumikyō stress the importance of ancestor worship in one form or another. EARHART's (1989) study of Gedatsu-Kai revealed that the founder of this movement had provided innovative means of more effectively dealing with spirits and ancestors. The *amacha* 天茶 memorial ritual and the mediumistic technique of *gohō shugyō* 五法修行 are two new methods of restoring harmonious relations with the dead. DAVIS' (1980, p. 41) study of Mahikari discovered a similar preoccupation with the dead: "Knowing how to feed and worship the spirits of one's ancestors has been the key to health and happiness for many Mahikari followers." Likewise, READER (1988, p. 240) notes that the *taizō* 胎藏 fire, one of the two *gomagi* 護摩木 fire rituals performed at Agonshū's popular *hoshi matsuri* 星祭 (Star Festival) is for the veneration of ancestors and salvation of suffering souls who in their unfulfilled state simply cause physical and spiritual trouble for the living. SHIMAZONO (1987), one

¹⁹ This conception of "buddhahood" or the idea that one can become a "buddha" (*hotohesama*) is a popular understanding of death that developed over many years in Japanese folk religion (see KOIKE 1963, pp. 166-68; HOSHINO and TAKEDA 1987, pp. 306-308). Hoshino and Takeda point out that, Buddhologically speaking, it is not appropriate to identify "Buddha nature" with the spirits of the dead who are pacified by various rituals. Nevertheless, this view is prominent in many of the New Religions.

leading interpreter of Japan's New New Religions (新新宗教 *shinshin shūkyō*) suggests that one important role of these more recent New Religions (such as Mahikari, GLA, and Agonshū) has been to revive the animistic world view and concern with the spiritual world (i.e., world of the dead) which has long been an important dimension of popular religion. In particular, these neo-New Religions have brought the revival of animism to Japan's middle class.²⁰ Research on new religions reveals the persistence of ancestral concerns in contemporary Japanese society. Thus, it is not surprising to find that Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai has been significantly transformed through contact with this native tradition.

Conclusion

It seems worthwhile in closing to briefly consider our case study of Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai in light of earlier theoretical discussions of indigenization. As noted in the introduction, a number of studies have examined the process of indigenization in various Christian churches in Japan. This research, however, has rarely been placed in a comparative theoretical framework. One exception to this is the fourfold typology of indigenization developed by MORIOKA (1972).²¹

Drawing upon church-sect theory, Morioka suggests that the nature of indigenization can be analyzed in terms of the following coaxial framework (see fig. 2). One axis has to do with the relationship between the foreign-born religion and the receiving society. Is it sectarian in orientation and critical of the values and behavior of the larger society or is it essentially affirmative (church-like) in its orientation? Is the foreign-born religion in tension with the larger society, or in a state of harmonious coexistence? The second axis has to do with the nature and degree of change in the imported religion. Here the question is whether in the process of cultural adaptation changes have occurred only in external form (non-

²⁰ Shimazono also suggests that the pentecostal movement has largely been a lower-class phenomenon (much like some of the older New Religions) and that the charismatic movement in North American churches has, like the neo-New Religions of Japan, brought "animism" to the middle class.

²¹ NISHIYAMA (1980, p. 174), in a review article of Morioka's work, notes that Morioka "has not subsequently carried out empirical studies using this framework, so its usefulness has not been clearly confirmed."

essential aspects) or have reached to the core of the religion. A combination of these two axes leads to four possible types: isolation, indigenization, clandestinization, and submergence.

Relationship with Society	Degree of Change	
	Change in Form	Change in Essentials
Negative / Rejecting (Sect-like)	A Isolation	C Clandestinization
Affirmative / Accepting (Church-like)	B Indigenization	D Submergence

Figure 2. Typology of Indigenization (MORIOKA 1972)

In terms of this framework, *Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai* would be regarded as an example of either the isolation type or clandestinization type. In spite of the adaptations it has made, it is nevertheless sectarian in orientation and in “tension” with the larger society. In the final analysis, where one places this movement depends upon a “theological” judgment. In other words, one must evaluate whether adaptations in this church constitute a change in “form” or in “essentials.” From a sociological standpoint, how is one to determine whether changes are only superficial or actually reach the “core” of the faith? While Morioka’s framework serves a useful purpose in drawing attention to various patterns of adaptation, it has inherited some of the problems of church-sect theory. Theologians and churches have considerable difficulty in determining the “core” of the faith and the “boundaries” which delimit acceptable doctrine and practice. A typology which requires such a distinction is problematic.

The utility of church-sect theory for sociological research has been questioned, particularly the approaches taken by Troeltsch and Niebuhr, because definitions of organizational types have been based upon the notion of “theological compromise” with the world (see EISTER 1973). Likewise, Morioka’s distinction between “change in form” and “change in essentials” calls for a theological judgment: has the “core” of the faith been compromised? More recent conceptualizations of religious organizations have replaced such external theological judgments with an emphasis on how a religious group understands itself. ROBERTSON (1970, pp. 120–28) and MCGUIRE

(1981, pp. 110–13), for example, distinguish types of organizations on the basis of whether they claim to be “uniquely legitimate” or accept the legitimacy claims of other groups.²² I would suggest that the self-definition of a religious group is important not only for church-sect theorizing but also for analyzing indigenization.

Established churches might place Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai in the clandestinization category because of its accommodations to the ancestral cult and its rejection of trinitarian formulations of the Christian faith. However, from the perspective of interpretive sociology this movement would be understood as “Christian” and “indigenous.” An interpretive sociology of religion gives priority to the “actors’ definition of the situation.”²³ As BERGER and KELLNER (1981, p. 40) point out, sociological concepts “must relate to the typifications that are already operative in the situation being studied.” In the case of Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai, it is apparent that the actors involved define themselves both as “Christian” and “Japanese.” Whatever evaluations might be made from a theological or missiological point of view, this movement would be most accurately viewed sociologically as an indigenous Christian movement, since this is how participants define themselves. Perhaps it would be helpful to recall the three diagnostic principles of an indigenous church which were widely accepted in missiological circles some years ago: self-government, self-support, and self-propagation (SMALLEY, 1974, pp. 147–51). On all three points, Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai certainly qualifies as an indigenous movement. It is self-governing and has adopted its own style of leadership and organization. It is completely self-supporting, receiving no financial support from foreign churches. In fact, this organization sends its own missionaries abroad. Finally, it is self-

²² The issue of monopolistic versus pluralistic claims to legitimacy is combined with the nature of group/society tension to produce the following four types: “The *church* considers itself uniquely legitimate and in a relatively positive relationship with society. . . . The *sect* is a religious organization that considers itself uniquely legitimate and is in a relatively negative relationship with the dominant society. . . . The *denomination* is in a positive relationship with society and accepts the legitimacy claims of other religious collectivities. . . . The *cult* accepts the legitimacy claims of other groups and is in a negative relationship with society” (MCGUIRE 1981, pp. 112–13) [emphasis mine].

²³ Elsewhere, MORIOKA (1976, p. 279) has made a similar point, though he has apparently not integrated this into his typology. He notes that the “attitude” of the believer towards what might be regarded as heretical practices is important. The Christian interpretation accorded certain practices is what distinguishes the “submergence-type” from indigenization.

propagating and receives no assistance from foreign missionaries in evangelistic work.²⁴

Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai clearly emerged from a foreign-born or imported religion. However, the established churches and Christian traditions are now viewed as apostate. Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai claims to have *the* truth and regards itself as “uniquely legitimate.” If we consider these features in light of church-sect theory, we must conclude that Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai is best understood as an indigenous Christian sect. It is indigenous in that it has been transformed through contact with native culture and by virtue of its organizational independence from Western Christianity. It is sectarian in that it conceives of itself as uniquely legitimate and continues to exist in tension with the larger society.

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²⁴ Iesu no Mitama Kyōkai is not the only indigenous Christian movement that fails to fit into Morioka's framework. Mukyōkai (the non-church movement) and Makuya (Primitive Gospel Movement) are also indigenous movements in terms of the three principles just noted. Nevertheless, both would be regarded as “isolation” types in this framework since they still exist in “tension” with the larger society. It seems rather arbitrary to restrict the indigenization-type to situations where the religious group and larger society mutually accept or tolerate each other.

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