CHANGING SOCIETY—CHANGING RELIGION: RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1920s' AND 1930s' JAPAN

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In Tōkyō in the 1920s volunteer groups from throughout the country came to the city to participate in the construction of the Meiji Shrine. For the first time, these young people experienced the thrill of a large metropolis and, at the same time, were affected by and could express the fact that they were members of the Japanese nation. The streets of Tōkyō were also filled with another group of young people, who held speeches and distributed newspapers, for example, a newspaper called *Shinreikai* (*World of Gods and Spirits*).They were missionaries of the New Religion (*shinshūkyō*)—Ōmoto—who were attempting to spread their beliefs. Those Japanese who were interested in questions of meaning, the future and religion, but not inclined to join any movement, could choose from a wide variety of different books and newspapers on these topics in book shops, for instance on subjects such as fortune-telling (*uranai*) or cultivation of the mind with the help of religion (*shūyō*).

Although the appearance of large building sites in the middle of Tōkyō was not necessarily an indication of a modern, urban Japan, the growing number of missionaries of various New Religions and the choice of a wide range of articles and books on fate, religion and the cultivation of the mind can definitely be regarded as indicators of a modern city. The new accumulation in the religious realm indicates that religion underwent a change in urban Japan. This change began with the Meiji Restoration and led, according to the religious scholar Ōmura Eishō, to a second religious boom in Japan.[1] The aim of this paper is to sketch, very roughly, some features of the religious growth during this period and to point out some of the alterations in Japanese religion that occurred during this process.

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[1] Ōmura names four such periods; the first growth period for New Religions began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a second boom occurred from the late Meiji, lasting through the Taishō period on into the early part of the Shōwa period, a third growth period began shortly after the end of World War II and the fourth religious boom began in the late 1970s and has endured until the present day (ŌMURA 1988:12–16). See also MULLINS 1992:233–239.

The situation of traditional religion in modern Japan

The traditional Japanese religious institutions (*kisei shūkyō*) had been weakened since the 1870s. Buddhism was linked to national policy and had become "formalized, conventionalized and isolated itself from the daily lives of the people" (Murakami 1980:84). The chief ties to the parish remained only in the form of funerals rites. Under the State Shintō system Shrine Shintō could only perform national rituals. The newly established system of shrine ceremonies brought rituals under national control.[2] As a result, festivals and rituals at the Shintō Shrines which had been formed in close connection with highly localized custom were entirely reorganized.[3] In this process both their integrative function for local communities and their function as ceremonies of *rite de passage* underwent a transformation as an instrument for structuring the relationship between the self, the community and the course of life, leaving a void which could be filled with new religious ideas and practices.

Local custom and ritual experienced dramatic changes and the power of the established religions was weakened, and, as a result of the growth of the capitalist society which created new problems, questions and conflicts for the individual, the demand for explanation, relief, support and the search for identity grew. It was this vacuum left by the established religion which enabled new ideas and rituals to thrive.

Secularization of religion?

The creation of a national identity made visible by the gigantic construction of the Meiji Shrine, the development of New Religions as well as the new supply of literature dealing with the self, are all developments of a religious nature. Religion can be described as a symbol system which helps the indi-

2 This process is well documented, see, for instance, MURAKAMI 1980:65–69 and HARD-ACRE 1989, pp. 79–113.

3 The amalgamation between buddhas and gods (*shinbutsu shūgō*) in premodern Japan begs the question if there was such as thing as a "pure Shintō Shrine" before the separation of Shintō and Buddhism following the Meiji Restoration. Therefore it is necessary to be very cautious when speculating about the meaning and role of shrines before this period; see, for instance, HARDACRE 1989, pp. 110–112, KURODA 1993 and ANTONI 1995.

vidual to deal with the world, to bridge the gap between inner self and the demands of the outside world. Other such symbol systems are, for instance, fashion, everyday goods, art or literature; systems which, as the articles of Inaga Shigemi and Jennifer Robertson in this volume demonstrate, also communicated change during this period. In contrast to these symbol systems, religion refers to the supernatural sphere,[4] in which the divine ancestor of the Tennō, numerous gods and ghosts dwell; the sphere of occult divination systems or self-development through the powers of meditation.

Whereas the focus of both Japanese and Western religious study, heavily influenced as it is by theology, has concentrated for a long period of time either on the analysis of religious institutions or on the self,[5] the study of the social functions of religion, particularly that of the "invisible" religion (Luckmann 1991) have been neglected. As a result of this stress on the visible—the institution—or the self—the "spiritual"—the hypotheses of the secularization of religion has dogged wide fields of research into modern Japanese religion.[6] However, as Jan van Bremen made clear: "The secularization of industrialized societies is a myth" (van Bremen 1995:6). With regard to the phenomenon of urbanization, the religious scholar Ishii Kenji, basing his observations on contemporary Tōkyō, concludes that "… it can hardly be said that urbanization has done away with religion" and "in Japan urbanization and religion are not opposite, but rather harmonious and complementary" (Ishii 1986:205). The "return of religion" (shūkyō no kaiki) (Byōdō 1987) in the wake of the New Age that Japanese society and other industrialized societies have been experiencing since the 1970s, has prompted a rethinking of the course taken by Japanese religion since the Meiji Restoration. In particular, the relationship between religion and the media and religion and materialism became objects of critical scrutiny.[7] This reassessment has been motivated by the intention of gaining a better understanding of the functions of the media and the market; those elements that define, to

4 According to LUCKMANN 1991, religion is communicating meaning through the reference to the transcendental; in the Japanese context I prefer to use instead of the term transcendental the term supernatural because it has a more general meaning.

5 See the critical account of NAGASHIMA 1995, p. 54.

6 Concerning this point, see DAVIS 1992, pp. 229–251.

7 See, for example, IKEGAMI and NAKAMASA 1996 and SHIMAZONO and ISHII 1996.

a great extent, life in "postmodern" societies.[8] Contemporary reanalysis of the development of religion in modern Japan shows that religion, rather than undergoing a process of secularization, was subjected to a process of transformation. Indicators for this transformation can be detected in developments which took place in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, many of the characteristics of the religious scene in contemporary Japan emerged.

The process of religious change was by no means restricted to Japan. Based on data from 1920s' North America, the religious scholars, Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge argue that secularization is a self-limiting process that prompts the formation of New Religions. They have shown that New Religions and so-called client cults thrive where conventional churches are weak (Stark and Bainbridge 1981:360). As they put it:

> We see no reason to suppose that the diffusion of science will make humans in the future less motivated to escape death, less affected by tragedy, less inclined to ask, "What does it all mean?". True, science can challenge *some* of the claims made by historic religions, but it cannot provide the primary satisfactions that have long been the *raison d'être* of religions. (1981:361)

As it is well known, the situation in 1920s' and 1930s' Japan confronted the individual, in particular, with a sense of tragedy and with a search for meaning. By this time Japan was well into its industrial revolution. It was experiencing the manifold problems associated with a rapidly changing economy. Whilst the urban population was only 9 percent, by 1920, as laborers came from rural areas to the city to meet the demands of industry, it had climbed up to 18 percent.[9] In urban Japan, these citizens experienced the loss of their community, new challenges, poor working conditions and, particularly during the depression following the crash of 1923, unemployment and growing insecurity. Their experience was shared by an increasing num-

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8   Further reasons for this reassessment are on the one hand the pressure on academics to market their research with new and timely sounding labels, see LUHMANN 1996, p. 45, on the other hand, the powerlessness of humanities vis-à-vis the conflicts of modern society might prompt the call for new fields and perspectives of study, see KIPPENBERG 1997, p. 185.

9   See MULLINS 1992, p. 234; for further elaboration on economic changes in Taishō Japan, see Suzuki Sadami's article in this volume.

ber of white-collar workers in administration, commerce and finance, who also became the new inhabitants of Tōkyō during this period. For the individual, the move from rural areas to the city meant a fundamental change. As already indicated, these people had to build new relationships and adjust to new duties and values both in their private and working lives. The french philosopher Pascal Bruckner characterizes this transformation in the following way:

> Today everybody has the task of creating himself and finding a meaning for his life. Yet, the beliefs, prejudices and customs of the past were not just inhospitably patronizing—they also provided protection against chance and insecurity and, as compensation for obedience to the rules of the group or community, they offered a certain degree of peace. The man of the past had to submit to all kinds of constraint. He had to bring sacrifices which would seem unbearable today. However, these secured him a place, integrated him into an order which had reputedly existed since ancient times and in which he was connected to the other members of the community by all kinds of obligations. In this way, he was accepted and bestowed with a certain amount of responsibility. In contrast, modern man who is actually free from all obligations, except the ones he chooses himself, bends under the burdens of responsibility which is fundamentally boundless. That is the meaning of individuality; the shift of the force of gravity onto the individual, on whom now rests the bondage of liberty (Bruckner 1997:34).

Bearing this in mind, I would like to address the question: What kind of release and aid could transformed religion offer the inhabitants of Tōkyō during the 1920s and 1930s?

Religion transformed

My first example of an altered religious perspective in an urban setting is concerned with the perception of a national identity. The huge construction site of the Meiji Shrine contributed significantly in the creation of this identity. The construction in Yoyogi began in 1915. It took five years to build and cost the national coffers over 5 Million Yen. Not only did volunteer groups from throughout the country participate, but also all the religious bodies of the Shintō and Buddhist religions. The Meiji Shrine was completed in November 1920 and inaugurated with a magnificent enshrining ceremony. As Murakami points out, "throughout Japan's recent history we find no parallel for the construction of a huge religious institution built on such a grand scale

as Meiji Shrine" (Murakami 1980:69). In the Meiji Shrine the newly found-
ed Japanese nation could be matched with an equivalent presence in urban
space; a strategy followed up by many of the New Religions of Japan.[10]
Through this symbolic representation, the power of their nation became vis-
ible for the new inhabitants of Tōkyō. For large numbers of worshippers, as
well as the citizens of Tōkyō who used the surrounding gardens for their
weekend walks, the shrine awoke memories of the Meiji Tennō with whom
the period of modern Japan began. The construction, the building itself and
the rituals performed within helped to implant in the minds of the Japanese
people the idea of belonging to a nation in which everybody had to fulfill
ones obligations.[11] This new national consciousness filled the gap left by the
change from a rural community to an urban isolation. In this sense, the
shrine acted as a sort of headquarter for the newly-invented "New Religion"
(Chamberlain 1927:559) of State Shintō. Similar functions were performed
by the Yasukuni Shrine and the Heian Shrine in Kyōto.

The religious needs could also be fulfilled by membership in one of the
New Religions which thrived during the Taishō period, of which the more
influential were Hito no michi,[12] Honmichi (founded 1913) and Reiyūkai
(founded 1924).[13] Sketching very briefly the teaching and practice of
Ōmoto it can be shown what the New Religions were offering their mem-
bers. Ōmoto had been founded in 1892 by Deguchi Nao (1837–1918); the
teaching of Ōmoto was to a large degree conceived by Deguchi Onisaburō
(1871–1948), one of the most influential religious thinkers of modern Ja-
pan.[14] After the beginning of the First World War in 1914, Ōmoto began an
intensive campaign of conversion in the streets of Tōkyō, Kyōto and

10 See MCFARLAND 1967, pp. 87–91. This strategy is of course not restricted to Japan.
    Religion is all about symbolizing the transcendental in space and time.

11 The shrine could also support the fixation of a sense for history in the minds of the
    Japanese, see HAGA 1994, pp. 396–399.

12 Hito no michi, the former Tokumitsukyō, was founded 1925 and renamed into PL
    Kyōdan after World War II.

13 Other New Religions of the Taishō period were, for instance, Nakayama shingōshū
    (founded 1912), En no kyō (founded 1919) and Nenpō shinkyō (founded 1925). The
    best overview in English is still offered by MURAKAMI 1980. For further studies on the
    mentioned New Religions, see INOUE et al. 1996.

14 On Deguchi Onisaburō, see MURAKAMI 1978.

Ōsaka.[15] The group also gained a vast popular following through the effective use of mass media to communicate its message to the general public (Tsushiro 1994:310–312). Its first publication *Chokureigun* (*Army for Direct Access to the Spirits*), issued in 1909, introduced parts of Deguchi Nao's *Ofudesaki*. The magazine was renamed on several occasions and under the title *Shinreikai* (1918) the plan to use this publication for nation-wide conversion campaigns could be realized. Ōmoto preached that a fundamental change (*tatekae tatenaoshi*) was necessary (Murakami 1963:202–217) and that Japan had been the land of the gods (*shinkoku*) since ancient times (Lins 1976:18–29). Deguchi Nao taught in her *Ofudesaki* that the people can actively support the coming renewal of the world; according to her, "the world is going to be a good world, if the Japanese people reform themselves".[16] This reform included the necessity to lead a life of virtue and to trust in the care of the gods. Their central ritual *chinkon kishin*[17] was even more effective in the recruiting of new members than the publications of Ōmoto. *Chinkon kishin* was used for healing and for the exorcism of evil spirits. It was also an effective tool, "to let the general public experience the existence of spiritual beings" (*ippanjin ni shinrei no jitsuzai o taiken saseru*) (Tsushiro 1990:39).

Other New Religions with similar beliefs and practices were founded in the 1920s and 1930s.[18] According to a survey by the Ministry of Education, by 1924 there existed 98 new religious organizations. By 1930 there were 414 and by 1935 their number had grown to more than 1000 groups (Murakami 1980:83–85). Like Ōmoto these groups promised this-worldly benefits

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15 During the first period of growth of the New Religions their believers came mainly from rural areas (for Ōmoto, see LINS 1976, p. 97). The Taishō period is marked by a shift of support from rural areas to urban centers (MCFARLAND 1967:62). During this period Ōmoto found many believers amongst students, civil workers, officers, bank employees and also intellectuals such as Taniguchi Masaharu (the founder of Seichō no ie, 1893–1985) or Asano Wasaburō (1873–1935) (LINS 1976:89).

16 "*Nihonjin no kokumin sae kaishin itaseba sekai wa yoi sekai ni naru*," from Deguchi Nao's *Ofudesaki*, quoted in MURAKAMI 1963, p. 212.

17 According to Tsushiro Hirofumi, the interpretation and the use of this ritual vary immensely; therefore I refrain from translating the term into English (TSUSHIRO 1990).

18 Because the New Religions of this period of time originated a wide variety of teachings and practices this is, of course, a generalization.

(*genze riyaku*),[19] the resolution of immediate problems such as sickness, personal and family troubles or economic difficulties through the help of ghosts and spirits. Professional missionaries were rare, the converts themselves becoming lay missionaries, the majority of groups being lay organizations.

These new religious organizations could offer security and a feeling of belonging to their converts; their members received a place in a new order with new responsibilities, for instance as lay missionaries. The appeal to Japanese tradition, such as the doctrine of the Japanese land of the *kami*, where the people used to live closely connected to the gods of the past, as in Ōmoto, bound the members of these groups to the past and counterbalanced the problems of adjusting to urban life with its rapid changes. The stress on a life of virtue helped them to adopt new values and qualifications. The emphasis on reform, as in the aforementioned teaching of Deguchi Nao, becomes understandable in this context. In contrast to rural life, the citizens of Tōkyō *had* to be punctual, to be able to make their own decision, to learn to be flexible, to communicate with strangers and to build relationships with them at work. As the religious scholar Bryan Wilson points out:

> New sects may be a reassertion of old values or an accommodation to new conditions: sometimes they manage to be something of both. Japanese sects have been, in large part, accommodative, even to the point where their own teachings have been consciously adjusted to meet changes in political climate, and the changing social needs of their votaries (Wilson 1970:219).

In the case of failure or misfortune the New Religions offered means of support, for instance the *chinkon kishin* of Ōmoto or the various similar rituals offered by other groups. In Hito no michi a technique known as *ofurikae* (transfer) was supposed to be able to heal. Memorial rites (*senzo kuyō*) as performed in Reiyūkai, were held to effect numerous benefits for the believers. These methods not only helped to cope in crises, but also offered aid in the struggle with the imponderable nature of life itself. They were integrated in a religious world view in which ghosts and spirits became highly personalized; a shift which reflects the increasing emphasis on individuality in modern urban Japan.[20]

19   On the notion of *genze riyaku*, see MIYAKE 1974, pp. 129–148.

20   The concept of *reishō* (negative influence from the spirit of the dead on the life of their offsprings) is a product of modern Japan, see PROHL 1995, pp. 50–51, see also Ko-

Urban life comprised very many designs, whose outcome remained uncertain. This is not to say that people living in rural communities could feel secure about the result of their activities. They were influenced by the weather, their relationships, their health and also by politics. Yet to live in the modern city multiplied the uncertainties of the results of an individual's intention, for example when taking an exam, dealing with bureaucracy, falling in love or starting a new job. Help in the struggle against the imponderable nature of life was also offered by the consultation of *uranaishi* (fortune-tellers) or *uranaihon* (books about fortune-telling). According to Suzuki Kentarō, books about the various techniques of fortune-telling based on the calendar or the individual's name, geomancy or palmistry started to become popular in Meiji Japan and flourished during the Taishō period.[21] Numerous fortune-tellers, such as Takashima Kaemon (1832–1914), published books[22] about their techniques. Although criticized as superstitious by intellectuals, their books were in great demand. From the end of the Meiji period onwards, their articles appeared in newly-founded women's magazines such as *Fujin sekai* (*Women's World*). The first issue of *Shufu no tomo* (*The Housewife's Friend*) in 1918 contained articles dealing with the methods of predicting the future with the help of photographs (*shashin kantei*) and fortune-telling for housewives (*shufu no unmei handan*). These articles introduced the various methods and their practitioners and they were also effective advertisement for their books. The popularity of *uranai* indicates the strong desire of the individual for support in reaching the complex decisions imposed by modern urban life. It can be assumed that where rational criteria for decision did not apply or could simply not meet the magnitude of the necessary decision, *uranai* was able to offer relief from responsibility, strengthen confidence and create optimism by use of criteria outside the reach of human beings.[23] It also seems safe to conclude that the practice of *uranai* gave women

zawa's analysis of the concept of ghosts (*rei*) (KOZAWA 1988, pp. 258–303).

21 The following is based on SUZUKI 1996.

22 One of the most influential books is *Takashima ekidan* (1894). This book is, as an annotated edition, still in print.

23 Research on the mechanism and functions of divination, particularly in the modern period is still to be done. An excellent overview is given by MINOIS 1998; on the functions of *uranai* in contemporary Japan, see SUZUKI 1995.

who had to define their new roles, either as workers or as supportive house-wives, a voice to articulate their wishes and needs in their struggle for acceptance and strength.[24]

The popularity of fortune-telling also illustrates the importance gained by the media in offering solace and help through religious means. The expanding media market offered books and newspapers published by the New Religions and books and articles about *uranai*. A further item on offer were the books on *shūyō*, the cultivation of the mind. Authors such as Tazawa Yoshiharu (1885–1944), Kiyozawa Hanshin (1863–1903), Nishida Tenkō (1872–1968), Tsunajima Ryōsen (1873–1907) or Hasunuma Monzō (1882–1980), particularly in the second part of the Meiji period, propagated the need for inner reflection and the cultivation of the mind through meditation in their books which also heavily influenced the younger generation of the Taishō period (Tsutsui 1992). Tazawa stresses the younger generation should practice the cultivation of the mind, "to truly work up a self which wholly gained a consciousness of life".[25] Tsunajima elaborates on the importance of experience and emotion for the search of religion.[26] This makes him an early advocate of "personal religion" which relies on experience. Some of these authors also founded movements dedicated to the training of the mind, such as Nishida, the founder of Ittōen, whose book, *The Life of Repentance* (*Sange no seikatsu*; 1921) became a best seller.[27] Hasunuma founded a training group that intended to provide aid in character-improvement (*jinkaku no kōjō*) through the cultivation of the mind. Influential authors of this period who also stressed the importance of the cultivation of the mind were Ōshima Masanori (1880–1947), Katō Totsudō (1870–1949) and Nakajima Rikizō (1858–1918). According to the sociologist Tsutsui Kiyotada these books can be understood as a reaction against the feeling of a crisis and a tormenting search for meaning that was prevalent among the younger generation. They helped to mitigate their disappointment in the social and political development of Japan and their bitterly experienced exclusion from influence and power. Instead of addressing these topics, these

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24 Concerning the role of astrology for women in the New Age, see FEHER 1992.

25 TAZAWA (1937), quoted after TSUTSUI 1992, pp. 155–156.

26 TSUNAJIMA (1977), quoted in TSUTSUI 1992, p. 154.

27 On Nishida Tenkō and Ittōen, see DAVIS 1992, pp. 189–225.

publications and movements were concerned with questions of personality (Tsutsui 1992:158). In doing so, they put ideas such as success and wealth into perspective, whilst, like the New Religions, simultaneously stressing the importance of self-improvement and virtue (Tsutsui 1991:122). Tsutsui points out that these new books demonstrate that marketing strategies reacted to the situation of anonymity and the feeling of crisis in modern Japan (Tsutsui 1992:158). In this sense, they can be interpreted as answers of the new market call for explanation, meaning and consolation.

Conclusion: The religious market-place of Japan

The above examples show that the void left by the established religions in the early 20th century was quickly filled with a new supply of religious teachings, ideas and activities. The state as well as the New Religions, fortune-tellers and various authors proved more flexible than the established religions in meeting the needs of the new citizen of urban Japan. With the exception of State Shintō, the aforementioned examples also show that this period witnessed the emergence of a religious market-place. Richard Sennett has emphasized the role of the warehouse in the course of urbanization and how communication was thus changed. Rituals of commerce and public presentations were replaced by a passive financial transaction (Sennett 1983:169). As in the case of goods in a warehouse, the media became a method of communicating religion thereby radically changing its form. To learn about religion and to practice religion became a private matter which did not necessarily involve a personal relationship. The ritual and performative dimension of religion, traditionally powerful tools to stress belonging and commitment to the community and simultaneously the origin of religious power itself, began to weaken, leading the way to the era of "personal religion" inhabited by the aforementioned personalized ghosts and spirits.[28] Beliefs and teachings became a subject of choice and taste. Thus the onus

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28 As Gebhardt shows in her article in this volume, these ghosts and spirits started to be important figures in the literature of this period. This is not to say that ghosts and spirits were in any way a rare component in folk-tales, literature and the teachings of religion before Taishō. Their images helped to communicate social morality, reciprocal emotions and hope for the afterlife, whereby their role, transformed in modern times, has to be reconsidered.

of the claim that religion could provide knowledge of the supernatural shifted to the individual, who now had to provide his or her own answers in questions of religious truth (Wallis 1984:97). Naturally, the issue of State Shintō is an exception to this observation.

Japan's privatization of religion is not an unique development; parallel processes occurred in America and Europe. Of course, the early emergence of a religious market-place challenges the concept of a New Age, both for the participants as well as the scholars of religion, because it begs the question as to how new the New Age really is. The popularity of religious, occult and esoteric ideas in Japan which began in the 1970s (Shimazono 1996) clearly have their precursors in the first part of the twentieth century. This fact has been stressed, in the cases of Germany and the United States by Ulrich Linse (1996) and Robert Ellwood (1992) respectively. Shimazono emphasizes the role played by the philosophical pioneers of the New Age in Japan, who began to emerge in the first part of this century (1996:251). Ōmura Eishō identifies parallels in the growth of religion in the 1920s' and 1930s' and contemporary Japan. According to the analysis of Ōmura, the key-concept for both periods is the "world of ghosts" (*reikai*) (Ōmura 1988:13–17). In addition Lisette Gebhardt (in this volume) and Ichiyanagi Hirotaka (1994) refer to the popularity of occult ideas and practices in Meiji and Taishō Japan. Hopefully, further analysis of the development and function of religion in the first half of this century will deepen the understanding of the contemporary religious and occult craze both in Japan as in Germany, Europe and the United States and also throw light on the fact that religion in Japan is, as in other cultures, a product of history controlled by change.

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