

The Interpretation of  
the "New Religions" of Japan  
As New Religious Movements

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In this essay the new religions of Japan (*shinshū shūkyō*) are examined briefly in terms of origin and definition in order to focus on their comparative significance.<sup>1</sup> The Japanese new religions arose as the result of three interacting factors: (1) the fossilization of the earlier traditions, (2) severe socioeconomic hardship, and (3) the creative inspiration of a founder. The new religions may be defined *chronologically* as those movements appearing from the early 1800's to the present; *in origin*, as those forces that thrust toward renewal or revitalization; *in formation*, as those movements that constituted significantly new religious reorganization.

Scholarly opinion is in agreement on the fact that new religious movements constitute a common body of data, but there is no consensus on the general meaning of the data. Social scientists have opened up important dimensions of new religions, but their focus on religion as a function of culture in a crisis-response relationship leaves unanswered the question of the religious significance of these movements. However, if new religions are a common body of religious data, then we should be able to identify, analyze, and interpret the common structure of such new religions. This kind of "phenomenological" approach to the new religions results in a different understanding of their significance.

Reflection on other comparative studies and my own work on the Japanese new religions leads to this tentative phenomenology of new religious movements:

1. New religious movements presuppose a prior (or established or classical) tradition.
2. They involve a radical break therefrom (and not just an inner critique or reform).

3. The thrust of this break is toward renewal or revitalization.
4. This results in a significantly new reorganization (or gestalt).

### *Introduction*

One of the most conspicuous developments in recent Japanese religious history is the large number of so-called new religions, *shinkō shūkyō* or *shin shūkyō* in Japanese. Although these new religions have attracted considerable scholarly attention, a preliminary review of Western-language literature reveals little common agreement on the interpretation of the origin, definition, and comparative significance of these religious movements.<sup>2</sup> All three problems—origin, definition, and comparison—are closely related, but they cannot be treated in full here. The two problems of origin and definition will be sketched briefly in order to ask about the wider comparative significance of the Japanese new religions. My general thesis is that a phenomenology of new religious movements is crucial to all three problems, but especially to the third. The thrust of this paper is theoretical and does not attempt to tap the vast historical materials dealing with the new religious movements outside of Japan.<sup>3</sup> In the investigation of basic methodological problems, various theoretical formulations will be critically evaluated.

### *Japanese New Religions: Origin and Definition*

The historical origin—or origins—of the new religions have most often been seen in terms of a socioeconomic "crisis," causing the appearance of new religions, which then resolve the crisis. This kind of interpretation seems to be faulty both in its estimation of the relationship between religious and nonreligious activities, and also in its analysis of the new religions. These recent Japanese religious movements, like all religious phenomena, are complex in their historical development and present nature. In the case of the Japanese new religions, it seems that three interrelated factors help us understand their appearance. First, the major "established" religions (Buddhism and Shinto) had become so formalized or fossilized that the time was ripe for some form of renewal outside of the existing organized re-



ligions.<sup>4</sup> This prior religious history provided a two-pronged enabling factor: while directing the appearance of new religions as innovations external to organized religion (rather than internal reforms), it also supplied the general religious content for them. Second, severe socioeconomic hardship helped provoke the social crisis that raised the question of where people placed their real trust. This social unrest contributed a precipitating factor, in the sense of directing the timing of the new religions and, to a certain extent, in the sense of channeling the shape of the new movements. Third, charismatic leaders or semidivine founders either rediscovered a vital religious element from the previous tradition or received what they felt to be a new revelation. These founders and leaders offered the inspiration that was the point of orientation for a new religious movement. These three factors—the enabling and the precipitating as well as the inspiration—interacted as a group to create a number of rather distinct new religions.<sup>5</sup>

In defining the new religions the two basic problems are dating the emergence of the new religions and recognizing the features that set these movements apart as a distinctive phenomenon within Japanese religious history. Some of the new religions arose as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, while some have been founded since 1945, the most flourishing period for the new religions. Some scholars date the emergence of the new religions with the appearance of those pioneer groups of the early nineteenth century, while other scholars insist that new religions (or "modern religions") did not really emerge until just before or after World War II. Each of these periods exhibits peculiar features worthy of consideration, but the question of chronology cannot be solved apart from the nature and scope of the new religions. Any interpretation of the nature of the new religions must embrace the total time span during which the new religions have been active.

The nature of the new religions must be understood in terms of their historical origin and time span as seen in the structure of their makeup. In general, "there seem to be three major criteria for distinguishing new religious movements: (1) chronologically, those movements that appeared from late Tokugawa [about 1800] or early Meiji [about 1870] to the present; (2) in origin those movements that arose as renewal or 'revitalizing' forces; (3) in formation, those movements that led to permanent socio-religious organizations."<sup>6</sup> These three



criteria, when seen as three interrelated aspects describing a total phenomenon, are able both to embrace the total time span of the new religions and to indicate the general nature of the new religions. This definition allows the inclusion of any movements from late Tokugawa times to the present that are revitalistic in character and have resulted in socioreligious organization. This definition also permits the exclusion of essentially schismatic groups that separated from Buddhism and Shinto without erecting a distinctively new religious ethos. By virtue of the same definition we can exclude from the category of new religions those ethical and cultic activities that have not resulted in new socioreligious organization.

### *The Problem of New Religions as New Religious Movements*

Now that we have considered the origin and the definition of the new religions, we can focus more closely on the problem of their wider comparative significance. One reason scholars have found it difficult to make generalizations about the Japanese new religions is that, on a wider scale, they were unclear about the generic nature of these new religions. Consequently, neither the generalizations about the Japanese new religions nor the wider kinds of comparison have been particularly fruitful.<sup>7</sup> Of course, any set of human phenomena can be compared and contrasted in a great many ways. The new religions, too, are human phenomena that can be treated on various levels, such as psychological, sociological, political, or economic. In actuality, these levels can never be completely separated; but another kind of question is, "What constitutes the religious character of these movements? Is there something that distinguishes "new religions" from other kinds of religious organizations? If we agree that these new religions are phenomena that have some characteristics in common, then we must be able to analyze and interpret that set of characteristics. In both the humanities and the social sciences—in fact, in any discipline—one must always ask what can be compared and what cannot be compared; then, among the various possibilities for comparison, one must ask which kinds of comparison best elucidate the material at hand.

It is my contention that the Japanese new religions will make more sense as a whole, and their comparison with other

groups will make better sense, when these groups are treated in terms of their basic character as new religious movements. In other words, I am proposing a phenomenology of new religious movements. This proposition presupposes the existence of a great number of such new religious movements, appearing at various times and places and possessing a rather common structure. To my knowledge, no satisfactory phenomenology of new religious movements is available, but on the basis of my preliminary research into the Japanese new religions, I would like to suggest their significance for such an undertaking. In fact, a number of scholars have been investigating the same general problem area, and it is worthwhile to measure the results of their comparative studies over against the case of the Japanese new religions.

The concept of new religions or new religious movements has existed for some time, but lack of clarity has prevented it from gaining currency. In modern times, as early as 1913 the notion of new religions formed the topic of an article by the anthropologist Alexander F. Chamberlain, who wrote:

One of the most interesting topics in the history of human civilization is the question of "new religions," and closely related phenomena. By "new religions" is here meant such religious ideas and movements, propaganda, etc., as spring up among more or less primitive or uncivilized peoples, particularly after their contact with the so-called "higher" races. The "new religion" is often largely, and sometimes almost wholly, the result of the suggestions of the religious ideas introduced by missionaries and other representatives of the intrusive culture.<sup>8</sup>

Chamberlain noted the presence of this kind of religious movement throughout the world, drawing his materials from primitive peoples, especially American Indians. The three features of this definition are quite interesting, particularly when considered in the light of the Japanese new religions. According to Chamberlain, new religions appear (1) among primitives, (2) particularly after contact with higher races, and (3) largely as a result of the religion of the intrusive culture. The case of the Japanese new religions proves that none of these factors is essential: (1) The Japanese are not a primitive people; (2) contact with a "higher" or other culture was not a major factor in the appear-



ance of the Japanese new religions; and (3) the Japanese new religions were not primarily the result of the religion of an intrusive culture.

Now, even if Chamberlain did not know about the Japanese new religious movements, the contemporary scholars who treat the Japanese materials and quote Chamberlain do not call his definition into question; they invoke his article merely as another example on the level of crisis-response and mass movements. Even the work of Lanternari is based on a similar notion of intrusive cultures producing a religious reaction, except that Lanternari specifies that the intrusive culture is the Western world, either in political or religious domination. While we sympathize with Lanternari's humanitarian critique of Western colonialism, this notion is not helpful for developing a comparative definition of new religions. Lanternari's treatment breaks down, in fact, when it encounters the Japanese new religions—until 1945 Japan knew no colonial period or military occupation. Lanternari must radically alter his theme that the new religions were caused by the crisis of Western influence to the notion that they were caused by the crisis within Japanese society: "Japan had been seeking liberation, not from foreign rule but from forces within its own society."<sup>9</sup>

It may be noted that Lanternari's work and some other comparative studies do not necessarily focus on a definition of new religious movements, but they have continued the earlier attempt to compare recently emerging religious groups, particularly along typological lines.<sup>10</sup> However, more pertinent to the definition of new religious movements are the studies that attempt to embrace all such "types" into a general theory.

### *Anthropological and Sociological Interpretations of New Religious Movements*

Those scholars who have made the most important systematic studies of new religious movements are the anthropologists and sociologists who have encountered newly emerging religious groups in various historical periods and geographical areas. These studies have considerable value for our present task, particularly because of their comparative inquiry and systematic plan. These studies are more concerned with the mechanism or process by which the new religions appear, and not



with their religious character; nevertheless we can learn a great deal from these studies. A valuable critical interaction can be gained by a juxtaposition of these theoretical formulations with the case of the Japanese new religions.

The more recent literature often takes as its point of departure Linton's suggestion of "nativistic movements," which he defined as "any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture." Linton tried to broaden the scope of earlier study of religious groups and to refine the explanation of their dynamics, but he still holds to the notion that cultural contact and "a situation of inequality between the societies in contact" are major causal factors in the emergence of religious movements.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have pursued comparative and systematic studies but have criticized several aspects of Linton's suggestion. For example, Lowie has pointed out—quite perceptively, I feel—that messianic and nativistic movements need not necessarily emerge from cultural clash, but that "messianism springs from internal causes."<sup>12</sup> Another kind of critique of Linton's theory has been made by Worsley, who thinks that Linton overemphasizes the regressive aspects of these movements.<sup>13</sup> Marian W. Smith, in reviewing some of the abundant literature on cult movements, makes the same kind of critique and proposes the more positive term "vitalistic" to distinguish organized attempts to incorporate elements from another culture rather than to exclude them.<sup>14</sup> These criticisms of Linton's theory reflect a common tendency to seek out a more inclusive and systematic concept of new religious movements. Both kinds of criticisms—insistence on recognition of internal as well as external causes, and the need for a more positive appreciation of the thrust of such movements—are reinforced by the phenomena of the Japanese new religions.

### *Revitalization Movements*

Among the various attempts to build these insights into systematic theoretical statements, we may select the works of Wallace and Smelser, and their respective formulas of "revitalization movements" and "value-oriented movements." These theoretical statements are particularly significant for focusing on the positive thrust of these groups as renewal forces and for sharpening the criteria by which the form of such religious

movements can be recognized. Wallace uses the term revitalization to include all innovations in cultural systems, such as nativistic movements, reform movements, cargo cults, and messianic movements. "A revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."<sup>15</sup> Wallace makes an important distinction between usual cultural change, when there is a "gradual chain-reaction effect," and revitalization movements, in which cultural elements "are shifted into a new *Gestalt* abruptly and simultaneously in intent." I think that Wallace's idea of a changing gestalt marks a significant advance beyond the narrower theories of nativism and vitalistic movements; what identifies the Japanese new religions, too, is a new socioreligious configuration.

Some other aspects of Wallace's theory are not supported by the material of the Japanese new religions and the idea of new religious movements. Wallace not only defines revitalistic movements as including all the specific varieties of new religious movements, but he also treats them as "recurrent features in human history," in which almost all men participate. According to Wallace, both Christianity and Mohammedanism, and possibly Buddhism as well, originated in revitalization movements. Even myths and dreams are seen as possibly originating from personal and social revitalization processes. In effect, Wallace stretches the theory of revitalization so much that it becomes a total explanation for religion—the origin of religion, the emergence of myths, the conversion experience, and also the radically changed gestalt of a new religious group. But if revitalization becomes a total theory of religion, then it loses its potential for defining new religious groups. What Wallace really seems to be saying is that revitalization is the major characteristic of religion in general, and not of new religious movements in particular. If Wallace's theory of revitalization is to apply to new religious movements (and if it is to be internally consistent), the revitalization motive must be directly linked to the result of a new gestalt.<sup>16</sup>

Wallace has also specified some of the basic presuppositions of his revitalization theory. "The term 'revitalization' implies an organismic analogy," which in turn utilizes the corollary of the principle of homeostasis—a society works to preserve its own integrity or "life-supporting matrix" and, under stress, will act "to preserve the constancy of the matrix." Stress is a threat to



the society and to the person's mental image of society ("the mazeway"), which results in changing the total gestalt or maze-way. This theoretical framework raises specific problems for the idea of new religious movements, but since the same problems arise in the background of Smelser's theory, comments on it may be reserved until after we have sketched Smelser's contribution.

### *Value-oriented Movements*

Whereas Wallace attempts to treat cultural innovation and the roots of all religion, Smelser is concerned with collective behavior in general, setting apart religious or "value-oriented behavior." But Smelser's work is similar to that of Wallace, because he attempts to include the whole range of new religious movements, presupposes the behavioral model of homeostasis, and utilizes a wide range of religious data to support his argument. According to Smelser, "a value-oriented belief envisions a modification of those conceptions concerning 'nature, man's place in it, man's relation to man, and the desirable and non-desirable as they may relate to man-environment and inter-human relations.'" In general, "this regeneration of values is the identifying characteristic of a value-oriented belief," and "a value-oriented movement is a collective attempt to restore, protect, modify, or create values in the name of a generalized belief."<sup>17</sup> Smelser uses the notion of a value-oriented movement to include all of the same phenomena to which Wallace refers, and the wide documentation places it in the same category as our use of new religious movements. It is apparent that Smelser is singling out a particular kind of religious movement, for he points out that "not all religious movements are value-oriented," illustrating this with the comment that "the mere diffusion of new rituals into a religion does not necessarily require a full-fledged value-oriented movement."<sup>18</sup> Although Smelser uses different language, he, like Wallace, is insisting that some religious movements are distinguished by their formation of a new gestalt (which he calls a "value-added process"). Both the material of the Japanese new religions and a general concept of new religious movements lend support to this formulation.

A more problematic aspect of the theories of Wallace and Smelser is their basic cultural model, which seems to over-



emphasize the factors of equilibrium and stress and to deemphasize the symbolic significance of religious phenomena. Smelser's theory is similar to that of Wallace not only in identifying the form of the new religious movement but also in locating the origin of these movements in some stress that upsets prior equilibrium. "Value-oriented beliefs . . . arise when alternative means for reconstituting the social situation are perceived as unavailable."<sup>19</sup> Smelser is careful to include all the factors in the production of a value-oriented movement, since "any correlation between any type of deprivation and any type of value-oriented movement, then, must be assessed as part of a *system* of operating variables."<sup>20</sup> But even if the various factors are accounted for, the question remains as to whether or not the crisis-response (or equilibrium-stress-new-equilibrium) theory is appropriate for interpreting new religious movements.

### *New Religious Movements: Social Crisis and Symbolic Renewal*

In general, both Wallace and Smelser have greatly advanced the theoretical consideration of new religious movements in their recognition of both the positive thrust of these movements and the major new gestalt that they constitute. However, if their theories are to contribute to a concept of new religious movements, these theories must be modified in two respects: by placing the crisis-response aspect in proper perspective and by giving full recognition to the symbolic significance of these movements.

Special attention should be paid to the "crisis" theory of new religions, particularly since it has been adopted by some students of religion in their interpretation of these movements. This notion is founded in the analogy of homeostasis—an equilibrium interrupted by strain and then brought back to a new equilibrium by a new religious movement. But this analogy has been questioned implicitly by the work of some scholars, including the anthropologist Stanner. In his treatment of cargo cults, Stanner notes that these cults provoke their own crisis—the impending event awaited by the new cult.<sup>21</sup> In brief, the new religion itself can easily, and often does, provoke a new crisis. To take an extreme example, there are reports of converts to the Japanese movements of Sōka Gakkai who have smashed

the family altar, destroyed the family solidarity, and upset business colleagues in the endeavor to convert them.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, from the viewpoint of these converts, they are trying to impose a new (the only and true) mazeway; but from the viewpoint of the family (and society?), these actions represent a critical threat. Herein is seen a question of the relative importance of equilibrium and revitalization, a question wider than any particular family.

It may be noted that every theory has its special strengths and weaknesses. The equilibrium-crisis-new-equilibrium theory is strong in accounting for cultural order and continuity, but weak in accounting for regeneration. Why should we view the cultural organism only as striving for equilibrium? Why should we not also view the cultural organism as striving for regeneration? Obviously these questions cannot be answered in an either-or fashion, but my own acquaintance with new religious movements leads me to conclude that their dynamic thrust toward regeneration or revitalization has been neglected at the expense of overemphasizing the factor of return to equilibrium. This overemphasis is seen in the fact that equilibrium is treated as a permanent, positive goal, whereas revitalization is treated as lacking direction or goal, being simply the inevitable response to a lack of order and equilibrium.<sup>24</sup>

A side issue in this discussion is the question of the nature of religion and the dimension of crisis in religiosity.<sup>25</sup> Although this large problem cannot be treated in full here, it is worth noting that, of course, all religion deals with a critical dimension of life. All religious activity—potentially or actually—involves the human crisis of basing one's life on what is sacred or ultimately real—what we may call generally an existential decision. And when there arises a crisis that cannot be met by the present religious tradition, this situation does define a critical juncture for the old tradition and the opportunity for a new tradition. So the concept of "crisis religions" is not without basis, but it does contain two liabilities. One liability is practically the same as that found in Wallace's elaboration of revitalization: If the factor of crisis is treated as the generic quality of all religious forms, then it loses its ability to locate new religious movements. The second liability (which seems to diminish the theories of Wallace and Smelser) is more serious: failure to recognize the crucial symbolic character of new religious movements.

Stanner helps us avoid the first pitfall by proposing "that



we are dealing with phenomena of crisis necessarily having a religious form."<sup>25</sup> This is quite significant, because he has effectively related the factor of crisis to the emergence of a new religious movement (cargo cults) and at the same time has recognized that the result has the nature of a religious form. Stanner provides the needed modification of Wallace's and Smelser's theories, because the interpretation of religious movements simply as the response to crisis does not recognize that the revitalization or new gestalt "necessarily has a religious form." In other words, their theories do not take into account the symbolic content of new religious movements. I say "symbolic," because what is at stake in the theories of revitalization and regeneration of values is a major transformation of symbolic systems. What is lacking here is sufficient recognition that man always defines himself symbolically; therefore a new symbolic system is not a substitute for another kind of cultural or social activity.<sup>26</sup> It would be more appropriate to say that the totality of man's culture is a complex symbolic structure, part of which is religious symbolism that should not be mistaken for merely social symbolism. By symbolism I mean those images by which man experiences the world and defines his life in the world. Man participates in a number of interrelated symbolic systems that, as a whole, define his world view. When interpreting either one internal symbolic system or the total world view, the respective symbolic unities must be honored. Geertz has effectively recognized the necessity of studying religious materials as symbolic systems, but no one has applied this insight to the study of new religious movements.<sup>27</sup> This insight must be verified in the analysis of actual religious movements, and in future research I hope to take up this task with Japanese new religions. But for the moment this insight can be stated theoretically by expanding Stanner's statement to read: "We are dealing with phenomena of crisis necessarily having a religious form of symbolic renewal." In other words, new religious movements initially emphasize renewal (rather than equilibrium), a renewal that searches for and makes claim to a new symbolic system that can resolve both the immediate crisis and also the critical or existential dimension of human life generally.

### *The Interpretation of New Religious Movements*

Considerable attention has been paid to the crisis-response formula, because it has proven to be one of the major obstacles



in the interpretation of the origin, history, and comparative significance of new religious movements. Now we must attempt a more constructive treatment of new religious movements, which takes into account their symbolic character. An adequate interpretation of new religious movements must be able to hold together in proper relationship (1) a definition of the nature of religion, (2) the location of the juncture of new religious movements, and (3) an explanation of the continuity of religious forms (and cultural forms).

Religion is that mode of life or symbolic activity by which man discovers, expresses, and celebrates what is ultimately meaningful to him. Religion is always directly related to every other aspect of life, but it focuses on what is ultimate, real, or sacred. The concrete forms of religious life vary according to their particular context—that is, they are relative to where they appear; and they maintain a modified continuity through time—that is, religious forms are handed down as traditions that are undergoing modification.

The element of renewal (or rebirth or regeneration) is found in all religious traditions, because in the celebration of the power of the sacred lies the possibility for transforming mere physical life into human and transhuman planes. One of the best examples of the theme of birth and rebirth is found in initiation rites, but it is a universal religious theme.<sup>28</sup> Religious traditions are handed down so long as they remain vital and continue to provide participants with a meaningful orientation in life. But the time comes in almost any tradition when the original inspiration fades and religious forms are practiced and transmitted without recreating the original inspiration. This state of affairs can be called formalism, stagnation, or fossilization. At these junctures the "time is ripe" for renewal, and new religious movements appear. Of course, the process of fossilization and renewal is going on in every tradition at every moment in the continuing modification that affects the way in which the tradition is handed down. However, at particular junctures the whole tradition is significantly reorganized into a new socioreligious organization (or new gestalt), which constitutes a new religious movement.

Every religious tradition represents a continuity in time, which is identifiable by virtue of the forms and goals that are crucial to it. This continuity can be traced by following the succession of a set of interrelated ritual, ecclesiastical, and soteriological forms. On the one hand, this continuity holds even in

the face of the emergence of new religious movements. On the other hand, the emergence of new religions marks a significant break from the preceding orderly succession.<sup>29</sup> A new religious movement does not necessarily introduce new content, but it must constitute a significant reorganization. For example, Japanese religion manifests a continuity from ancient times to the present, in spite of the appearance of the new religions. The new religions incorporate some fairly novel elements, but on the whole they preserve the persistent themes within earlier Japanese religion.<sup>30</sup> What the Japanese new religions have accomplished is a significantly new kind of socioreligious organization in contrast to the former pattern of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the idea of "new" religious movements and insistence on the historical continuity of religious traditions.

### *A Tentative Phenomenology of New Religious Movements*

Having reviewed some of the literature on new religious movements and the major problems of interpretation, I will now venture a tentative phenomenology of new religious movements, based particularly on my familiarity with the Japanese new religions. In the first place the very idea of a new religious movement presupposes an established tradition from which or in opposition to which the new group emerges. In Japan there is the specific term *kisei shūkyō* (established religion); but even in the case of new religions among American Indians we can see clearly the contrast between the "classical" tribal tradition and such renewal movements as the Ghost Dance Religion.

In the second place, a new religious movement constitutes a significant break from the prior, or established, tradition. A new religious movement is to be distinguished from internal reforms, whether they are revisions of liturgy or polity. For example, changes in Roman Catholicism such as the vernacular mass or even a married clergy do not necessarily constitute a new religious movement. Schisms, too, are of a different category, simply implying a new authority.

In the third place, the thrust of the break is toward renewal or revitalization. The implicit or explicit criticism of the old tradition is its inability to speak to present-day people. Whereas



social scientists may emphasize the crucial importance of a crisis situation, such a crisis will not provoke a new religion unless the old tradition is incapable of handling it. (Sometimes crises—such as the martyrdom of early Christians or the World War II bombing of London—can strengthen faith.) Revitalization necessarily implies the decline of the prior tradition. Therefore, it seems to me that the concept of revitalization makes sense only in a pair of terms, such as stagnation and revitalization. A renewal or revitalization movement promises literally a new life, a new access to religious power.

In the fourth place, the thrust of renewal results in a new socioreligious organization. It is true, of course, as Wallace has pointed out, that revitalization is a recurrent feature of all religions. However, a revitalization movement is distinguished when renewal is incorporated in a significant reorganization (that is, in a new *gestalt*): a new configuration has appeared. There is no need to look for new religious content, because what is important is not the relative balance of old and "new" elements, but the resulting new socioreligious movement.

This phenomenology of new religious movements is still tentative, requiring further verification from Japanese and other examples.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it is hoped that the elaboration of this phenomenology will help both to clarify the particular context of the Japanese new religions and to raise comparative questions. This kind of comparative study always involves scholarly cooperation, and it is hoped that others interested in the problem will contribute their own materials and theories toward a more inclusive interpretation of new religious movements. Of greatest significance is the fact that these movements are not merely responses to crisis or substitutes for other forms of action; they are attempts at religious renewal, through which the forms of religion again help people define their world and their careers therein.

### *Retrospect, 1973*

This article was written in 1969 and retains essentially its original form, except for minor revision of footnotes. During the past few years a number of books and articles on the Japanese new religions have been published, but it would require another article to treat them thoroughly.<sup>32</sup> Suffice it to say at

this point that the main thesis of the article is still relevant today. Although there is even more scholarly interest in the new religions, still no generally accepted interpretation has been reached. The most widely used theory for studying the new religions is some form of the crisis (or anomie) explanation. In my estimation this theory is not adequate for comprehending the basic problems of the origin, definition, and comparative significance of these new religious movements. My own phenomenological approach is an attempt to resolve these issues by balancing the various factors rather than using one factor as the major explanation. What is needed now is a demonstration of this theory through a comprehensive analysis of the new religions. Obviously this is a large task and can be completed only by the cooperation of a number of scholars who will have to further/innovate if a generally accepted theory of new religious movements is to be achieved.

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## NOTES

1. This paper was read at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Oct. 17, 1969, and was published in Japanese translation in *Nihon Bukkyo*. Research for this paper was supported by Western Michigan University through a Faculty Research Grant and by a Study and Travel Grant to Japan from the Institute of International and Area Studies; grateful acknowledgment is also made for a 1969 summer stipend from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

2. H. Byron Earhart, *The New Religions of Japan: A Bibliography of Western-Language Materials*, a Monumenta Nipponica Monograph (Tokyo, 1970). Hereafter this work is referred to as *New Religions Bibliography*.

3. See *New Religions Bibliography*, app. C, "Comparative Materials for the Study of New Religious Movements."

4. For a brief analysis of "fossilization and renewal" in recent Japanese religion, see H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (Belmont, Calif., 1969), esp. pp. 69-98. Some friendly critics have voiced objection to the term fossilization, because it seems to have a pejorative connotation. However, the term is intended to be not pejorative but descriptive, indicating a tradition whose forms are preserved and whose ceremonies are practiced, but whose vitality is waning or almost absent.

5. This problem is treated at greater length in H. Byron Earhart, "The Interpretation of the 'New Religions' of Japan as Historical Phenomena," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 37.3: 237-48 (Sept. 1969).

6. See *New Religions Bibliography*, p. 6; see also items listed under "definition of new religions" in the topical index for other attempts to interpret the new religions.



7. The same problems of method and interpretation seem to trouble works on the Korean new religions, which quote the "crisis" theory that has been applied to the Japanese new religions. Spencer J. Palmer writes that in spite of the diversity of Korean new religions, "nevertheless, all of these New Religions have emerged from a common socio-ideological tradition, and they have been generated and shaped by the sudden impingement of the same kinds of outside forces" (Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *The New Religions of Korea*, Vol. XLIII of *Transactions of the Korea Branch, Royal Asiatic Society* [Seoul, 1967], p. 2). This so-called crisis theory needs to be reexamined both on the theoretical level and in its application to historical materials. The present article criticizes the crisis theory primarily in terms of its applicability to Japanese new religions, but it is both necessary and fruitful to consider its implications for comparative study.

8. Alexander F. Chamberlain, "'New Religions' Among the North American Indians, Etc.," *Journal of Religious Psychology*, 6.1:1-49 (Jan. 1913).

9. Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*, trans. Lisa Sergio (New York, 1965), pp. 223-27. See also the reviews in *Current Anthropology*, 5.4:47-65 (Oct. 1965). Another modern scholar who tends to follow Chamberlain is H. Neill McFarland, *The Rush Hour of the Gods: A Study of New Religious Movements in Japan* (New York, 1967); see esp. pp. 14-15.

10. See, for example, Guglielmo Guariglia, "Prophetismus und Heilserwartungs-Bewegungen als völkerkundliches und religions-geschichtliches Problem," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik*, 13:1-322 (1959).

11. Ralph Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist*, 45: 230-40, esp. 230 (1943).

12. Robert Lowie, "Primitive Messianism and an Ethnological Problem," *Diogenes*, 19:62-72, esp. 65 (Fall 1957).

13. Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia* (2d, augmented ed.; New York, 1968), pp. 472-76.

14. Marian W. Smith, "Towards a Classification of Cult Movements," *Man*, Jan. 1959, pp. 8-12. Smith is already commenting on Wallace's notion of revitalization.

15. Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist*, 58:264-81, esp. 265 (1956). See also his reply to Smith, entitled "Towards a Classification of Cult Movements: Some Further Contributions," *Man*, Feb. 1959, pp. 25-26. In his *Culture and Personality* (New York, 1961), pp. 143-44, there is a slightly modified definition of revitalization: "deliberate, organized attempts by some members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture by rapid acceptance of a pattern of multiple innovations." Wallace has elaborated his position somewhat in *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York, 1966), pp. 30-39, 157-66, 209-15. See also his pamphlet *Religious Revitalization: A Function of Religion in Human History and Evolution* (Boston, 1961).

16. Even in Japan we find the tendency to compare new religions to the early or the "new" stage of Buddhism and Christianity. It is obvious that a religious tradition varies considerably from its earlier to its later stages, but this does not necessarily constitute the earlier stage as a new religion. See Akio Saki, *Shinshū Sōkyō—Sore o Meguru Gendai no Jōken* (The new religions—the contemporary conditions surrounding them; Tokyo, 1960), pp. 52-53.

17. Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York, 1962), pp. 120, 122, 313.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

21. W. E. H. Stanner, "On the Interpretation of Cargo Cults," *Oceania*, 29:1-25 (1958). After this article was written, there came to my attention the recent work by Palle Christiansen, *The Melanesian Cargo Cult: Millenarianism As a Factor in Cultural Change*, trans. John R. B. Gosney (Copenhagen, 1969). Christiansen, too, in reviewing interpretations of cargo cults, calls into question both "Frustration and Stress Theories" and "The Deprivation Theory." At several major points my argument is in agreement with Christiansen (who criticizes overemphasis on factors external to the culture where such movements arise and who asks for more study of the factors inherent in the culture).

22. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological Review*, p. 30, states that "new religions, far from being conservative, are often radically destructive of existing institutions, aiming to resolve conflict not by manipulation of the self but by manipulation of the real world." In the first half of this statement Wallace recognizes the potentially disruptive aspect of new religions, but in the second half he attributes this potentiality to the shift from the personal to the "real world." In short, he does not seem to recognize the symbolic character of both the personal and "real" worlds, whether the attitude be conservative or otherwise.

23. Christiansen, *The Melanesian Cargo Cult*, p. 126, notes that "whether the individual author sees the cargo cult as a positive or a negative phenomenon depends, as stated previously, on whether he regards social and cultural change as a normal or abnormal process." Elisabeth Tooker has argued effectively against Wallace's theory that revitalization is due to disorganization. Analyzing Wallace's main example of the Handsome Lake religion, she concludes that "the explanation for the introduction of the New Religion of Handsome Lake is not to be found in the gross disorganization of Iroquois society at the time, but in the specific changes in the society, some of which have been interpreted as evidence of disorganization." See her "On the New Religion of Handsome Lake," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 41.4:187-200, esp. 190 (Oct. 1968).

24. Christiansen, *The Melanesian Cargo Cult*, p. 125, in concluding his criticism of crisis theories, states that "all these points of view are the expression of functional explanations, the roots of which go back to Radcliffe-Brown, who regarded the new religions in the traditional societies in Africa and Oceania as an attempt to 'relieve a condition of social dysnomia.'" See A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York, 1965), pp. 183-84. See also Wallace's critical comments on functionalism in *Religion: An Anthropological View*, p. 38.

25. Stanner, "On the Interpretation of Cargo Cults," p. 21.

26. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, p. 325, holds that "value-oriented beliefs . . . arise when alternative means for reconstituting the social situation are perceived as unavailable."

27. Clifford Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (New York, 1966), pp. 1-46. Burridge argues Geertz's theoretical point in a concrete situation by insisting on the significance of symbolic representations in the cargo move-



ments. See Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: A Study of Melanesian Cargo Movements and Their Social and Ideological Background* (New York, 1970), pp. 272-73. In reviewing some of the crisis and revitalization theories, I have been intrigued by the fact that they neglect the rich field of new aesthetic movements. I suspect that the same critique of the homeostasis theory could be made on the basis of a study of new art styles. See Meyer Schapiro, "Style," in *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory*, ed. A. L. Kroeber (Chicago, 1953), pp. 287-312, esp. p. 287: "Style is . . . a common ground against which innovations and the individuality of particular works may be measured," by study of which the art historian can "account for the changes of style."

28. See Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (original title, *Birth and Rebirth*), trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1965).

29. In other words, cultural continuity and renewal movements are not mutually exclusive. I am emphasizing the thrust for renewal, or regeneration, because it is essential for new religious movements.

30. See Earhart, *Japanese Religion*, pp. 5-8, for a description of six persistent themes in Japanese religion. The same themes are found in the Japanese new religions, as demonstrated in my article "The Significance of the 'New Religions' for Understanding Japanese Religion," *KBS Bulletin on Japanese Culture*, No. 101, pp. 1-9 (Apr.-May 1970).

31. See the adaptation of the revitalization theory to Japanese Utopian movements by David W. Plath, "The Fate of Utopia: Adaptive Tactics in Four Japanese Groups," *American Anthropologist*, 68.5:1152-62 (1966). See also the article by Koepfing, who follows Linton's theory of nativistic movements and its categories in his interpretation of a Japanese new religion: Klaus Peter Koepfing, "Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan: A Preliminary Discussion of a Recent Religious Movement in Japan," *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, 8.2:101-34, esp. 132-34 (June 1967). Brief mention of Wallace's theory of revitalization is made in Dator's functional interpretation of Sōka Gakkai: James Allen Dator, *Sōka Gakkai, Builders of the Third Civilization: American and Japanese Members* (Seattle & London, 1969), pp. 128-31. Harold W. Turner has proposed the study of new religious movements in the context of "the encounter of a primal society and its religion with one or more of the higher cultures and their major religions." See his "A New Field in the History of Religions?" *Journal of Religion and Religions*, Vol. I, No. 1.

32. Works by Noah S. Brannen, James Allen Dator, Kiyooki Murata, and David W. Plath are discussed in my "Recent Publication on the Japanese New Religions," *History of Religions*, 10.4:375-85.