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## Views on the Pursuit of Happiness in Japanese New Religions

### The Vitalistic Conception of Salvation and Systems of Instruction

This article presents views on, and approaches to, the pursuit of happiness in Japanese new religions, and elucidates their theodicean features. Using as its frame of reference the vitalistic conception of salvation, a fundamentally identical structure in views on salvation and the world in new religions, this article focuses on the systems of instruction (*kyōdō shisutemu*) they use as it proceeds. The article relies mainly on statements from the major religious groups for its sources, making reference also to groups categorized as “new new religions.” The study ascertained that the new religions have in common a rationally systematized theodicy. They have a shared world view that holds that a person (1) should “polish their heart,” strive to live the right way, and return to the true nature of a pure and unspoiled human being; and (2) should put teachings into practice in their everyday lives, proactively reach out to other people, disseminate the truth, and carry out deeds that are useful in the world; through that process, a person will (3) earn “blessings” and “merit” from a transcendent being that in turn will (4) make it possible to enjoy a happy life. Furthermore, the study also makes clear that not just appealing to a transcendent being but also engaging in ethical practices and discipline in one’s life are necessary conditions for enjoying happiness.

KEYWORDS: Japanese new religions—theodicy—vitalistic conception of salvation—  
instruction system—worldly benefits

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THE OBJECTIVE of this article is to elucidate the kinds of views on happiness that Japanese new religions preach, the instruction they give about how to pursue it, and their logic and practices that make it possible to obtain happiness.

Max Weber wielded the concept of “theodicy” (Ger. *Theodizee*) to give meaning to happiness and suffering. Weber argued that there were only three bodies of thought in the world’s religions that provided theodicies that were logically consistent: those of Indian karma [Ger. *Karman*], Zoroastrian dualism, and predeterminism with its hidden god [*Deus Absconditus*] (WEBER 1972, 48). He contrasted predeterminism premised by an all-powerful god with human beings being guided to a purely ethical rotation/revolution, and assessed the teachings of karma, Zoroastrian dualism, Confucianism, and Japanese Buddhism as not evoking ethical demands nor forming a rational, secular inner life and attitude based on abstemiousness in this world. Weber further argued that the core of mass religious consciousness in Asia, including Japan, lay not in wonder (*wunder*) but rather in magic (*Magie*). Magic is an irrational operation that destroys all meaningful connections between phenomena, according to Weber; it stood in a contrastive relationship with wonder, which was regarded as an act of rational global domination and bestowed by god’s blessings (WEBER 1951; 1958; 1963).

The present article seeks to answer the question of what makes up the theodicean characteristics of Japan’s new religions. Of course, while “new religions” may be a short phrase, the *Shinshūkyō kyōdan jinbutsu jiten* (The encyclopedia of new religious groups and persons in Japan) presents articles on some three hundred such groups (INOUE et al. eds. 1996). There is considerable variation depending on the period in which these religions were created or stepped to the forefront, as well as on their pedigree (Shinto-derived, *Lotus Sutra*-worshipping, and so on). Nonetheless, it has been noted that if one brackets the details of jargon and teachings unique to each group separately and focuses on overall structure, they basically share an identical world view that has been termed a vitalistic conception of salvation (TSUSHIMA et al. 1979).

In the following, I proceed by reviewing key concepts extracted from empirical Japanese research on new religions while presenting specific discourses (lessons, sermons, teachings, doctrines) from the groups. The ideas, concepts, and

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examples presented in this article rely heavily on a series of surveys conducted regarding “instruction systems” and “religious strategies for interpreting and resolving problems in life” under the direction of former (now emeritus) Toyo University Professor Nishiyama Shigeru (joint researchers Kojima Nobuyuki, Ōnishi Katsuaki, Tsukada Hotaka, and Kumamoto Masaki).<sup>1</sup> Please note that some of the materials contained herein duplicate existing articles and reports.

### *Vitalistic Views of Salvation in New Religions*

In this section, I will advance my argument by stipulating that the new religions are religions formed through mass-led movements that established a new religious style, and relatively different from the religious traditions formed prior to the early modern period. They have been created or have upsurged in the years since around the Bakumatsu (the end of the Edo) and Meiji Restoration periods (mid nineteenth century; see NISHIYAMA 2005).

Groups originating or upsurging between the end of the Edo and the early years of the Meiji periods include Kurozumikyō 黒住教, Tenrikyō 天理教, Honmon Butsuryūkō (later Honmon Butsuryūshū 本門佛立宗), Konkōkyō 金光教, Maruyamakyō 丸山教, and Renmonkyō 蓮門教. From the later Meiji to the Taishō periods there were Ōmoto 大本, Taireidō 太霊道, Honmichi ほんみち, Amatsukyō 天津教, Ennōkyō 円応教, and Bukkyō Kanka Kyūsaikai 仏教感化救済会 (later Hōon-ji 法音寺). From the end of the Taishō through the early Shōwa periods arose Hitonomichi (later Pāfekuto ribatī kyōdan パーフエクト・リバテイー教団, also known as PL Kyōdan), Nenpō Shinkyō 念法眞教, Gedatsukai 解脱会, Reiyūkai 霊友会, Seichō no Ie 生長の家, Bentenshū 辯天宗, Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教, and Soshindō 祖神道. Groups that emerged to prominence from the end of the war to the years of high-speed growth included Jiu 璽宇, Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō 天照皇大神宮教, Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, Busshō Go'nenkai 佛所護念会, Myōchikai 妙智會, Zenrinkai (later Zenrinkyō 善隣教), Nakayama Shingo Shōshū 中山身語正宗, Byakkō Shinkōkai 白光眞宏会, and Reiha no Hikari 靈波之光. Following the high-speed growth years, Shinnyoen 眞如苑, Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan 世界眞光文明教団, Sūkyō Mahikari

1. These surveys were conducted using Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research for fiscal years 2002–2003, 2004–2005, and 2006–2007, as well as research commissioned by the Chuo Academic Research Institute in fiscal 2004. Nishiyama Shigeru was the principal investigator for each of these surveys. Nishiyama's research office published three research reports and five collections of survey data based on the surveys conducted during these periods. The results in the present article are based on the prefatory considerations compiled by NISHIYAMA (2008). Other participants in the seminar aside from those mentioned in the text who also assisted with research while the work was being carried out included Hirayama Shin, Kawamata Toshinori, Ōtani Eiichi, Aota Tadashi, Tagaki Noriko, Togashi Akifumi, Mizuno Noriko, Takizawa Akinori, Watanabe Masamichi, and Satō Hiroshi.

崇教真光, GLA, Agonshū 阿含宗, Kenshōkai 顕正会, Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教, Kōfuku no Kagaku (Happy Science) 幸福の科学, and Worldmate ワールドメイト all stepped forth. New religions have developed and become prominent in several waves, and these groups have their respective systems of belief, practice, and organizational structure.

Research into the belief systems (precepts and thought) of the new religions has been pursued based on three approaches: (1) to understand them in terms of their links with traditional religions and relationship with their intellectual foundations; (2) to understand them as expressions of popular and mass Japanese thought; and (3) to see the new religions as having unique teachings distinct from those of the existing religious traditions, and to understand in an immanent way the structure of their religious thought (TSUSHIMA 1990a, 213).<sup>2</sup> The vitalistic conception of salvation that the present article presumes as its point of reference is a concept that arose from the third of the approaches mentioned above.

I would like to provide a basic summary here of an article written by TSUSHIMA et al. (1979). The article investigates eleven religious groups: Kurozumikyō, Konkōkyō, Tenrikyō, Ōmotokyo, Reiyukai, Seichō no Ie, Risshō Kōseikai, PL Kyōdan, Sōka Gakkai, Sekai Kyuseikyō, and Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō. According to Tsushima, the precepts of the new religions are identical in terms of their basic structure. A deity in these groups is conceptualized as “the source from which all life emanates and the source which nurtures all life,” or even as “the Original Life” itself. They (whether in the singular or plural sense) have the image of “a motherly being who affectionately nurtures all things.” The true nature of a human being, on the other hand, is conceptualized as “an individualized manifestation of the Original Life or an existence which has been endowed with this life force” that is “divine, unpolluted, pure, and perfect.” Human beings are considered as being “kept alive” and “nurtured by the gracious and infinite benefit of the Original Life” who “cannot exist independent of it.” Deriving from this is the understanding that human beings are naturally obliged to be grateful for this welcome beneficence. To forget that they were given life out of that, to not have a sense of gratefulness, and to cling to their ego and their selfish desires is conceptualized as being “evil” and a “sin.” This is the root of “suffering” and “misfortune.” It becomes possible to gain happiness by renouncing self-interest and self-centeredness, and by recovering the heart of one who is grateful for

2. Examples of the first approach are the research of Hori Ichirō 堀 一郎, Fujii Masao 藤井正雄, Miyata Noboru 宮田 登, and Kōmoto Mitsugi 孝本 貢. The second may be exemplified by the research of Saki Akio 佐木秋夫, Takagi Hiroo, Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良, Yasumaru Yoshio, and Kozawa Hiroshi 小沢 浩, while the research of Tsurufuji Ikuta 鶴藤幾太, Morioka Kiyomi 森岡清美, Ikeda Akira 池田 昭, Shimazono Susumu 島薮 進, and Tsushima Michihito illustrates the third.

the blessings of life. The specific norms and practices demanded of humans therein are regarded as expressions of a sense of gratitude toward other people and things, as well as ethical conduct in daily life such as integrity, honesty, and sincerity. On the other hand, the explanation given for why misfortunes occur to people who live with a “proper heart” is that some selfish or self-centered behavior in the past (in one’s previous life or on the part of an ancestor) is creating a blockage in the present life through the influence of the genealogical relationships among lives. The foregoing are essential to theories on the cause of misfortunes as well as the theodicies of new religions as presented in the above-mentioned article.

Tsushima would subsequently recast the vitalistic conception of salvation into the broader “vitalistic world view and conception of salvation.” Thought on human life would be categorized into the idea of it as a living collective that derives directly from a parent deity, that is, a cosmic life force, and the idea that it is supported by reciprocal linkages with other living beings (parents and ancestors, as well as other people and animals with whom we have a connection) that surround us. He conceptualized the former as “great life thought” and the latter as “spirit world thought” (TSUSHIMA 1990b). As to how they are related, Tsushima argues that life thought accounts for the fundamental part of the so-called world view in the majority of new religious groups. Spirit world thought does not appear on its own; rather, generally it is found together with great life thought.

The vitalistic conception of salvation is strongly compelling as a bottom-up concept closely related to the realm of experience, and has become one of the best-known in the study of the history of new religions (NISHIYAMA 2005, 219; YUMIYAMA 2003, 51). Many scholars in the field, including the present author, have touched on and cited it, and special sessions were organized at the 2002 conference of the Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society and the 2008 conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies to discuss it.<sup>3</sup>

Various opinions have been put forth about the concept, but to the author’s mind its validity remains completely unshaken. However, researchers have pointed out a number of considerations that should be noted: (1) follow-up efforts at corroboration are necessary given the strongly tentative character of the assumptions underpinning this concept; (2) careful studies of each group are needed, particularly in regard to the relationships between “self-directed spiritual renewal” (*jirikiteki na kokoronaoshi* 自力的な心なおし) and “other-directed esoteric ritual” (*tarikiteki na higi* 他力的な秘儀) and between “official doctrine” and “on-the-spot precepts”; (3) there is room for investigation as to

3. For details regarding the two sessions, refer to the *Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society* (2004), and KOJIMA et al. (2009). Regarding the literature that refers to the vitalistic conception of salvation, see TERADA (2009).

whether or not one can observe vitalistic conceptions of salvation and world views in new religions that have been created or stepped to the forefront in post-modern social conditions (the so-called “new new religions”); (4) it is hoped there will be comparative research into whether one can detect similar views on salvation and the world in religions elsewhere in East Asia and outside of Japan; and (5) careful studies should be made into the similarities and differences with the Taishō vitalism concept that has been presented in literary studies.<sup>4</sup> The present article proceeds with considerations (1) and (3) in mind.

### *Theodicies of Happiness in New Religions*

The following kinds of teachings can be ascertained when we reexamine the vitalistic concept of salvation from the perspective of views on happiness. Let us examine the discourses of Konkōkyō, Tenrikyō, and Seichō no Ie:

Kami (the deity) does not exist separate from human beings. The function of Kami is to create the foundations for humans to live. People cannot maintain themselves without the functioning of Kami. We turn to Kami, pour in the heart and soul of our lives that Kami has produced, and do our best to make that truth function. By so doing, we reveal our own function on a line in the manner of actualizing and making manifest the will of Kami. Thanks to our doing so, Kami is given expression there.

(Konkōkyō: KONKŌKYŌ HONBU KYŌCHŌ 1972, 225 )

Konkōkyō explains that by becoming a human being who makes manifest the workings of Kami—that is to say, a *kamihito*, it becomes possible to achieve the *medeta medeta* [happy, happy] lot in life of “ancestral and familial prosperity” through “safety and health”:

God the Parent (Oyagami) created human beings to see the Joyous Life of humankind and, thus, to share in that joy. To bring this intent of God the Parent into realization is the significance of human life.

(Tenrikyō: TENRIKYŌ KYŌKAI HONBU 1973, 69)

In Tenrikyō, a “paradise on earth” without illness, hardship, or privation is expressed as *yōki-gurashi* (translated by the group as “joyous life”). The Oya-

4. Regarding the above-mentioned points, see NISHIYAMA (2008) as well as both the *Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society* (2004), and KOJIMA et al. (2009). In particular, refer to Tsushima Michihito’s summary briefing, Yumiyama Tatsuya’s report, and floor comments from Nishiyama Shigeru at the 2002 Religion and Society conference, and to Kojima Nobuyuki’s panel summaries and comments from the 2008 Japanese Association for Religious Studies conference; see KOJIMA et al. (2009). NISHIYAMA (2008) attempts to investigate items 1 and 2; Terada attempts to investigate item 5 (TERADA 2014).

gami, it explains, created human beings in order to bring about such a life. As for Seichō no Ie:

The life of human beings is that of being “children of god.” They were created to enjoy from the start, to be happy from the start. . . . True enjoyment and delight are generated from within. Because human beings are the children of God, immanent within them they have enjoyment and delight that can always be called out if they call it out. (Seichō no Ie: TANIGUCHI 1996, 156)

The True God or True Buddha is a being without limits, like teaching only about the next life or the flesh or the soul. . . . Because human beings were made by god, they were not made with imperfections like becoming ill. And inconsistencies did not take place, like God making human beings to commit sins or to punish them for such. If there is no sin in this world that God made, then there is also no illness. . . . If that True Image befitting God or Buddha is not understood . . . then you cannot achieve true happiness.

(Seichō no Ie: TANIGUCHI 1962, 24–28)

Next we turn to Kōfuku no Kagaku, which has not yet been addressed in the literature from the perspective of a vitalistic conception of salvation:

Why is it that human beings are able to want happiness in the first place? The reason for this is because human beings are children of the light that have branched off from the one God. And if human beings are the children of God, then one would expect human beings to have within them the same disposition as a god. . . . So, what exactly does the happiness of a God mean? What on earth might God feel happy about? Might not God take pleasure at creation, evolution, development, and prosperity? Within the great harmony of all things developing and prospering? Amid the experience on the way of that tremendous development taking place? This is what I feel.

(Kōfuku no Kagaku: ŌKAWA 1990, 179–81)

We can see that Kōfuku no Kagaku—a group categorized as a so-called “new religion”—also sticks to the same type of world view and rhetoric as the “old” new religions.

To achieve a happy lot in life, the following practices must be undertaken. Let us look at Konkōkyō, Tenrikyō, and Seichō no Ie.

Whether we can accept blessings or not is something that lies within our hearts. If we can only renew our hearts, we can receive any number of blessings. (Konkōkyō: KONKŌKYŌ HONBU KYŌCHŌ 1989, 54–55)

Originally, the relationship between Oyagami and the human beings who were made out of divinity’s intent was that of parent and child; it certainly was not a relationship lacking in affinity. However, with the free spirits they have

been given, human beings over many years became selfish in their attentions and prideful.

I would like to see human beings firmly change and develop a spirit of single-hearted salvation (*tasuke ichijō*). If human beings would only develop a spirit of supporting and helping one another, Oyagami would also save them in some way. (Tenrikyō: TENRIKYŌ KYŌKAI HONBU 1973, 212–13)

To become truly happy, one must control the desires of the ego in the correct direction. . . . To become truly happy, one must have a generous mind. . . . When a person is truly pardoned, and all incidents and affairs are accepted with a sense of gratitude, a person can obtain the release of his/her soul.

(Seichō no Ie: TANIGUCHI 1996, 169)

Among Buddhist-derived new religions, the logic extolled is similar, though they use the Buddha (*hotoke-sama*) in place of God or Oyagami. Here is an example from Nenpō Shinkyō:

Leave everything up to the Buddha when it comes to past karma. If you treasure and value this world, and work with all your heart to accumulate virtue and do good, then there is nothing to worry about. For example, even when some karma has made itself known, the Buddha will protect you so that great misfortunes become small ones and small ones become nothing at all. . . . We must first “polish our hearts” and chase out the gloom. . . . The heart in essence is something that is perfectly pure. It is the self that darkens it.

(Nenpō Shinkyō: Ogurayama Kongō-ji 小倉山金剛寺, *Nenpō hōgoshū* [*Kaiteiban*] 念法語集[改訂版], 1984, as cited in KOJIMA 2008, 16)

The “ethic of purity” that Fujii Takeshi noted can be clearly observed here (FUJII 1990).<sup>5</sup> By returning to the true “pure” and “unspoiled” nature of a human being freed from self-centeredness and self-interest through “polishing the heart” and “polishing the soul,” it becomes possible to obtain the “blessings” and “help” of a “god” or “Oyagami” or “Buddha” and thus obtain or receive happiness. Deities and humans are not separate from one another. They are “parents and children” or “children of gods” who have the “same dispositions.” They were made “to be happy in essence.” The foregoing theodicies regarding happiness can be seen.

5. See Yasumaru Yoshio’s concept of “the philosophy of heart.” However, caution is necessary with regard to the differences between the folk morality of hard work, filial piety, harmony, self-sacrifice, and subservience and the nature of the correct heart that the new religions espouse (YASUMARU 1999).



### *Worldly Benefits in New Religions*

Words that appear in the teachings of the new religions such as *okage* (“blessings”), *tasuke* (“help”), *kudoku* 功德 (“merit”), and *genshō* 現証 (“actual proof”) refer to improvements in situations and changes in fortune in real life—that is, worldly benefits. The new religions are forthright in their preaching about worldly benefits, but there are individual variations in how they go about it. Furthermore, even the same group will change its content and tone regarding worldly benefits promised depending on the times. Let us look here at Sōka Gakkai, who teach about worldly benefits in an easily understood fashion and a direct way of speaking. First I will present statements from Toda Jōsei 戸田城聖:

By believing in the Gohonzon 御本尊 (“object of devotion”) and working hard on the Daimoku 題目 (chanting “*Namu myōhō renge kyō*”) to train oneself and teach others, the sick will become healthy, the poor wealthy, and the foolish clever.

(Sōka Gakkai: *Daibyakurenge* 大白蓮華, January 1964, as cited in NISHIYAMA 2012, 50)

The next time we come into this world, we want to have thirty maids and five servants, graduate from a first-class university, marry a fine girl, and enjoy supreme happiness together with our gifted children . . .

(Sōka Gakkai: *Daibyakurenge*, September 1956, as cited in NISHIYAMA 2012, 50)

Next, I offer statements from when Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 was president.

Even if the doctors have given up, the Gohonzon will save you. If you confess to having disparaged the teachings, and devoutly strive in your prayers to be made healthy because you sincerely have faith and will be useful to spreading the word, you will certainly be bathed in the expansive merit of the Gohonzon.

(Sōka Gakkai: Izumi Satoru 和泉覚, *Shidō no izumi* 指導の泉, Seikyō shinbunsha 聖教新聞社, 1979, as cited in ŌNISHI 2008, 88)

You cannot say that a religion where obtaining merit in this life is a given and prayers are powerless in this world is a true or correct religion.

(Sōka Gakkai: KODAIRA 1962, 113)

If you join Sōka Gakkai and believe sincerely, no matter how serious your illness you will be healed.

(Sōka Gakkai: KODAIRA 1962, 115)

The Sōka Gakkai of more recent years has adopted the following tone:

It is taught that when you deeply believe the Gohonzon and strongly chant the Daimoku, a powerful life force wells up and you can overcome any disease and become healthy. Believing that with good grace and practicing it

is important. . . . If you decide you cannot get well, then naturally no matter how much you pray you won't get well. If you can decide and pray that you absolutely will try to heal yourself, then you will start on the path to recovery. In that sense, you can say that illness is not about whether you will passively "get well" or not, but rather about to actively "heal or not heal."

For that reason, even when you are seriously ill the crucial thing is to decide to be forward-looking and pray that you will "turn poison into medicine, change my fate, and make this a chance to be even healthier than ever before.

(Sōka Gakkai: Kawai Hajime 河合一, *Zoku: Seikatsu ni ikiru shinkō*  
Q&A 続・生活に生きる信仰 Q&A, Daisanbunmeisha 第三文明社,  
1997, as cited in ŌNISHI 2008, 89)

One can perceive that the optimistic worldly benefits of the Toda and Ikeda eras have changed into soft and cautious turns of phrase with the changes in the times and the maturation of the group. Of course, changes of this nature were not limited to Sōka Gakkai. However, whether in the past or today, there has been no change when it comes to new religions regarding the pressing problems of life, such as unease, anxiety, and torment brought about by need, illness, and disputes, as well as the expectations for improving the situation. Let us examine some Risshō Kōseikai discourse from recent years:

When suffering is produced due to troubles over illness or relationships with other people, everyone hopes that it will be quickly alleviated. There are many people who seek relief from real suffering and turn to deities and buddhas. Beneficial worldly merit (*genzeriyakuteki na kudoku*) is what most average people seek of religion. This is the thread that leads to religion. Such prayers expressing the desire to be saved are important for human beings. They should not be disavowed. (Risshō Kōseikai: NIWANO 2008, 160–61)

The fact that one should not disavow "beneficial worldly merit" is of note here. We turn next to a statement from Seichō no Ie about the relationship between human happiness and "desire":

Having been born as human beings, we want to live in happiness. We as humans instinctively have this desire. However, life is not filled solely with such happy people. Why is this so? One reason is because they do not know the "laws of the mind," and another is because they do not know what happiness is. (Seichō no Ie: TANIGUCHI 1967, 3)

The fact that human beings have desire is undeniable. They explain that it first becomes possible to enjoy happiness by learning the laws of the mind and coming to know what true happiness is. Worldmate, a group categorized as one of the so-called new new religions, also uses similar logic about happiness and desire:

What is happiness to you? . . . It is regularly praying for people to be able to relieve the dissatisfactions in their daily lives, or to be able to satisfy their own desires. Because human beings are born into this world in the flesh, it is natural for them to try to give that flesh satisfaction; since they have minds desiring pleasant conditions, this is also understandable. However, there is no end to human desires. If you can get satisfaction for one, another dissatisfaction is created. Satisfy that and yet another new desire arises. You eventually surrender yourself to the nonstop flow of desires. . . . One might just think that human beings hoping for happiness might be the source of their ruin, but that is not the case. That's because ruin is invited by errors in the method for seeking happiness. (Worldmate: FUKAMI 1987, 16–17)<sup>6</sup>

While new religions affirm worldly benefits, they do not preach that you cannot obtain “blessings,” “results,” or “actual proof” if you do not fully understand the content of their teachings. Let us return to Sōka Gakkai:

The creation of the values [of gain, good, and beauty] lays a foundation in the life force of each person. So long as a person's life force is as strong as it can be, that person can obtain happiness. This life force absolutely cannot be obtained through ascetic practices or false religions. A strong and pure life force will be drawn up precisely through the one ultimate religion.

(Sōka Gakkai: TODA 1963, 113)

Question: If you worship the Gohonzon, why are illnesses healed and why do you make money? Answer: The reason why there is merit is not something to be understood through theory. You will understand it only by having faith and experiencing it. Life is not truly understood by only learning through theory, by only imagining and surmising. You understand quickly only if you experience it.

(Sōka Gakkai: KODAIRA 1962, 117)

The enjoyment of worldly benefits through recitations of this sort is broadly apparent in *Lotus Sutra*-worshipping new religions. The earliest appearance of the discourse is in the homilies of Honmon Butsuryūshū. It is through worldly benefits that people are first instructed in the teachings:

If the actual proof has benefits, naturally it is from the five characters of wondrous law that people believe.

(Nagamatsu Nissen 長松日扇, HONMON BUTSURYŪSHŪ KYŌIKUIN 1973, 115)

### *Theodicies of Suffering in New Religions*

How do new religions deal with theodicies of suffering, that is, the issues related to “the imperfectness of the world”? Why are people confronted with need, ill-

6. The name of the group at that time was Cosmomate.

ness, and disputes? Or being beset from all sides, or the loss of purpose in life, or unease, anxiety, and torment? Let us return to Seichō no Ie:

The human sufferings given to us have within them some aspect that is not natural to our lives—that is to say, not on the true path of growth. They appear in order to make us aware of those aspects that are not natural.

(Seichō no Ie: TANIGUCHI 1962, 25)

The theory on the causes of suffering being argued here is that the “Great Life of the Universe” (the Oyasama) is making human beings take notice since they have forgotten “the true path of growth,” that is, the fact they are the children of god, and that they have strayed from correct ways of living and of how they frame their minds. The Great Life is providing them with the opportunity to polish their souls. “The Oyasama does not take pleasure in the suffering of we children,” the group believes. “We are given suffering and illness of necessity when we will not grow if we are not made to suffer” (TANIGUCHI 1962, 13). The sense that there is a loving god in the background is noticeable here. The rhetoric used to explain that such misfortunes and suffering are messages from the gods or buddhas takes such forms as *o-tameshi* (trials) (Konkōkyō), *kami no michi-oshie* (the path-teaching of the kami) or *michi-ose* (road signs) (Tenrikyō), *mishirase* (divine warning) (PL Kyōdan), *osatoshi* (admonition) (Risshō Kōseikai), *kaikoku* (warning) (Mahikari-derived groups), and *riburai* (reminders) (Shinnyo-en).

Seichō no Ie teaches that “misfortune” and “doubt” will “disintegrate” by opening one’s eyes to the “truth” and cleansing the “mind” and the “environment.” However, it also teaches that “during certain periods suffering is needed for our souls to grow” and “sufferings and sadnesses of any sort are disciplines we are all thankful for having gotten as materials for the limitless growth of the self” (TANIGUCHI 1962, 10–11). Comments about “disciplines” and “tests” to improve the soul can be seen in many religious groups.

Such theories on the causes of suffering are shared by many groups. Zenrinkyō’s theories on the cause of illness provide one of the most interesting examples. Tsukada Hotaka has reported that the group has indicated separate discourses on the cause of suffering (all originating in one’s frame of mind) based on the affected part—digestive tract, circulatory system, urinary system, respiration, and so forth—and, in the case of cancer, the specific type: stomach, esophagus, colon, bile passage, bowels, larynx, lungs, skin, bladder, prostate, uterus, and breast (Zenrinkai Kyōmushitsu 1990, cited in TSUKADA 2008, 110–11).<sup>7</sup> Zenrinkyō argues that illnesses arise from having a “straying heart.”

7. See *Zenrinkai kyōmushitsu* 善隣会教務室, ed., *Shirīzu Zenrinkyō* (5), *Byōki konzetsu kenkōhō* シリーズ善隣教 (五) 病根絶健康法, 1990, and *Shirīzu Zenrinkyō* (7), *Gan konzetsu yobōhō* シリーズ善隣教 (七) 癌根絶予防法, 1991.

The significance assigned to this is that of a “compassionate reminder” from the Goshinzon-*sama* (*Tenchi ōmioya no kami*, or the god of heaven and earth who made all things). Resolution can be achieved by deeply reflecting on one’s stance, attitude, and frame of mind toward others, and by improving one’s “approach to real human relationships.”

For its part, Seichō no Ie pairs the above-mentioned theories on the cause of suffering and its theodicies with respect to the living environment—the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) of home, workplace, and school—that is connected to reality, with the following take on problems that include “the karmic relationship of past lives”—framing the latter as the vertical temporal axis in contrast to the horizontal axis that the former represent:

Regarding the source of illness, if we observe this vertically in a temporal sense, then if the cause was created by someone’s first generation then there is also a karmic relationship that has been handed down by the children and grandchildren across the generations and tens of generations after it was created. . . . There are also many cases in which especially incurable and malignant diseases arise in the flesh in order to nullify the sins through the self-mortification of the soul (*reikon*) of the human being who created the sinful deed in a past generation. Thus, even as the soul does want to try to heal the illness in the spirit of the flesh, it also delights in cleansing the sins from past lives with deformities in the soul itself and incurable malignant diseases to one’s power and by gaining strength to cause suffering. . . . The intention of the soul immanent in a person to want to become ill manifests itself . . . and it is difficult to get well. (Seichō no Ie: TANIGUCHI 1962, 34)

In such cases, “sin is not intrinsic.”<sup>8</sup> The method for resolving this is “to make the spirit in the depths of a person self-aware of the truth [that] even without self-mortification this is entirely a full circle (*ensō*) [of the no-mind for contemplation].” In that event, the recommended thing to do is to teach and recite the scripture (*seikyō dokujū*) [meaning to recite *Kanro no hō* 『甘露の法雨』 to ancestors and aborted children]. Also, the literature on the vitalistic conception of salvation speaks of “selfish and self-centered behavior in the past” of previous lives or those of one’s ancestors, but Seichō no Ie teaches that not only past lives or ancestors but also “karmic relationships” and such “lost souls” as aborted children, the souls of relatives, the souls of “earthbound spirits” (*jibaku no rei* 地縛の霊), and the souls of strangers (*mu'en no rei* 無縁の霊) produce misfortunes through notions (*sōnen* 想念) and pulses (*hadō* 波動). This illustrates an aspect of the “spirit world thought” of which Tsushima made note, and is often preached in new religions derived from Ōmotokyō or Sekai Kyuseikyō.

8. *Tsumi* 罪 (“sin”) is regarded as coming from *tsumi* 積み (“accumulation”) of other things that have piled up upon those that originally were with us and block our original freedom.

“Teaching and reciting” corresponds to an “other-directed esoteric ritual” in Seichō no Ie, while in Sekai Kyūseikyō it is *jōrei* 淨靈 (“cleansing the soul”) and in Mahikari-derived groups it is the *mahikari no waza* or *tekazashi* (names for their hand ritual of channeling a purifying “pure light”). However, that is not to say they teach that the workings from the spirit world or past lives absolutely cannot resolve matters if they do not rely on such other-directed esoteric rituals:

No matter how great the *meguri* (accumulated past offenses of one’s family) are, you can get them removed through faith. The *meguri* from your ancestors, divine punishments—Kami (the deity) will lead you to the path.

(Konkōkyō: KONKŌKYŌ HONBU KYŪCHŌ 1989, 45)

The Gohonzon and chanting the Daimoku correspond to other-directed esoteric rituals in Sōka Gakkai. However, the group teaches that you cannot gain other-directed merit (Gohonzon) if you do not autonomously and proactively make a self-directed approach of your own. Furthermore, while many Buddhist-derived new religions teach that the karma and karmic relationships of one’s own past lives are the cause of misfortunes, they do not specify that as the only reason:

If you are sick due to the karma of your own past lives or due to an evil spirit, then you certainly will not get well if you do not rely on the great Gohonzon of *namu myōhō rengekyō*.

(Sōka Gakkai: KODAIRA 1962, 113–16)

In new religions, the theory on the cause of suffering they provide for when confronted with suffering or unjustness is that (1) it is a notice from the transcendent being (kami, Buddha) that the person has strayed from the proper way of living or frame of mind; (2) it is an operation of the spirit world, such as a soul or karmic relationship; or (3) it is retribution for an evil or sinful act in a past life. With respect to karma, the pattern is to explain that one aspired to it of one’s own accord (a) in order to get rid of a sin committed in a past life or (b) to take on the mission of saving people. Let us examine (a) here:

Sinful acts such as disparaging Buddhist teachings that have built up as a cause in past lives produce retribution as their effect in our lives in the present generation. For that reason, it is a natural principle that if you accumulate heavy sinful acts then the retribution will likewise be heavy. However, on this point, to “convert retribution into something borne lightly” (*tenjū kyōju* 転重軽受) means you can take the weighty retribution that in essence must be borne not only in the present life but over the future as well into something to be borne lightly in this life so those sinful acts will all be expiated. As to why this is possible, it is because the meritorious power of the protecting law will be stored, and will work in the life of the practitioner through the practitioner’s belief in the true law in the current life and assiduousness in their disciplines.

(Sōka Gakkai: SŌKA GAKKAI KYŪGAKUBU eds. 2002, 309)

They proclaim a theory on the cause of suffering that is based on sinful acts in past lives. But in a major difference from the fatalism of Indian teachings on *Karman*, the group offers the affirmative and optimistic precept that it can be totally changed depending on how you lead your life in the present:

Seen from the perspective of an individual's karma (*shukugō* 宿業), suffering presents a splendid opportunity to change one's fate. Through the merit produced by practicing the true law, all of the bad karma etched in one's life can be revealed in this life and eliminated.

(Sōka Gakkai: SŌKA GAKKAI KYŌGAKUBU eds. 2002, 293)

Examples of pattern (b) can be found in the Sōka Gakkai concept of *ganken ogō* 願兼於業, or “assuming bad karma of one's own volition,” and that of *ganshō* 願生, or “birth by aspiration,” in Risshō Kōseikai:

[St. Nichiren] proclaimed that the great misfortunes that befall the life that one has now are great misfortunes that you ask to receive in order to fulfill your life's mission. One is joyful for the suffering one receives in order to help all living things. . . . While we bear various fates in our actual lives and lead those lives within a web of various interpersonal relationships, it is clear that those lives and existences as is are sites one asks for and brings about by assuming bad karma of one's own volition. . . . The important thing is for those sites themselves to be recognized as the sites of the mission one has prayed for and produced . . . and then fulfilling one's mission.

(Sōka Gakkai: SŌKA GAKKAI KYŌGAKUBU eds. 2002, 314)

Not one single person was born by chance as a human into this life. . . . No one's existence is the outcome of chance. To the last person, we were all born out of our aspirations into these lives with our many sufferings. In short, we are the products of *ganshō*. . . . When we become aware of our *ganshō*—our wishes to be born into these lives, then the fact that we are wholeheartedly working for all people through our work in the places where we now lead our lives will lead us to take pleasure from the bottom of our hearts.

(Risshō Kōseikai: NIWANO 1993, 45–47)

If we compare this to the theodicy of Indian *Karman*, we see that even premised by the circle of transmigration world view it still allows room for free will and choice in rebirth. You are born into a current lot in life chosen by yourself. The sinful acts of past lives are expunged by “wholeheartedly working . . . to fulfill your life's mission,” and through this you can obtain a happy lot in life. Suffering is something that can be taken and turned into a “splendid opportunity” to change one's fate.

*Systems of Instruction in New Religions*

The matter of greatest concern with regards to ordinary citizens—who are potential converts to new religions—is simply what the advantages and disadvantages are to their daily lives. Religious groups skillfully explain their worldly benefits when it comes to the interests of ordinary citizens regarding the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the worries and anxieties that arise from them, and draw them in with religious “realities” and “truths.” Many of the teachings of new religions treat individual benefits and merit as being on a continuous line with the happiness of others and with the common and universal happiness of society. Nenpō Shinkyō explains matters in the following way:

Sincerely acting in the bodhisattva way will result in becoming a perfected person. That is, you will lead the happy life of the bodhisattva, your household will be that of a harmonious life of paradise, society will become one of harmoniously connected households of paradise, the nation will be one social paradise of peace, the world will be the ideal one of nations of paradise, and in short the world itself will be paradise.

(Nenpō Shinkyō: *Ogurayama Kongō-ji*, 1984, as cited in KOJIMA 2008, 34)

Kojima labels this *shūshin seika chikoku heitenka* 修身齊家治國平天下 (“regulate the body and the family to govern the nation and pacify the world”) world view an “accumulated salvation-type stage theory” (*kyūsai no tsumiage-gata dankairon* 救済の積み上げ型段階論) (KOJIMA 2008, 34). Many new religions place priority on rectifying one’s own heart, making teachings a part of everyday life, and before everything else bringing unity to the household. Their world view holds that the spread of happy households will make it possible to diffuse and spread harmony and peace to the workplace, the local community, the nation, and the world. The “new new religion” *Kōfuku no Kagaku* explains matters as follows:

I have said that human beings have the disposition to seek out happiness. The kinds of happiness that they seek and pursue are personal happiness and public happiness. Personal happiness refers to the search and pursuit for the happiness of the individual. Public happiness refers to the results of the pursuits for personal happiness: the creation of public happiness—in short, the building of a utopia—by expanding the individual utopia created around each person to encompass everything, that is, the whole of society, the whole of the world, and the whole of humanity. (Kōfuku no Kagaku: ŌKAWA 1990, 179)

While the “household” was not mentioned and could be seen as distinctive, the accumulative nature of this theory with utopia being spread from the pursuit of personal happiness to that of public happiness is the same. We could say this point stands in contrast with New Age-style world views, which put an emphasis on self-awakening and do not stress the practice of specific ways of life.



The new religions do not promote achieving self-satisfaction with individual worldly benefits. Rather, they try to encourage disseminating to others about having directly experienced the correctness of teachings and feeling gratefulness (sincerity) for them, and dedicating oneself toward promoting happiness throughout society. Nishiyama has conceptualized this as a “system of instruction” (*kyōdō shisutemu* 教導システム), meaning a “sociocultural system for changing self-interested ordinary persons into altruistic bodhisattva . . . and making such changes possible.” Alternatively, he says it can be described as a “skillful method of teaching sentient beings where, having appraised their worldly desires, [the teacher] explains the way of salvation (*Bodhi*) and through the use of expedient means (*hōben*) the listener is led to the truth” (NISHIYAMA 2003, 1). Nishiyama put forth these concepts based on the example of Buddhist-derived new religions, but such connections aside one can generally perceive this in new religions. Some statements here from Sekai Kyūseikyō are relevant:

Healing illness is a means and not an end. That’s why at the start you will be healed even without believing. The Gods permit this as expedient means as a special measure such that they assign roles to human beings who know nothing. However, they cannot be like that forever.

(Sekai Kyūseikyō: *Sekai kyūseikyō Izunome kyōdan kyōten hensaniinkai*, eds., 1963, as cited in KUMAMOTO 2008, 97)<sup>9</sup>

While this affirms worldly benefits (expedient means), they teach that one should not be satisfied forever with the healing of individual illnesses. Consider next a unique metaphor from Hōonji:

What are expedient means? For example, when a child is born he or she is first given milk to drink. The parents did not have their child in order to have it drink milk.

(Hōonji: SUZUKI 1962, 260)

The Buddha provides ordinary people with expedient means (benefits) the same way that an infant is given milk. However, to provide expedient means is not the original purpose or role of the Buddha. Human beings likewise were not created in order to be provided with expedient means. Hōonji teaches that while we have “the mysteries of outside help,” including “the provision of divine power” (*jintsū gake* 神通がけ), the most important thing of all is to preserve the “three virtues” (benevolence, sincerity, and patience) and put the teachings into practice at home and in the community.

However, while the new religions reject fixating on enjoying worldly benefits and egotistically satisfying one’s needs, they also do not deny or reject

9. See Sekai Kyūseikyō Izunome kyōdan kyōten hensaniinkai 世界救世教いづのめ教団教典編集委員会, eds., *Tamanoizumi (Inori to jōrei) たまのいずみ(祈りと浄霊)*, Sekai Kyūseikyō Izunome Kyōdan Shuppanbu 世界救世教いづのめ教団出版部, 1963.

them as being of a lower order. Whatever the event or desire, they see it as an opportunity to direct a person's gaze toward faith and inspire their interest in the group's teachings, and use the leverage to create a higher order of religious self-understanding as well as that of the world. Let us examine here some remarks from Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai:

The prayer "I want to be happy" may appear to be self-centered, but in fact it is linked at the bottom of one's heart to the prayer "make everyone happy." You do not solve a problem through your own efforts, but you still want to solve it somehow. At the moment you think this, your heart turns toward the religion that previously you had not relied upon and you recognize that religion somehow is important. You notice that you were not living through your own efforts but rather had been birthed by the kami and buddhas, and you change from a self-centered lifestyle to an altruistic one.

(Risshō Kōseikai: NIWANO 2008, 160–63)

*Shakubuku* 折伏 ("convincing the counterpart of one's own interpretation of Buddhism") is not something you do because you want yourself to be happy. Rather, the attitude of someone who is doing true *shakubuku* is that of someone who is overjoyed by the merits of the Gohonzon, feels compassion for the other person's lot in life, and has a charitable soul. Doing *shakubuku* for selfish motivations will have no effect.

(Sōka Gakkai: KODAIRA 1962, 125)

While individual worldly benefits produce momentary fulfillment (satisfaction), they do not result in durable happiness. It is possible to acquire "true happiness" within the environment and time allotted you by continuing to long for progress and growth, by making approaches to others and society at large, and by treating that as pleasure.

Nishiyama has described this as follows: "Providing and receiving worldly benefits is not regarded as the ultimate objective for new religions. The favor with which they are viewed in the new religions rises to the extent that they deepen faith and encourage moving beyond to being altruistic." Nishiyama labels this cultural apparatus wherein people are guided into "religious beliefs that tie self-interest to altruism and see self-interest as something attainable through the very act of altruism" as an apparatus for joining and transforming self-interest and altruism (*jiri rita renketsu tenkan sōchi* 自利利他連結轉換装置) (NISHIYAMA 2012, 49–51). Some discourse from Risshō Kōseikai will illustrate this:

To be aware of transience and self-conscious about the value of life is the starting point for having something to live for. It is the road to happiness. If you do not understand the value and preciousness of life, then no matter how blessed you may be with health or with money and status you cannot savor true joy. . . . When we sort out those things that make us happy, two items come up. The first is to be a human being capable of being thankful. . . . The

other thing that results in happiness is bringing joy to others. It is the pursuit of the bodhisattva way. . . . Achieve benefits for yourself and benefit others, too . . . . Human beings achieve their purpose in life when self-interest and altruism are one and the same and they put all their heart into being devoted to others. It is at such moments that we can savor true joy and a true sense of satisfaction. (Risshō Kōseikai: NIWANO 2008, 261–71)

### Conclusion

Using the vitalistic conception of salvation as my central point of reference, I have examined views on happiness in the new religions as well as their approaches in the pursuit of happiness. While my reexamination has unavoidably been a fragmentary one, it did confirm that they share views of the world and salvation that are rationally structured as well as practically-oriented teachings.

From a theodicean perspective, they see human beings as sharing in the ownership of the life of a transcendent being (kami, or buddhas, or the great life of the universe). They are the children of gods, and were originally created in happiness. Human beings are confronted with the unavoidable results of suffering, unjustness, and misfortune because these are (1) notifications from transcendent beings that they have strayed from proper ways of living or frames of mind; (2) some operation of the spirit world such as a soul working or a karmic relationship; or (3) retributions for evil or sinful acts in past lives. However, all forms of suffering or past karma (*shukugō*) can be expunged or transformed through belief and faith. The transcendent being provides the suffering without which human beings will not grow if they do not experience it, but that entity most certainly does not abandon them. There is a shared loving image of that entity watching over how human beings live their lives like a parent watches over a child. Furthermore, suffering in the new religions is seen as a message the transcendent being delivers to make people aware of the correct teachings and the truth. At the same time, they also see its significance as presenting a good opportunity for people to change their fortune and fate, for carrying out discipline to encourage the growth of their soul, and for accomplishing the mission assigned to them. In short, suffering and distress have a positive value in that in and of themselves they provide indispensable springboards for causing the ego to grow and change one's fortune. They function as stimuli for promoting self-cultivation and self-actualization (self-disciplining).

While the wording and rhetoric may differ from group to group, they share views of the world and salvation that hold that (1) members are to “polish their hearts” and strive toward living the right way so as to return to the true nature of pure and unspoiled human beings (that is, the children of gods); and then (2) through this process of putting the teachings into practice in their everyday lives, reaching out proactively to other people, disseminating the truth and true

law, and repeatedly engaging in deeds and conduct that are useful to the world they will earn the (3) “blessings,” “help,” “merit,” and “actual proof” from a transcendent being or beings that will (4) make it possible to enjoy a happy life. One does not merely depend on “blessings” and “help” (other-directed salvation and magic) from the transcendent being; correcting one’s mind and behavior and making approaches toward others and society are also prerequisites for receiving happiness.<sup>10</sup>

The theodicies of the new religions differ from the predeterminism, the Indian teachings of *Karman*, Zoroastrian dualism, and Confucian concepts that Weber suggested.

The transcendent beings of the new religions did not create human beings as entities who cannot reform themselves on their own like the Calvinist god did, or apportion to certain creatures eternal death. They do not imagine that the deity intends to be immeasurable by human standards (to be an absent god, that is, *Deus Absconditus*); rather, the deity wishes for human beings to lead happy lives. In the new religions the possibility of changing one’s fate in the world opens up in ways that are not apparent in the fatalist Indian notion of *Karman*, a universal mechanism for retribution that does not allow for a transcendent being to intervene.

While the Zoroastrian supposition of a “shadow power” that produces iniquity and injustice and its regard of corporal desires as evil may resemble the “spirit world thought” of the new religions, they see the authority of transcendent beings as limited. One also does not widely see in the new religions any orientation (eschatological pathos) toward craving salvation in the future.<sup>11</sup> Impurity and evil can be wiped away in the new religions through self-help efforts in this world; they do not imagine the existence of some powerful evil or blackness that is a match for the transcendent being.

Though at a glance seeing misfortune as retribution for unworthiness as the result of desiring worldly benefits (happiness, wealth, and long life) and engaging in virtuous conduct for happiness may resemble Confucianism, there is a tremendous difference with the way of seeing the world. This is apparent where the observance of attitudes toward living and ceremonies in which virtuous conduct is matched to one’s standing is seen in the same light as deficiencies in

10. The new religions teach that the more the heart is polished the more that dust and shadows catch one’s eye, and the more that one understands the appropriateness and correctness of teachings the more that one can become self-aware of the greatness (importance) of the duty incumbent on oneself (to practice altruism). In other words, the teachings of the new religions come with a mechanism that alternately cultivates and disciplines (gives subjecthood to) one’s inner heart and external attitude toward living.

11. With regard to eschatology, there are also exceptions such as early Ōmotokyo, Honmichi, Tenshō Kōtai Jingūkyō, Kenshōkai, and the various Mahikari-related groups.

someone's education and livelihood. Weber viewed Confucianism as an ideology drawn toward the unconditional affirmation of the world—an adherence to traditionalist attitudes toward life—and in which humans did not regulate themselves from within. The new religions, however, emphasize internal self-control and rearranging lifestyles.

A unique aspect of Japan's new religions is that while they retain the Indian *Karman* world view, their fatalism is abstract and they do not reject this world. They actively and autonomously approach the self and the world in ways akin to pre-determinism. Also, blessings and merit are viewed in the new religions within specific linkages of meanings. They are not seen as being synonymous with irrational, chaotic "magic." The new religions have developed ideas that can produce ethical transformations in humans, as the foregoing discussion has made clear.

Through his concepts of "systems of instruction" and the "apparatus for joining and transforming self-interest and altruism," Nishiyama has attempted to grasp the mechanisms by which the new religions instruct people and make them self-actualizing (self-disciplining). With regard to the systems of belief, practice, and organization related to these two concepts that Nishiyama has introduced, the present article has focused its discussions on the new religions' systems of belief. Further research will be required to draw attention to the systems of practice and organization.<sup>12</sup> This article constitutes an attempt to present an overall outline; it is hoped that future researchers will reexamine the subject with more empirical data and refine the concepts presented herein.

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12. Considerable research has already been done regarding the practical and organizational frameworks of instruction systems; see, for example, TAKAGI (1959), MIURA (1959), and SUZUKI (1970). With regard to work that has come out since the publication of the *Shinshūkyō jiten*, special note should be made of WATANABE (2001), HAGA and KIKUCHI (2006), and SAKURAI and NAKANISHI (2010). For Seichō no Ie, refer to TERADA (2008).

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