
Ulrike WÖHR, *Frauen und Neue Religionen. Die Religionsgründerinnen Nakayama Miki und Deguchi Nao* [Women and New Religions: Foundresses Nakayama Miki and Deguchi Nao]. Beiträge zur Japanologie Bd. 27. Wien: Institut für Japanologie, 1989. 190 pp., glossary, bibliography.

Based on a very well-done MA thesis from the University of Vienna, this book reveals the author's deep knowledge of Japanese religions. There is no misuse of religious or theological terms often found in similar works by beginners (and sometimes not just beginners). Describing the female medium as not only passive and the male partner as not only active, the author avoids the usual exaggerations of male-female role patterns in the New Religions. The introductory chapter on woman's position in the Edo and Meiji periods (pp. 8–18) is very useful. The author shows that—in spite of *bunmei kaika*—in the area of law (the Civil Code of 1898) the freedom of women in the lower classes during the Edo period was abolished by expanding the oppression of the warrior-class women to women of all classes.

The two female founders of a new religion, Nakayama Miki (Tenrikyō) and Deguchi Nao (Ōmotokyō), are described as shamans, each later on assisted by a male partner (Iburi Izō and Deguchi Onisaburō, respectively) who in both cases are more than just organizers. In contrast to the “fundamentalist” writing of Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō authors, Wöhr assumes not only the parallelism of both women's experiences (disappointment in married life, multiple pregnancies, trouble with children, impoverishment) as the conditions that led them to their religious ways, but also of their psychological development after the first *kamigakari*, or divine possession. Both of them were educated according to the instructions of *Onna daigaku* [The great learning for women], and both transcended this model of femininity through experience and reflection.

According to the author, a difference can be seen in Miki's concentration upon the possibility of salvation in this world (*koko wa konoyo no gokuraku*, *Mikagurauta*) and the eschatological expectations of Nao. Both women are similar again in opposing the adaptation of their religious message and their group of followers to existing religious institutions.

From the viewpoint of feminist studies in religion, the author is interested in demonstrating the balance of the male-female features of Miki's god, Tsukihi (moon-sun). For Miki, in divine creation as well as in salvation, the male-female unity is decisive (p. 50). Miki's activity as a healer and helper of women in childbirth is stressed as the liberation of women from the blood taboo: *obiya-yurushi*, "liberation from the parturition hut" (p. 61), means the safety of giving birth without subjection to the traditional taboos isolating women. This is interpreted as regaining the trust in a woman's own body and understanding its signals, the only way to overcome the oppressive attitude of former religions concerning female sexuality. The author thinks that Miki is much more a liberator of her own sex than a social revolutionary, and that she attempts to undermine the *ie* system even if she does not dissolve the order of male inheritance. It seems that Miki, who was always surrounded by daughters, granddaughters, and other women, hoped for a female successor. It goes without saying that she would not have agreed to the patriarchalization of Tenrikyō after her death.

Deguchi Nao is described as an apocalyptic prophetess who, in spite of regarding herself as illiterate, wrote about 200,000 pages in a state of divine possession, but could not read them afterwards. The reason for the discord in her later life is seen in her dependence on Onisaburō, whom she needed for the interpretation of her "dark" writing, even though she knew the differences between them: she was a critic of Meiji civilization, he a follower of nationalistic Shinto. In the tenor of the words by which the gods reveal themselves to Nao, Wöhr again discovers the coordination of male-female in correspondence to Nao's own self as a woman with the eyes of a man (p. 91), with a soft voice and the voice of a man (p. 92), conscious of the good elements in her femininity (p. 101), with a male soul in a female body (p. 110). The author does not judge whether this androgyny is a relic from tradition or an expression of wholeness and power in this woman. There is also a correspondence between Nao's own consciousness of guilt and her obligation to do penance for the gods' failures. Her unwillingness to heal and to give oracles is regarded by the author as a consciousness of the dignity of the divine, whose suffering Nao finally agrees to share. Nao is described as a much more tragic figure than Miki. Nao's determination to be succeeded by her daughter and to have her religious community always guided by a woman is very clear, and it shows that she intended something different from the *ie* system in her religion, that she wanted a matriarchal order, a kind of renaissance of the oldest state of Japanese society.

A very important element in the religious fate of both women is what the author calls "das pendelnde kami-Bewusstsein" [the oscillating kami-consciousness] (37, 94, 131), the difference between the phases with and without divine possession. This is reminiscent of the German Mechthild von Magdeburg (13th c.), who in the phases between mystical unity with God felt alienated and iso-

lated and was a sharp critic of the Church and clergy of her time. However, the author refers the experience of divine possession to the revival of ancient Japanese structures of consciousness in both women (“Ungleichzeitigkeit der geschichtlichen Bestandteile einer Gegenwart” [nonsimultaneity of the historical elements of a present time], p. 132).

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