

Editors' Introduction

Mark R. MULLINS and Richard F. YOUNG

The transplantation of religions to other societies and cultures has long been a subject of scholarly interest to historians, sociologists, and missiologists. In particular, the missionary expansion of Christianity and its subsequent indigenization or inculturation in non-Western societies has become a research field in its own right. Several generations of scholars have already devoted themselves to this area of study. While research on the worldwide growth of Christianity may perhaps be said to overshadow and dominate studies of this nature, we are glad to say that the phenomenon of expanding Asian religions has not been entirely ignored. An indication of this parallel interest is the increasing attention being directed to the historic and contemporary movement of Japanese religions beyond the archipelago in which they were generated and to which until recently they were largely localized. The role of established Buddhism in the ethnic Japanese communities scattered across North, Central, and South America was a prominent theme in the many studies of this kind that were initially undertaken. It was then observed that the "carriers" of Japanese Buddhism were, for the most part, either ordinary individuals who accompanied other immigrants or professional priests who were subsequently called from the homeland to minister to the needs of Japanese already living abroad. Most significantly, propagation outside the ethnic community was rarely attempted or even desired, and therefore even today the identity of such groups continues to be overwhelmingly Japanese.

Today's situation, however, is unlike yesterday's, and in this connection time must be measured in a scale of rapid change. In Japan itself, established religions are in certain respects outpaced by the fiercely competitive movements called "New Religions." And if the face of religion at home is being transformed, so also are the activist and sometimes even aggressive overseas missionary efforts of Japan's New Religions significantly different from what they were even twenty or thirty years ago. This is especially the case if we compare their present methods with the more passive strategies of the past by which established Buddhism

perpetuated itself overseas with a view mainly toward the intra-generational continuity and integrity of belief and ritual within immigrant communities. The New Religions at home are vigorously seeking a relevant way of relating to the world beyond Japan, and the proselytizing activities in which they have engaged abroad with increased fervor over the past two or three decades represents a significant development. One can say that there is now an unprecedented seriousness about how to be a part of the world "out there." Whatever it is that underlies this new sense of "mission," it must be carefully distinguished from the semantic range of meanings of that word in Western languages. Nonetheless, the characteristic of being "burdened" with a concern for others, so symptomatic of other missionary movements, is everywhere evident in the efforts of the new Japanese religions on behalf of the "unreached."

But whom exactly have the New Religions been trying to reach? With whom do they start? How far have they gotten in breaking through the ethnic barrier? And what motivations drive the New Religions engaged in missions, considering that the view of an ethical or soteriological dichotomy between the "saved" and "unsaved" has held hardly any attraction to the Japanese in the context of their religious history? The aim of this special issue is to grapple with questions like these and others, especially the manner and degree in which the New Religions have themselves been transformed, by choice or by the force of circumstances, in the process of their encounter with various cultures and societies around the world.

In this connection, we would like to stress the stickiness of the question of whether and to what extent the New Religions have been successful in their missionary efforts. How is growth to be gauged? If the membership statistics of the pre-1960 era—a watershed date mentioned by more than a few of our contributors—are taken as a baseline, the increase has by and large been consistent and solid and perhaps even impressive in several instances. The reader will need to bear in mind, however, that comparison with other new religious movements of non-Japanese origin also active in the same geographic regions under review is largely outside the scope of the studies offered here.

It should also be noted that we are not naively committed to a view that suggests an irreversibly steady or potentially explosive growth across the board. Just as certain New Religions are already on the decline in Japan, certain others that once flourished overseas are likewise now contracting, not expanding. While numerical growth is not the only measure of success, without it critical questions begin to be asked and evaluative judgments naturally follow. For reasons such as these, the issue of statistics and the responsible interpretation of them will therefore necessarily have to be considered throughout the pages ahead. But readers are advised that, where the New Religions are

concerned, precise statistics are as difficult to tabulate abroad as they are at home, where the presence of numerous floating or inactive members inflates denominational statistics and complicates precise enumeration by objective observers. Our statistics are all educated approximations to which only a provisional credibility can be attributed, notwithstanding the caution that has been exercised by the authors in collecting them.

One of the aims in putting this special issue together was to provide breadth of geographic coverage. We regret that Africa could not be included, for we hear of interesting developments in the activities of Japanese New Religions in several places on that continent. It was in part from Francophone African nations, evangelized by European missionaries, that Mahikari found its way into the Caribbean along the same routes by which slaves and their religious beliefs and practices were introduced centuries earlier. It will be noticed that the routes of transmission are not always what one would expect: one of our authors (Nakamaki) will show that Perfect Liberty Kyōdan, an active New Religion in South America, came to Canada via Brazil, and onward from there to Oceania (Australia and elsewhere). We have tried to include regions that until now have attracted little notice, such as Southeast Asia, and we regret that our timetable did not permit us to include a study in process of being completed on Singapore and Malaysia. Nonetheless, Thailand at least is represented in the contribution of Elizabeth Richards. To our surprise, studies of Japanese New Religions in Europe are few and far between, and we are therefore pleased to publish Catherine Cornille's work on Mahikari in that connection. We had initially intended to downplay North, Central, and South America, not out of any bias, but simply because so much is happening elsewhere in the world to which inadequate attention has heretofore been paid. But the magnitude of what the New Religions have accomplished there cannot be so easily excluded, and we have therefore carried studies on the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and several Caribbean Island nations.

Naturally, the Japanese themselves have been the most active in studying the transplantation of their New Religions abroad, and in keeping with the editorial policy of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, which endeavors to bring to scholarly and international attention notable work in the Japanese language, no more than half of our collection comes from foreign scholars. To elaborate this point more precisely, we looked for individuals who were specializing on localities outside the United States, where so much energy has already been expended in research on Japanese New Religions, especially Nichiren Shōshū (Sōka Gakkai). We also wanted to assemble a team that was looking into New Religions other than those that arose out of the Nichiren tradition of Buddhism, in the belief that the study of other smaller movements arising out of other sources (Shinto and folk religion, for example) was

being neglected. We are therefore pleased to present several studies on New Religions such as Konkōkyō, Sekai Kyūseikyō, PL Kyōdan, and Mahikari, none of which came primarily from a Buddhist matrix. We would have been remiss, however, had we entirely bypassed the tremendous overseas impact of Nichiren Shōshū. It has therefore been taken into account in relation to its expansion into Mexico.

We are delighted that Shimazono Susumu agreed to start this special issue off with his essay on "The Expansion of Japan's New Religions into Foreign Cultures." In surveying the progress of the New Religions around the world, he considers the major factors related to their acceptance by non-Japanese. These include socio-political conditions of the receiving societies (urbanization, industrialization, tolerance and freedom of religion), the degree of effort in proselytizing activities, and the attractiveness of certain beliefs and practices introduced by the Japanese New Religions. From the varied and incomplete data now at our disposal it is clearly difficult to draw general conclusions. The above-mentioned conditions vary widely from region to region, not to mention the diversity in the missionary policies of the New Religions and the sometimes adventitious and sometimes deliberate considerations that have led them to certain places rather than others. Shimazono has nonetheless provided us with a useful conceptual framework that draws attention to many of the questions that need to be raised in comparative studies.

Our collection of case studies begins with a New Religion that enjoys a solid and stable base at home but static and perhaps diminishing growth abroad. Inoue Nobutaka's article, "The Dilemma of Japanese-American Society: A Case Study of Konkōkyō in North America," traces the history of the oldest Japanese New Religion treated in this issue. Its roots in the United States go back to 1930. His historical analysis pays particular attention to the consequences of the "guilt by association" that stigmatized the Konkōkyō ministers who were interned during World War II as "enemy aliens." Focusing on the question of religious leadership, Inoue moves in his analysis from the efforts of the very first Konkōkyō missionary sent to the United States to a discussion that distinguishes between three types of ministers who have served in the same country during the postwar era. He concludes that Konkōkyō, like the established Buddhist churches in North America, has expended little energy on transcending ethnic boundaries and has therefore always functioned primarily as an ethnic institution throughout its history in the United States.

The third and fourth articles in this issue examine the reception and interpretation of Sekai Kyūseikyō in Thailand and the United States. Elizabeth Richards (whose earlier writings were published under her maiden name, Derrett) has drawn upon her doctoral research in the

preparation of her article, "The Development of Sekai Kyūseikyō in Thailand." She analyzes the initial stage in the transplantation of this movement to Southeast Asia. Although she conducted her studies in the early 1980s, she brings us up to the threshold of Sekai Kyūseikyō's development of a mature and productive approach to mission in Thailand from the middle of the last decade. After outlining the initial phase of missionary activity, she considers how urban middle-class Thais understand this New Religion and its relation to the indigenous Buddhist tradition. To be Thai is historically to be Buddhist, and this ethnic and nationalistic imperative has necessarily involved Sekai Kyūseikyō, which though not of Buddhist origin incorporates into itself features of Buddhism, in a classic dilemma of indigenization.

Also drawing upon his doctoral research (supplemented by long residence near his field of study), Yutaka Tisdall-Yamada's "The Symbolic Image of Ancestors in the Church of World Messianity" is a welcome reminder of how complicated the process of intercultural implantation of religion can be, especially in a heterogeneous society such as the United States. Yamada has found, by means of a comparative interpretation of their narratives, that what ancestors symbolize to Japanese-Americans is considerably different from what they symbolize to Caucasian members. It may come as no surprise that symbols change as they are interpreted by different actors and subgroups within another society. Yet Yamada develops from this the thesis that the process of diversification is potentially divisive in an overseas context, where one ethnic contingent in the overall membership is set off against others (Japanese-Americans vs. Caucasians).

In the following article, "The Acceptance of Nichiren Shōshū Sōka Gakkai in Mexico," Ōkubo Masayuki offers a modified Weberian perspective on the role of religion in transforming attitudes to the world through a study of Mexican converts to Sōka Gakkai. According to Ōkubo's analysis, religious resocialization is a powerful force that encourages members of this monolithic New Religion to cultivate an altruistic and this-worldly engagement with the society surrounding them. We recognize that the use of postconversion accounts and testimonies is highly problematic when reconstructing preconversion attitudes and subsequent change. In spite of this difficulty, we think his study will contribute to a clearer understanding of how members do in fact perceive themselves as transformed and more altruistic than before because of the resources they believe they have discovered in this New Religion. In addition to his socio-psychological analysis of local members, Ōkubo describes how Nichiren Shōshū has adapted itself to the culture and customs of Catholic Mexico, and concludes by suggesting why this New Religion has been less successful in Mexico than the United States.

If Nichiren Shōshū has not fared particularly well in Mexico, Naka-

maki Hirochika argues in his article that another Japanese New Religion, the Osaka-based Perfect Liberty [PL] Kyōdan, has achieved more striking results farther south through a radical process of “de-Japanization.” The “Brazilianization” of PL Kyōdan progressed rapidly in part because its leadership was willing to grapple seriously with the question of which elements in its Japanese identity were most expendable. Knowing as we do that language, ethnicity, and religion are mutually reinforcing aspects of what it historically means to be Japanese, the alacrity with which the liturgical function of the Japanese language was abandoned in favor of Portuguese by the leadership and even by the rank-and-file membership is suggestive of a significant thrust toward universality. One cannot help but admire the hard-working first-generation PL missionaries whose labors Nakamaki extensively details. Yet he finds that rapid progress really began only when second-generation Brazilians of Japanese descent, who were comfortable in speaking Portuguese, moved into positions of leadership. Perhaps Nakamaki’s most intriguing reflections are comparative. His analysis of the contemporary urbanization and industrialization of Brazil indicates that in certain respects the conditions there mirror those of Japan in the last century. A progressive language policy would therefore in itself be inadequate to account for the popularity of PL Kyōdan in Brazil were it not for its work and family ethic that developed in Japan under similar circumstances and now matches so suitably the needs of today’s Brazilians. While most of our contributors employ the terminology of indigenization or inculturation, Nakamaki introduces a concept similar to what economists call “multinationalization.” We think our readers will benefit from his concluding twofold observations on the entrepreneurial origins of certain New Religions in early modern Japan and the consequent similarity of their present management strategies to the contemporary corporate policies of Japanese multinational companies. In case a more extensive discussion of these points is desired, readers are referred to Nakamaki’s Japanese monograph of nearly a thousand pages, from which we have extracted just a single section.

As was also the case with the two selections concerning Sekai Kyūseikyō, our seventh and eighth papers on Mahikari in certain Caribbean and European countries confirms how widespread this rapidly growing “neo-New Religion” or “new New Religion” (*shin-shin-shūkyō*) has become in a brief span of years in regions of the world that have little in common besides the French language. Laënnec Hurbon has kept up an interest in Mahikari for more than a decade, following the path of its progression from one island nation in the Caribbean to another. He has updated his facts and explored dimensions of culturally determined religious realities that he could only touch upon in earlier studies. His conclusions are crafted in a profoundly mature social-scientific perspective.

By means of a penetrating analysis of testimonials, he brings the cosmologies of the Caribbean and Japanese islanders more closely together than one might have thought possible, drawing attention in particular to the commonalities in their understanding of the etiology of illness and other spirit maladies and afflictions.

By contrast, the theme of Catherine Cornille's study of Mahikari in Western Europe, "The Phoenix Flies West," might be the apparent (if not real) distance that the mythical bird had to fly in order to reach the West from the East. Considering, for instance, that Mahikari prominently incorporates a heterodox variant of the life of Jesus into an esoteric and Japan-centered teaching of world history that insists upon his Japanese origin, one might be pardoned for wondering why this New Religion has progressed in Europe as far as it has without significant concessions on this score to its critics (among whom past and even present members can be counted). Like Yamada's study, hers also establishes that the symbolic meaning of a European ancestor is not necessarily the same as a Japanese ancestor. She is also perhaps the most theologically inclined of our writers. Her observations are sensitive to the upheaval that occurs in an Age of Asian Missions, in which, unlike the past when the current flowed in the opposite direction, people of Christian heritage are being faced with a new religious tradition that dovetails neatly with the unofficial undercurrents of folk religion in their own. Yet in a guarded sense one could say, all things considered, Mahikari has already achieved remarkable results in Western Europe. And this notwithstanding her record of the internal organizational upheavals and struggles that spilled over into Europe from the breakup of Mahikari in Japan into mutually hostile organizations following upon the founder's death. One might say, too, that among our authors she is the one who most insistently emphasizes the selectivity of the European consumer of Japanese spiritual goods.

Our studies will no doubt indicate that the Japanese New Religions have thus far met with varied responses from people abroad, some encouraging to the leadership at home, but others not. There are movements that have yet to significantly penetrate the non-Japanese population even in countries where they have long existed, and in this sense their numerical achievements are on a disappointing par with those of the established Buddhist churches that primarily function as ethnic institutions. Others have more effectively shed their "Japaneseness," or have retained of it what is most enriching to others, and they have therefore succeeded in attracting a larger following among local peoples. Although our contributors do not all agree with Shimazono's assessment of the appeal of Japan's economic prowess to the world at large in a time of recession and slow financial growth (the paper by Catherine Cornille expressly downplays the significance of this factor in

Europe), there are other instances in which Japan's achievements as a nation do in fact enhance the appeal of its New Religions overseas. Nor can it be denied that the explicitly Japanese face of certain New Religions, which is sometime firmly maintained and asserted in opposition to those who favor indigenization, is indeed a force that attracts individuals who are seeking alternatives to the Western religious traditions from which they have been alienated. Far from being monotonously uniform, the responses of people overseas to the Japanese New Religions has been a bewilderingly complex and therefore exciting subject for us to study.

We stated earlier that there is now evident in Japan's New Religions an unprecedented seriousness about how to become more relevantly involved with the outside world. There is naturally implicit in this connection a question common to religious studies and also of significance to those who deal with religion from other academic disciplines, that of the universal and the particular. A collection of articles such as this one will be of special value to the comparative historian and sociologist as they consider what happens to religions as they move across their own original boundaries into other regions of the world. But this collection might also compel us all, regardless of our academic specializations, to reconsider whether we have not overemphasized the ethnic dimensions of the New Religions by unrelentingly referring to them as "Japanese," as if they could be nothing else than religions peculiar to the people among whom they originated. This might be called a variant of the "genesis fallacy," and, if nothing else, the research presented in this volume indicates a certain quality of universality that our nomenclature unfailingly obscures and insistently particularizes (a tendency to which the present party is no less susceptible than others). Others besides scholars— the overseas members of these New Religions — have seen a reflection of their own human and culturally mediated identities in Japan's New Religions, embraced them, undergone initiation, and benefited from their socializing and spiritual resources. With a view toward how we describe and interpret it, we who study this phenomenon had perhaps better let the New Religions unfold in their own way and become what they are becoming: the religions of those who not infrequently could hardly care less what Japan's GNP is or whether its New Religions originated there or somewhere else. The impact of an influx, great or small, of such overseas believers on the Japanese at home may itself have interesting universalizing and internationalizing repercussions. This question would be one to assess in the future.

This past year saw the publication of a major Japanese reference work, the *Shinshūkyō jiten* [Dictionary of the New Religions]. We are pleased that we can round out this issue with a review of this work by H.

Byron Earhart, especially in view of the fact that several of our Japanese collaborators have contributed to this monumental work.

In the course of preparing this volume we were assisted by a number of individuals. We wish to express our appreciation to H. Byron Earhart of Western Michigan University for his published and unpublished bibliographical materials on Japanese New Religions abroad. Also to be thanked is James Beckford, University of Warwick, who assisted us in reaching the island-hopping Laënnec Hurbon, whose precise location in the Caribbean is constantly changing. Of the staff at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, we would especially like to express our appreciation to Jan van Bragt for translating Hurbon's manuscript from French, to Paul L. Swanson for his translation of the Inoue article from Japanese, and to Edmund R. Skrzypczak for his translation of the Shimazono, Ōkubo, and Nakamaki papers. We enjoyed the opportunity to serve as guest editors for this special issue and are extremely grateful to the regular editors for their painstaking efforts in preparing this volume for publication.