

Shinnyoen and the Transmission of Japanese New Religions Abroad

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Conventions

Japanese names are given throughout this study in the Japanese order, namely family name followed by given name. Except for widely known words and geographical locations, long vowel sounds in Japanese words and names are indicated with a macron, as in Itô Shinjô. Japanese terms are put in italics the first time they occur followed by a general explanation of term in brackets. Also, in order to preserve the anonymity of certain Shinnyoen members, pseudonyms are used and are placed in quotation marks the first time they occur. The English translations of Shinnyoen titles are as the religion itself employs the terms, e.g. bishop (sensei), reverend (-san).

Acknowledgments

There were many occasions when it seemed doubtful I would get this far in my educational journey. However with the help and encouragement of family, friends, and teachers, I have been able to reach what was once unreachable for me. I therefore wish to share my achievement with them as the completion of this thesis is as much theirs as it is mine.

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Abstract

This study examines the ways and the extent to which Japanese new religions that seek to attain an international presence adapt and alter their techniques of proselytism in moving from one culture to another, and the ways in which their development varies in non-Japanese cultures. In particular I focus on Shinnyoen, one of the largest new religions in Japan, which has achieved a foothold in Hawaii and other areas with large Japanese immigrant populations, but which has also begun to develop in Europe and other parts of Asia. Currently, movements such as Shinnyoen are in their infancy in Britain, although they have already begun to establish a presence and have developed to some degree beyond the Japanese population. Accordingly, the activities of such religious groups and the ways in which they seek to appeal to and attract non-Japanese followers form a highly appropriate topic for research. This study will examine Shinnyoen and its proselytizing campaign in three diverse locations--the UK, Hawaii, and Singapore--in order to glean a clear account of the dynamics involved in the proselytizing activities of Japanese new religions overseas. The ethos of Japanese new religious movements and the conditions (social, organizational, cultural) conducive for dissemination abroad, especially among local populations, are issues explored in the process. The extent to which these patterns differ at the various locations will also be examined in order to determine whether Shinnyoen attracts, and targets, the same type of people in Britain as it does in Singapore and Hawaii. What will emerge at the conclusion of this study is a clearer picture of the challenges Japanese new religions face in their efforts to expand overseas and flourish in foreign soil and the necessary provisions they must possess in their praxis and organizational structure if they are to meet these challenges.

Shinnyoen and the Transmission of Japanese New Religions Abroad

Chapter One: Introduction

1. PURPOSE/INTENT OF DISSERTATION

The primary aim of this thesis is to examine Japanese new religious movements in their efforts to expand overseas and flourish in foreign soil. It also intends to provide a picture of the development of Japanese new religions abroad with particular reference to the ways in which they are seeking, and managing, to attract non-Japanese followers. More specifically this study focuses on one particular religion seeking to gain an international presence, Shinnyoen, and its proselytizing campaign in the UK, Hawaii, and Singapore. I examine the development of Shinnyoen in Japan (its history, organizational structure, beliefs and practices) and compare the religion with its overseas manifestations in order to frame our investigation of Japanese new religions abroad. Moreover, while the primary focus is the examination of a single religion in several countries, I invert this strategy at times and look at several different Japanese new religious movements within a single geographical location in order to glean a more complete account of the dynamics involved in the spread of Japanese new religions abroad. Such a study addresses several important issues surrounding the continuing research of Japanese new religions: the ethos of Japanese new religious movements, their proselytizing activities, and conditions (social, organizational, cultural) conducive to their dissemination abroad, especially among local populations. What will emerge at the conclusion of this study is a clearer picture of the challenges Japanese new religions face proselytizing overseas and the necessary provisions they must possess in their praxis and organizational structure if they are to meet these challenges.

Anything New?

Due to the popular rise of Japanese new religions, there are a number of books and articles readily available for the interested reader that cover the subject in various fashions. Scholarly research too has taken quite an interest in Japanese new religions and this has produced several important studies that have benefited our understanding of these groups.¹ A number of works have provided solid background information on Japanese new religions in general--introducing the various movements, their identifying traits, and their historical development--that a repetition here is not necessary. The reader is directed to the bibliography for a list of some of these works. Monographs in English, however, have largely focused on one particular new religion--Kurozumikyô, Risshô Kôseikai, Mahikari, Gedatsukai, for example--in their natural Japanese habitat, while articles treating Japanese new religions abroad are limiting due to writing constraints imposed by the brevity of articles. Here I introduce the new religious movement Shinnyoen in a detailed account for the first time. While the group has appeared as the subject in past journal articles² and book chapters³, only a specific aspect of the religion was addressed. This study examines Shinnyoen in Japan and its attempt to expand abroad, something that has appeared in neither monograph nor article form. It also takes into account other Japanese new religious movements attempting to propagate in the same area as Shinnyoen, thus making for interesting comparisons and illuminating as a whole the transmission of Japanese new religions abroad.

This study is divided into the following chapters: Chapter One introduces the subject of Japanese new religions and proselytism in general, provides a brief historical summary of overseas propagation by Japanese religions, and concludes with a look at some of the methodological issues pertinent to the study of Japanese new religions abroad. Chapter Two

¹ See for example the works of Numata (1988), Inoue (et al., eds. 1990, 1992) and Shimazono (1992a, 1992c) in Japanese, and Hardacre (1984, 1986), Earhart (1989), and Reader (1991) in English.

² See for example Nagai (1995), Sakashita (1995), and Shiraimizu (1979).

³ See for example Numata (1995) and Djumali (1994).

looks at the history and organizational structure of Shinnyoen in Japan and highlights specific traits of the religion that are significant for export overseas. Chapter Three examines Shinnyoen's beliefs and practices. Chapter Four examines Shinnyoen's attempt to expand overseas, namely to Europe (the UK), the United States (Hawaii), and Asia (Singapore). By no means has the religion achieved an equal amount of success in these diverse areas. This chapter compares the branch temples abroad and suggests factors that have determined to some extent the degree of success in these regions. Chapter Five focuses on proselytization strategies utilized by Japanese new religions in general and Shinnyoen in particular to expand beyond the Japanese archipelago. Chapter Six is a summary of the challenges Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions face if they are to be successful overseas.

2. HISTORICAL SUMMARY AND PATTERNS OF OVERSEAS PROPAGATION⁴

Japanese religions first ventured abroad during the Meiji period (1868-1911) as the result of Japanese labor migration patterns or military expansion and colonization. Hence Japanese religions were disseminated in the Korean peninsula, the north east parts of China, to Hawaii, Taiwan, the former South Seas, mainland America, Canada, Brazil, Peru, and wherever else large Japanese immigrant populations were found. Japanese religions abroad probably had their start in 1868 when the first group of Japanese laborers were sent to Hawaii to work in the sugarcane fields. However formal proselytizing efforts were not undertaken in earnest until several years later when several of the so-called established or traditional religions sent official envoys to properly minister to the religious needs of the Japanese immigrant communities abroad.

During these early stages of overseas expansion by Japanese religions, often it was at the requests of Japanese expatriates that overseas missions were initiated. Some of the earliest ventures of Japanese religions abroad are examples of this pattern. Established

⁴An informative and concise history of the expansion of Japanese religions abroad can be found in David Reid's "Internationalization in Japanese Religion" (1996). A more detailed account of the spread of Japanese new religions overseas can be found in the *Shinshûkyô Jiten* (Inoue et al., eds. 1990).

Buddhist groups such as Jōdo-shū, Jōdo Shinshū, Shingon-shū, and the Zen, Tendai, and Nichiren sects, for example, established themselves abroad after first having dispatched priests overseas to minister to the needs of Japanese expatriates. Inoue Nobutaka characterizes these early overseas missions which catered mainly to Japanese expatriates and their descendants as examples of what he terms the *kaigai shutchō kata* (overseas dispatch model).⁵ This type of proselytizing mission made little attempt to bring non-Japanese converts into its fold as the function of Japanese religion during these early stages was mostly to cater to and support the Japanese community abroad. The nurture and support Japanese religions provided for the immigrant communities included the performance of weddings, funerals, and other religious rites and festivals such as obon dances, which celebrated the return of ancestral spirits.

Following the lead of the more established religions, Japanese new religions also determined these lands to be opportunities for expansion and hence several new religions including the Shinto derived ones of Tenrikyō (1897 in Taiwan), Kurozumikyō (first recorded in Hawaii in 1910), and Konkōkyō (in Hawaii, 1930s), and the Nichirenshū derived Honmon Butsuryūshū (in Brazil, 1908) followed suit. Proselytizing efforts by Japanese new religions during this period and up to World War II were similarly aimed at Japanese expatriates. However after the war, a number of new religions began to more clearly distinguish themselves from the established religions when the focus of their proselytizing energies also included those in the non-Japanese community. Soon an increasing number of Japanese new religions began to look abroad and each decade after the war saw a number of new religions venture overseas. It is significant to note that the expansion of new religions abroad during the post war years coincided with the growth of the Japanese economy and the increase in overseas expansion by Japanese businesses. The strength of the Japanese economy during this period provided the backbone for expansion abroad and, to some extent, lent an air of legitimation to Japanese new religions. This trend

⁵Inoue (1992) p. 189.

of overseas expansion and international recruitment has continued into the present although the economic downturn in Japan during the nineties has affected the rate of expansion abroad to some extent. This pattern of overseas mission, which included attempts to proselytize among the non-Japanese population as well, is referred to by Inoue as the *takokuseki kata* (multi-national membership model).⁶

Japanese new religions successful abroad with the multi-national membership model often follow a common script that helps launch their proselytizing campaigns: A Japanese female member marries a non-Japanese male, moves to his home country and there introduces her beliefs and practices to her neighbors, friends, and husband's friends.⁷ A small circle of followers is then formed which grows over time. Usually at this point a request is forwarded to the main temple in Japan asking the religion to dispatch a teacher or priest to minister to their needs. Soon a piece of land is procured by the religion and a branch temple is constructed. Sôka Gakkai, the largest of the Japanese new religions and the most successful in terms of procuring non-Japanese members, had its beginning in America following a similar pattern. In the years preceding formal missionary work in California, most Sôka Gakkai followers were Japanese women who migrated to America after their marriages to American soldiers.⁸ Once in America they were able to organize, meet, and lay the foundation for successful missionary activity. This familiar tale is also evident in the transmission of Shinnyoen to Hawaii, London, Singapore, and New York where at each location the construction of a branch temple had as its beginning a female follower who carried the faith abroad. It was the initiative of followers then that provided the impetus for Shinnyoen to explore propagation possibilities overseas.

Not all Japanese new religions actively proselytize. Even among Japanese new religious movements abroad, there are those groups and practitioners that do not seek to recruit new members, having found themselves beyond the Japanese archipelago by chance

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 196.

⁸Inoue (1983) p. 102.

and not design. For example there are several cases of Japanese female *reinôsha* (psychic and spiritual practitioners) in Hawaii who came to the islands by way of marriage or after school graduation. In one particular case the development of a *reinôsha*'s spiritual powers was facilitated by her painful divorce from a Japanese American. Among Japanese new religions that do engage in proselytizing activities abroad, not all make efforts to recruit non-Japanese members into their fold (I shall deal with these points later in this chapter). Inoue's notion of two models of overseas proselytism is thus a simple hermeneutical tool, yet it provides a useful step towards building a framework through which to view the transmission of Japanese new religions abroad. While not completely ignoring Japanese new religions that fall under the *kaigai shutchô kata* pattern, especially when comparisons may yield helpful insights, this study focuses largely on Shinnyoen and other groups that actively engage in proselytizing activities and can therefore be placed in the *takokuseki kata* pattern.

The Impetus to Proselytize

Of the Japanese new religions that engage in proselytizing activities, only a few do so abroad. Inoue estimates that of the two thousand or so new religions in Japan, perhaps less than one hundred religions have attempted to expand overseas.⁹ That only a limited number of Japanese new religions have ventured outside Japan with the intent to actively proselytize suggests that most groups lack the worldview, the wish, and/or the means to undertake overseas proselytizing efforts in earnest.

To increase the likelihood of waging successful overseas campaigns, religious movements must have within their system an appropriate worldview to support such missionary activities. This includes leaders of religious movements perceiving their teachings to be universal in scope, as the desire to spread their beliefs and practices beyond the Japanese archipelago is generated from such a worldview. Shinnyoen is an example of such a religious movement.

⁹May 1995 interview.

At the conclusion of every Shinnyoen service, followers recite in unison a number of pledges. One of the pledges for 1998 stated, "To serve and act for the sake of people and the world." A Shinnyoen monthly newsletter comments on this particular pledge:

The phrase "for the sake of people and the world" was part of the original spiritual words that came forth when the Shinnyo spiritual faculty was born. This can be understood as a revelation of the compassionate heart of the Origin to see salvation manifested for all of humankind, the earth, and the universe.¹⁰

Many groups lack this sort of impetus to spread overseas as their interests lay not so much in propagating a new truth or practice as they are in supplementing an already existing religious market. These groups are less concerned with winning new members as they are in focusing on a small but devoted band of followers. Street corner reinôsha in Japan, for example, cater to their local patrons and have little interest in expanding their clientele or in developing their practice abroad. Indeed I have witnessed foreigners being politely turned away from certain religious practitioners in Japan because for whatever reasons they were outside the practitioners' pastoral niche.¹¹ There are a number of freelance Japanese reinôsha abroad, however. While they command a loyal following, those whom I have interviewed have, like their counterparts in Japan, little interest in expanding their practice or soliciting non-Japanese clientele. Their practices are specialized--one elderly blind female reinôsha in Hawaii transforms ordinary tap water into a healing agent, while another female reinôsha provides her customers with glances into their futures and advice in matters of love and business--and do not seek to displace existing social or moral structures, nor do the reinôsha require

¹⁰*The Nirvana*, January 1998, no. 324, p. 4.

¹¹For a number of Japanese spiritual technicians, regardless of their special powers, having a foreigner approach and speak to them can be an intimidating experience.

commitment, which is the basic prerequisite of recruitment activities. In other words their worldview does not support proselytizing activities.

Resources

A number of Japanese new religions have the desire and worldview but lack the means for overseas propagation. A rediscovered ancient truth or newfound teaching alone is often not enough to commence overseas missions. A large, stable membership combined with an even larger financial support system is required. In the early stages of expansion abroad, a common pattern found among Japanese new religions is the tendency to consistently send a mission of senior members and other organizational officials to overseas branches to nurture its fledgling band of followers. Hence a religion needs a substantial number of members and a sound organizational structure that produces devoted members in responsible positions in order to facilitate the process of guiding new followers and establishing branch temples abroad. A lack of consistent contact between the main temple in Japan and its branch temples abroad could spell problems for the religion. Furthermore, overseas branch temples often incur heavy financial expenses for the religion and therefore the organization must be wealthy enough to withstand such financial demands and still be able to maintain its organizational strength in Japan. It is no coincidence that the largest (and therefore wealthiest) new religions in Japan are the ones with relatively solid organizational branches overseas. Sôka Gakkai, Risshô Kôseikai, Reiyûkai, and Shinnyoen, for example, have branches in numerous countries spanning several continents. While the success of overseas campaigns varies according to religion and region, these Japanese new religions continue to expand to a great degree because they possess the money and human resources to do so.

3. NEW RELIGIONS AND PROSELYTISM

Having studied personal testimonials of the Japanese new religion Zenrinkai, Richard Anderson notes that proselytism is one aspect that separates the new religions in Japan from the established ones.¹² Inoue makes an even stronger claim suggesting that "by nature, progressive propagation activities are the lifeline of the new religions."¹³ While Anderson and Inoue make important points, it should be noted that the degree of proselytism among Japanese new religions varies greatly.¹⁴ Towards one end of the proselytizing spectrum is the aggressiveness of groups such as Shinji Shûmei Kai (founded in 1970 by Koyama Mihoko [1910-]), where followers assemble in front of train stations in Tokyo and actively promulgate their religious practices. I have seen the raised hands of Shinji Shûmei Kai followers--their mode of practice whereby purifying rays are emitted through their palms--during various times of the day at Shibuya and other crowded train stations in Tokyo. Indeed they can usually be found at bustling stations peddling their beliefs in shifts from nine in the morning until ten at night. This group is certainly to be counted among those religions that aggressively proselytize. Within a five minute time span, for example, I once observed a Shinji Shûmei Kai believer approach 69 individuals. With palm raised, the young follower tried to delay busy commuters just long enough to pray over them for their health and prosperity. Unfortunately for the young fellow, those whom he approached were either too busy or had enough health and prosperity to accommodate the Shinji Shûmei Kai acolyte as all 69 commuters refused his offer. Unfazed, the devoted follower continued his proselytizing efforts, leaving the uninterested to fend off illness and misfortune on their own.

The salvation of train commuters and other strangers is not the sole aim of the Shinji Shûmei Kai peddler, however. If it were, the Shinji Shûmei Kai devotee would not have been so easily discouraged by the public's refusal to receive his prayers. Approaching 69

¹² Anderson (1992) p. 308.

¹³ Inoue (1992) p. 12. Arai Ken (1996) also argues that propagation is the "lifeblood of the new religions" (p. 103).

¹⁴ Hardacre (1996) states that in contrast to the new religions, the so-called "new" new religions place less of a "premium on making members go out and proselytize as proof of their commitment" (p. 202).

people within a five minute span may at first seem impressive from a proselytizing standpoint but it pales considerably when one realizes that in order to reach such a high number the follower could not have put much effort in each proselytizing attempt. Indeed I have watched members approach train commuters with the anticipation of being rejected and already looking to move on to the next person emerging from the station wicket.

Few people would willingly subject themselves to open rejection, criticism, and public humiliation in the manner of a Shinji Shūmei Kai follower for the sake of saving Japanese businessmen and office ladies, regardless of how noble and justifiable a cause this may be. For many devotees of Japanese new religions, however, such public acts of proselytism are often prompted by an additional motive--the wish to secure one's own spiritual happiness. In a number of Japanese new religions proselytism functions as a form of *shugyō* (religious training), a practice designed to deepen the faith and understanding of new religion members as well as strengthen their commitment to certain prescribed religious beliefs advocated by their organizations. Proselytizing train commuters, cleaning public toilets, and sweeping the streets,¹⁵ then, are acts understood by new religion adherents as opportunities to perform *shugyō* and raise their own spirit level in the process. In this regard we can understand the function of *shugyō* first and foremost as for the salvational sake of existing members. The Shinji Shūmei Kai follower, therefore, is in part motivated to raise his palm at bustling train stations in an effort to participate in his own soteriological scheme. Actually converting non-members is secondary, hence the ease in which the acolyte aborts his proselytizing attempt at the slightest hint of rejection. More on this aspect of proselytism will be discussed in a later chapter.

Near the other end of the proselytizing spectrum are groups such as Tentoku Yodō (founded by Shima Yoshinori [1921-1964]), a religion which, if its overseas manifestation is any indication, has little interest in disseminating its beliefs and practices to the outside public. In Hawaii since 1989, this Shinto derived new religion had only mustered a handful

¹⁵These acts are commonly done among the new religions e.g. Tenrikyō, Agonshū.

of practicing followers by 1997. Amassing a large following, however, is not a high priority on Tentoku Yodô's agenda.¹⁶ A small band of Tentoku Yodô devotees gathers regularly for spiritual supplication and healing in a location outside Honolulu. Unlike Shinji Shûmei Kai however, followers of Tentoku Yodô have little interest, if any at all, in parlaying their religious practices into recruiting new followers. As a matter of fact the head of the Hawaii branch, an elderly woman whom I contacted over the telephone, was reluctant to share any information about her group. Nor was she keen to have an outsider observe or participate in Tentoku Yodô's religious services.

Tentoku Yodô then, is the proselytizing antithesis to Shinji Shûmei Kai. I have asked for permission to visit Tentoku Yodô a number of times over the course of several years but I have been discouraged from doing so on each occasion. In fact, early on in my contact with Tentoku Yodô, the group refused to divulge the location of their meeting place.¹⁷ I was informed that Tentoku Yodô services are for members only and unless I had a personal invitation from a member, it would be impossible for me to attend. Tentoku Yodô apparently is content to focus its energy on its few devoted followers who "come to us for healing." Moreover as its careful screening procedure suggests, its agenda probably includes collecting only like-minded individuals who share a common worldview, shunning excessive contact with the non-believing public as a result. Tentoku Yodô's inclination to close itself off from outsiders and focus mainly on members in its own circle is actually a theme not uncommon to a number of Japanese new religions. As we shall see in the following pages, while many Japanese new religions claim to have universal spiritual practices suited for the salvation of all humanity, in reality their own members are more often the focus of their religious activities. Outsiders, and especially non-Japanese, are mostly seen as a means through which the organization and its followers may legitimize and advance their own spiritual causes. In the case of Tentoku Yodô, it may have developed a soteriological scheme for its band of

¹⁶Membership numbers, as scholars have come to realize, are not necessarily a good indicator of the success a new religious movement has achieved (Wilson 1990).

¹⁷Since 1997 Tentoku Yodô has listed itself in the telephone directory alongside other Shinto groups.

followers without the need to involve outsiders in the process, or it may simply be organizationally unprepared to venture beyond its small religious ring and therefore intimidated at the prospect of enlarging its circle of believers. These are speculations on my part, however. Why the religion is little interested in expanding abroad is not clear but one thing certainly is: Proselytizing does not play as central a role in Tentoku Yodô as it does in Shinji Shûmei Kai where anyone, Japanese and non-Japanese alike, may be openly beckoned into the salvational fold.

The focal group of this study, Shinnyoen, is located somewhere between Shinji Shûmei Kai and Tentoku Yodô on the proselytizing spectrum. As with Shinji Shûmei Kai, Shinnyoen also preaches to its adherents the promotion of the religion as a method whereby one may gain spiritual and material benefits. As we shall see in the following chapters, Shinnyoen followers learn that when one is proselytizing for the sake of the religion, in addition to offering a soteriological design to potential recruits, the follower is simultaneously purifying his or her own heart/mind, thereby making clear the path to receive spiritual and material boons from the Shinnyoen spiritual world. In Shinnyoen such boons may come in the form of improved personal relationships, job promotions, and better health. However when successful proselytizing is tied so deeply to one's status within the religion, as it is in Shinnyoen, questionable recruiting practices may arise. This issue will be addressed in a later chapter.

In a manner reminiscent of Tentoku Yodô however, Shinnyoen is by and large a closed system that focuses its religious activities on existing followers and their immediate circle of friends and family. As will become clear in the following pages, Shinnyoen is reluctant to avail itself willingly to any outsider. In fact, in many instances the religion takes a cautious approach even regarding its own devotees, especially when it comes to sharing religious knowledge. This cautious approach taken by new religions like Shinnyoen has methodological repercussions for scholars interested in this field of study.

4. PRETENDING TO BELIEVE: METHODOLOGIES IN NEW RELIGION RESEARCH

There is no scholarly consensus concerning the number of Japanese new religions. Some scholars suggest there are as many as 3,000 new religions in Japan¹⁸ while other scholars estimate the number to be as little as several hundred.¹⁹ With such numerical range, it is not surprising that Japanese new religion researchers find much diversity among these groups in terms of organizational structure as well as a wide variety of beliefs and practices.²⁰ The diversity among the religious movements extends to the stance they take toward the general public as well. A number of Japanese new religions, Gedatsukai, Reiyûkai, and Risshô Kôseikai for example, are on the whole open and accommodating to outsiders with inquiries about their religion.²¹ Staff members, ministers, and other organization officials are usually willing to entertain questions researchers and other interested parties may have. Moreover arranging meetings and conducting interviews generally pose no problems for organizational leaders, provided one extends to them the courtesy of going through the proper channels beforehand. Of course these groups are also quite happy to distribute informational pamphlets and other materials to help the non-member procure an introductory understanding of the beliefs and practices of the respective religions. Even if one should drop in unannounced at some branches of Japanese new religions, it is not uncommon for the religion to shower the visitor with enthusiastic attention. Indeed it is the enthusiasm and vigor displayed by some of these groups that bring to mind the term "new." The enthusiasm and attention induced by a visit to some of these new religions can at times reach an uncomfortable level for the visitor, however. This was the case when a plump, talkative, and inordinately happy middle-aged Japanese woman grabbed me by the elbow a few moments after I had stepped through the doors of Agonshû, a Japanese new

¹⁸Hardacre (1994).

¹⁹Reader (1996), Mullins (1992).

²⁰This is in stark contrast to Winston Davis' assertion that one Japanese new religion is "typical of the lot." Davis (1980) p. 9.

²¹In view of previous attempts at constructing a typological framework for classifying new religions, Stark and Bainbridge (1979) may place these three groups under the rubric of *religious institutions*, organized groups with little tension with their sociocultural environment.

religion founded in 1978 by Kiriyaama Seiyû (1921-). What was intended as a brief visit to the Tokyo headquarters of a Japanese new religion turned into a three hour stay as I was paraded around the temple and introduced to a number of followers, urged to watch a video illuminating the charisma of its founder, encouraged to read several of the religion's numerous publications, invited to meditate, and asked to pay (literally and figuratively) homage to the religion's *gohonzon* (main image of worship/veneration). All the while my guide happily chatted away, frequently reminding me how fortunate I was to have visited her religion as my ill karma was already in the process of being cut due to my visit. There are other groups of course, such as Tenrikyô, which regard an inquisitive visitor meandering through its church grounds with benign indifference. In this scenario it is the visitor who must track down a member, staff official, or minister to elicit information about the group.

Shinnyoen differs from the above mentioned religions in terms of its position vis-à-vis outsiders and society in general.²² Although there has been a shift in direction to some extent since the mid-1990s, by and large it is still a discrete and closed organizational system that generally frowns on entertaining visitors uninterested in becoming devout followers. At its Hawaii temple, for example, the religion is carefully guarded in its attitude towards outsiders. Until 1995 non-members were not allowed to visit the temple save for once a month, a day designated as "Open House."²³ Other than this day the temple doors were closed to all outsiders. In 1997 visitors to Shinnyoen Hawaii could enter the temple and receive information at the main reception counter, however the religion still prohibited non-members from the inner sanctuary area and from attending any worship service. Those

²² Shinnyoen, on the other hand, would perhaps be classified by Stark and Bainbridge as a *religious movement*, a group with a degree of tension with the surrounding sociocultural environment and/or seeking to become religious institutions.

²³ Shinnyoen Hawaii changed its "no visitor" policy for a brief period in 1995. Prior to this date no visitor was allowed in the temple outside of the day designated as "Open House" (as will be explained later, other Shinnyoen temples abroad did not enforce this rule). The ruckus caused by the Aum Shinrikyô incident may have had a part in Shinnyoen's decision to change its "no visitor" policy. Since the Aum Shinrikyô incident Shinnyoen has made efforts to be much more "open" to outsiders as evidenced by its subsequent allowance of NHK to videotape for broadcast a segment on "sesshin," one of the pillars of Shinnyoen practice. By late 1997, however, the "no visitor" policy seemed to have been reinstated.

wishing to view the inner sanctuary and learn more of the religion were told to return to the temple on the next "Open House" day.

Shinnyoen's reluctance to willingly open its doors and freely divulge information about itself to any nonchalant visitor must not be misconstrued as evidence of any wrongdoing or paranoia on its part, however. While the religion takes a cautious approach when dealing with outsiders it does assist genuinely interested non-members learn about the religion. Its policy of restricting non-member access to the religion stems in part from the identity it has cultivated for itself--esoteric Buddhism.

Shinnyoen claims to be a form of esoteric Buddhism and the shroud of mystery it wears, as will become evident later, is what in part helps render the religion appealing to many in the general public. Although the religion has since departed somewhat from its esoteric direction after Japanese new religions as a whole came under intense media scrutiny as a result of the Aum Shinrikyô incident, esotericism remains a significant part of its self-identity. There are other reasons, however, for the closed posture and secrecy surrounding the religion which I will discuss in detail in a following chapter. Here it is enough to mention that Shinnyoen's closed stance is not conducive for the "objective" Japanese new religion researcher and raises questions of methodology. Indeed, my study of the group has progressed under much stress, frustration, and at times infuriating conditions. At various points in my study it seemed that the resistance I received from Shinnyoen as a subject of study jeopardized the continuance of my research. Therefore very early in my study the issue arose of how to approach a cautious religion like Shinnyoen and gain access to its belief system and organizational structure without first becoming a follower.²⁴ It is necessary here to tell of the strategies and delineate the tools of methodology utilized that helped me gain a degree of access into the esoteric spiritual world of Shinnyoen.

²⁴While I recognize the different levels of commitment that characterize new religion membership (see for example Beckford 1985), throughout this study I use the terms follower, member, believer, etc. almost interchangeably. Where there is a need to distinguish different types of membership I will alert the reader.

The Choice of Shinnyoen as Study Subject

In the initial stages of my inquiry into Japanese new religions, it was made clear whenever I visited one of the numerous organizations in Hawaii that I had little intention of becoming a believing member. My intent was to be a detached observer at services and other religious activities. My interest was in the proselytizing methods of Japanese new religions abroad and it seemed logical therefore that getting to know followers, their practices, and acquiring a sense of their worldview would facilitate my understanding in this regard. Thus the first important decision I faced was choosing one primary Japanese new religion on which to focus my study.

It was not Shinnyoen's esoteric system that attracted me to the religion, nor its claimed ability to communicate with ancestral spirits. And despite the number of ailments I suffered at the time, it was not its alleged powers of healing that caused me to walk in unannounced at Shinnyoen Hawaii. For no particular reason other than its Hawaii temple was situated near the University of Hawaii's campus and was therefore quite convenient, I selected Shinnyoen as a group through which I could better understand the proselytizing activities of Japanese new religions as a whole. Because my choice of Shinnyoen as a subject of study was based solely on geographic proximity rather than prior information collected on the group, my orientation towards Shinnyoen in the initial stages of research was relatively free of presuppositions and biases.

Maurice Punch highlights a number of factors that can influence the outcome of fieldwork, including one simple factor that is often overlooked in the selection process of topics and field settings, namely geographic proximity: "There may be something romantic about Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, and Boas setting off stoically into the bush, where they lived in relative isolation and virtuous celibacy, but some researchers just pop conveniently down the road to the nearest commune, mental hospital, or topless joint..."²⁵ As a resident of Hawaii and a student who spent much time at the University of Hawaii campus, I fell into

²⁵Punch (1986) p. 22.

this category of researcher whose choice of specific religion of research was influenced in this way. In addition, Hawaii is a major place for Japanese new religions.

Selecting one group to illuminate issues and themes relevant to many Japanese new religious movements admittedly has its drawbacks. As already mentioned, there is such diversity among the characteristics and teachings of Japanese new religions that careless generalizations can easily lead to distortions and misunderstanding. However, if done carefully and with the understanding that there are almost always exceptions, some of the common themes that many Japanese new religions share can be brought to light and analyzed. Moreover in order to limit the chances of erroneously extending the characteristics of one particular religion to the entire lot, I have paid regular visits to a number of other Japanese new religions besides Shinnyoen as a means of verifying such traits. This was done in an effort to ensure the accuracy of statements concerning Japanese new religions as a whole. Therefore throughout the following chapters I intend to alert the reader each and every time a particular finding is relevant only to Shinnyoen. Hopefully through such an endeavor a clear picture of Japanese new religions, especially in the context of overseas proselytizing activities, will emerge.

Japanese New Religions and the Researcher

Scholars engaged in fieldwork among Japanese new religions are treated in different fashions by their research subjects. Some are openly embraced by the religion and allowed access to important organizational data. Byron Earhart, Helen Hardacre, and Stewart Guthrie for example, were given full cooperation by their respective subjects of study. Even scholars who were later critical of their chosen religion were initially warmly welcomed by the group. A number of researchers then have been amicably received by Japanese new religions, personally guided by organizational leaders, and even provided housing accommodations at a minister's residence, causing one scholar to remark that every student of Japanese religions

should have the experience of being treated so well.²⁶ In return, Japanese new religions may use the scholar for legitimizing purposes within its own organizational structure and/or towards the general public, especially if the researcher is well known or comes from a notable academic institution. Kôfuku no Kagaku for example, is quick to mention the name of a particular scholar in London as a supporter and member of the religion in order to validate the legitimacy of the group. Though I have visited the group at its Tokyo and Hawaii branches, when staff members learn of my interest in studying Japanese new religions they often use this particular scholar's name in an attempt to convince me of the group's significance in society.²⁷

My experiences during four and a half years of research of Shinnyoen from September 1993 to March 1998 were quite different from the experiences of the scholars above. I received no official help from Shinnyoen. It was especially during the period from October 1994 to July 1995, when the focus of my research took me to Japan to study the religion in its native land, that Shinnyoen provided me the least amount of assistance and greatest amount of resistance. Written requests to the religion's headquarters, for example, seeking permission to visit Shinnyoen branch temples in various parts of Japan and conduct interviews with staff officials and senior followers went unanswered. Follow-up telephone calls asking for research assistance failed to garner better results. Telephone inquiries to Shinnyoen were initially met with polite apologies for not having the appropriate minister or staff official available to answer my questions. Apparently the timing of my telephone calls was consistently bad as those whom I asked to speak to were usually in a meeting, away on business, or simply too busy to speak to me. Whether these early responses to my requests were veiled attempts to misdirect and delay me from pursuing my research is unclear, however my telephone calls were in the end met with curt responses, indicating that Shinnyoen would not be cooperative as a research subject. This indication soon became a

²⁶Hardacre (1986) p. xi.

²⁷Whether the scholar mentioned is actually a member and whether he knows that his name is used to legitimate the religion is another question, of course.

clear fact. In fall 1994, during a short telephone conversation with a minister at Tachikawa, I was informed that Shinnyoen prohibits anyone from visiting the religion for research purposes.

My research progress was thus in jeopardy of stalling in Japan. The religion's International Division especially hindered my attempts to procure data concerning Shinnyoen's overseas missions. The International Division refused to provide me with the simplest of information, such as the addresses of its branch temples abroad, including that of Shinnyoen Singapore, which I was hoping to visit in time to attend its official opening ceremony in November 1994. What is more, the minister and *reinôsha* (Shinnyoen spiritual medium), Mr. Omagari, who headed one of the departments in the International Division, met me with resistance at almost every step of the way, even refusing to allow me to meet with certain Shinnyoen members. Furthermore, staff officials misled me on several occasions and at other times fed me false information (especially concerning the history of the founder's family). In fact, my requests to participate in certain services were denied. Finally, a survey I planned to administer focusing on member's proselytizing activities, which could have proven helpful for both my own study and the religion's Public Relations Department, was flatly rejected. Therefore the reader should not expect to find any "official" survey reports, organizational charts, or formal statistical, so-called objective data.²⁸

A personal visit to the main temple in Japan and its International Division on June 17, 1995, a final effort to elicit the religion's cooperation through official channels, fared no better than my previous attempts. Documents, forms, and various other written material were hurriedly taken from my view and temple staff members bluntly refused to disclose any

²⁸While surveys can be helpful tools for gaining insights into believers' thought processes, there are also numerous problems in administering them and interpreting their results. This has led some scholars to be skeptical about the importance of surveys as data can often be interpreted (distorted) to bolster any agenda the researcher may have. In addition, there is a problem for survey takers who undertake the study of new religions. Members of Japanese new religions, who are on the whole quite sensitive about the public image of their respective group, may answer surveys in a manner which will put their religion in a favorable light or they may provide answers which they think the researcher wants to find. I have had experiences where members of new religions change answers on me after learning that I was studying Japanese new religious groups.

information about branch temples abroad. On the International Division counter just out of reach of the young receptionist, lay one of the Shinnyoen slogans for the year: Unite in Harmony to Link All. Despite the slogan, officials in the various departments of Shinnyoen made it quite difficult for a Japanese new religion researcher to link up harmoniously with Shinnyoen and gather information about the religion's beliefs and activities.

There was one minister who did provide me with some help, however. One of the resident ministers at Shinnyoen Hawaii took some personal risk to record and send me tapes of worship services while I was in the UK. The young minister did this in spite of the religion's prohibition of the use of recording devices during services and despite knowing that I had been earlier warned against attempting to do such a thing. Once this minister was reassigned to Japan, however, circumstances made it increasingly difficult to maintain contact and we soon lost touch.

The challenge of collecting information on Shinnyoen was not limited to Japan but extended to Hawaii, the UK, and Singapore as well. Hawaii is where I made my initial investigative foray into the religion. It is also where I first realized my research strategy of detached observation would conflict with the nature of the religion. The problems that ensued from this conflict would reverberate continually throughout my research in varying degrees. My initial refusal to participate as a devoted follower (which among other things required me to recruit a minimum number of new followers and make regular monetary donations) did not sit comfortably with staff members and other higher ranking members. Moreover my asking uncomfortable questions at group meetings and other gatherings caused me to be singled out by Shinnyoen devotees who warned other followers of my presence. This warning extended beyond Hawaii's shores. When I traveled to Shinnyoen UK for example, a fax from Shinnyoen Hawaii preceded my arrival. After the UK followers learned my name and before I had the chance to acquaint myself with members there, a Shinnyoen UK staff member announced to the small contingent of followers that I was, "the one we've heard about." In Singapore too, the cooperation I initially received from Shinnyoen Singapore was retracted

after one of the staff members there was informed by a Shinnyoen Hawaii official of my research agenda.

Besides merely describing a frustrating experience with an uncooperative religion, the above narrative serves to highlight certain methodological issues that affect fieldwork and influence research results, namely the researcher's personal background, the timing of the research, and the character of the research subject. Various combinations of the three will yield different study outcomes. Regardless of how a researcher is treated by a study subject, however, it is important for the scholar to remain as objective as possible and provide a fair account of his or her religious host. An overly sympathetic interpretation of a religion or a hypercritical one are both equally undesirable and may undermine the validity of one's research. Both experiences, being warmly embraced or coldly cast aside, however, can contribute to a more complete understanding of Japanese new religions. My encounter with Shinnyoen not only underscores the methodological issues involved but highlights three possible reasons to account for the group's reluctance to willingly cooperate as a research subject.

Personal : First of all, at the time of my introduction to Shinnyoen I was an unclassified graduate student and hence the religion may have considered my inquiries more meddlesome than complimentary. In addition, because my interest in Shinnyoen was academic and not personal, Shinnyoen was reluctant to provide me with more than cursory information. As mentioned, Japanese new religions are on the whole keen to acquire a sense of legitimacy, something which a known scholar and/or person of non-Japanese ancestry may, in the religion's view, provide. Had I been an older, more established scholar, perhaps Shinnyoen would have been more accessible in terms of allowing me to gather important data about the organization.²⁹ This however is strictly conjecture on my part.

²⁹Indeed Shinnyoen has since invited other well-known religion scholars to observe its religious festivals in the UK.

In *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork*, Maurice Punch lists several factors that may affect the outcome of fieldwork study including the researcher's ethnic background.³⁰ For Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions seeking to attain an international presence, this is an important consideration. Procuring non-Japanese members into their fold is an important goal for a number of Japanese new religions. The presence of non-Japanese members goes some way towards validating their claims of possessing universal truths and thus legitimizes their self-understanding as significant and universal religions. Because of their perceived ability to provide legitimation, not surprisingly non-Japanese members are often treated differently from Japanese members in these religions. From what I gathered through informal interviews with non-Japanese Shinnyoen followers and from my own experiences and observations within the group, it is likely that my evaluation of Shinnyoen would have been quite different had I been of non-Japanese ancestry. I will pursue this assertion in greater detail in a following section.

Circumstantial : Secondly, part of the difficulty I experienced with Shinnyoen perhaps can be traced to the timing of my study. I was in Japan during the period surrounding the Aum Shinrikyô incident, which created a negative backlash against Japanese new religions as a whole. Part of Shinnyoen Japan's reluctance to entertain researchers and other outsiders may be due to the aftermath of the Aum affair. During this period Japanese new religions struggled with their public image and were forced to reevaluate themselves. Shinnyoen took pains to distance itself from Aum and convince its legion of followers that they were different from such dangerous and marginal groups. However much the religion was successful in convincing its own members of its noble intents, public relations were a different matter. Shinnyoen, which had been consistently expanding and building new temples, suddenly found it difficult to procure lands on which to construct more temples. Moreover the intense media spotlight and accompanying scrutiny of reporters and researchers investigating Japanese new religions may have resulted in a number of new religions seeking

³⁰Punch (1986) p. 23.

a low profile for awhile. It was during this sensitive period for Japanese new religions that I was in Japan asking uncomfortable questions of Shinnyoen.³¹

Organizational : A third possible reason to explain the difficulties in gaining access to Shinnyoen centers on the religion itself. Even Aum Shinrikyô cannot be fully blamed for the problems I experienced with Shinnyoen, as my first encounter with the religion preceded the Aum incident. Although the Aum Shinrikyô affair in spring 1995 had the immediate effect of heightening the cautious approach Shinnyoen took towards outsiders, as I have mentioned the religion was already a closed religious system due to its esoteric leanings. The reluctance to freely divulge information about itself to outsiders then is consistent with the general character of Shinnyoen. Ironically, after the immediate reverberations of the Aum Shinrikyô incident passed, Shinnyoen made efforts to adopt a more accommodating stance regarding outsiders. Again this was largely an attempt to distance itself from association with other groups that were viewed as questionable or harmful to society. It was during this transitional period for Shinnyoen regarding its position towards outsiders that I also made a methodological shift in my study.

From Participant Observer to Participant Follower

Clearly the pursuit of information through formal channels had not gained me access into the inner workings of Shinnyoen. Previous thoughts of working cooperatively with Shinnyoen staff members to help distribute prepared questionnaires or conducting lengthy interviews with reinôsha and other high ranking officials needed to be cast aside. From the amount of resistance I encountered working openly as a non-believing researcher, it became quite obvious that I would make little progress with Shinnyoen in this capacity. According to H.J. Gans, "If the researcher is completely honest with people about his activities, they will try to hide actions and attitudes they consider undesirable, and so will be dishonest.

³¹Other scholars have had similar experiences. Ian Reader, for example, told me of problems he encountered in Japan procuring information from Kôfuku no Kagaku and Agonshû after the Aum affair.

Consequently, the researcher must be dishonest to get honest data."³² Instead of shelving my research and pursuing a more "accessible" Japanese new religion, however, I decided a change of methodological strategy was needed if I were to gain some insight into the organization's activities. It was at this point that I became a believer.

The methodological shift from participant-observer to participant-follower was made in order to secure material from what was then a closed and cautious religious organization. Along with this shift in methodology I turned my attention away from working with organizational heads, ministers, staff members and others near the top of the Shinnyoen hierarchy; and focused my attention instead on the rank and file follower. To these members I simply acted out the role of a believer myself in order to elicit information. Fortunately Shinnyoen is a large enough religion that attending services and followers' meetings without notice from the organizational heads encountered previously was not too difficult. This change in approach garnered me some success but not without raising some concerns as well.

Deception is a dangerous tool and has potentially serious consequences for fieldwork. Betrayal of trust and invasion of privacy are not only personal issues that may elicit moral opprobrium but may also affect future research activities. Botched research due to exposure as an disingenuous follower by a religion could close doors and make access to Japanese new religions like Shinnyoen even more difficult for other scholars. Yet feigning belief is at times the most efficient method, if not also an inevitable one, of accessing a particular group. As Punch has observed:

In essence, one has to learn how to inveigle one's way into the life of a group, build up contacts with key actors, and retain one's emotional balance

³²As found in Maurice Punch (1986) p. 41.

continually in order not to spoil acceptance and also to keep on collecting research material.³³

...Unconsciously or semi-consciously, you do 'lie through your teeth' (as an experienced American researcher put it at an ASA seminar) and dissemble in order to gain acceptance and to get at the data. To me, these dilemmas and ambivalences are inevitable and irreducible in fieldwork and are virtually impossible to resolve in advance.³⁴

Though the act of feigning belief for the sake of procuring information may be considered questionable, my experiences with Shinnyoen have shown that a participant observer can only scratch the surface of this religion while a participant follower has a wider access to the beliefs, world view, and mindset of a convert. Though a number of followers continued to view me with suspicion, my change in research strategy for the most part worked towards my benefit. As a fellow believer for example, I was invited to other members' homes for meals, asked out on dates, and, most importantly, told in confidence information regarding recruitment strategies, material that were previously unavailable to me as a participant observer.

Fieldwork among Japanese new religions in this capacity, however, can be mentally and emotionally taxing. One of the real problems, in my view, is determining to what degree one feigns belief. Different levels of commitment yield different results. As this study will demonstrate, commitment in Shinnyoen is hierarchically structured, with the more devoted rewarded with access to advanced teachings and information while "paper members" are only provided marginal soteriological tidbits. And lest there be any confusion regarding the commitment of followers, the level of faith is indicated by various pins on lapels, different colors of Buddhist stoles worn, and other spiritual accouterment donned.

³³Ibid., p. 16.

³⁴Ibid., p. 33.

5. INTERNATIONALIZATION, INTERPRETATION, AND THE FOREIGN MEMBER

As indicated, a number of Japanese new religions distinguish themselves from their more established counterparts by undertaking proselytizing efforts among non-Japanese populations. At this point one may want to consider the motive behind certain Japanese new religions' efforts to recruit foreign members and expand abroad. Besides the opportunities present in inter-racial marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese members, there are other considerations that prompt Japanese new religions to seek converts among non-Japanese populations. As touched on earlier, one such factor is the quest for legitimization, something perceived by the general public as lacking in the new religions. According to Japanese new religion scholar Shimazono Susumu:

New Religions are in general extremely keen to expand membership, and not only out of a desire to save people. In a capitalistic competitive society, one's legitimacy is graphically brought home on the basis of success in expanding numbers. What is more, when the following of one's teaching by people of other cultures is felt to be proof of your religion's universal adequacy, missionary activity to people of other cultures overseas can stir up stronger impulses than propagation among one's compatriots.³⁵

The quest for legitimization may incur heavy financial losses, however, especially when the construction of branch temples abroad does not yield the desired for results. Yet religious activities are not always governed by economic principles but operate instead under different pretenses. Many Japanese new religions which proselytize abroad are not necessarily seeking financial profit. They are seeking instead an affirmation of the truth of their beliefs and practices and the validity of its universal nature, things which can be gained by winning a

³⁵Mullins, Shimazono, and Swanson (eds.) (1993) p. 282.

number of followers abroad. The recruitment of even a few non-Japanese members from the local population lends legitimacy to a group that is apt to be viewed as socially low both in Japan and in its host country. Such gains cannot be measured in financial terms. The perceived international acceptance of a Japanese new religion's teachings will lend self confidence to its members. This in turn may lead to deeper commitment and more enthusiasm, which, in the end, may very well result in financial gain.

Legitimation and the Foreign Follower

It would do well for us to note here that not all foreign cultures are viewed equally in the minds of many Japanese. Certain cultures, western ones in particular, are often regarded with such esteem that Japanese scholar Takie Lebra notes there is a "Japanese ambivalence toward their national identity that is suggestive of an inferiority complex."³⁶ Lebra is quick to mention that "this does not hold true for foreigners other than Westerners," however.³⁷ Regarding non-Westerners, Lebra adds that the Japanese seem to have a "disdain toward 'backward' peoples, including Asian neighbors."³⁸ According to Suhara Satoru, a Student Counselor at the Asian Cultural Association in Tokyo, such attitudes have persisted into the nineties as there continues to be a ranking of races in the minds of many Japanese with western countries still perceived to be superior to other cultures. Supporting Suhara are the findings of a monthly magazine poll which suggests that Japanese women have a clear preference for certain foreigners over others. According to the survey, Japanese women rank Americans first and the British second in terms of desirability with Iranians at the bottom followed by Southeast Asians and Chinese.³⁹ While such ranking may be economically inspired, the perception of the superiority of the west has its seeds in the period of nearly two decades in the Meiji era when many Japanese fervently pursued the fruits of western

³⁶Lebra (1976) p. 74.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹"Ranking of foreigners called common in Japan" *Honolulu Advertiser*, November 21, 1995.

"civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei-kaika*). Paul Varley states that some advocates of *bunmei-kaika* went even so far as to suggest that "since Caucasians were observably superior to the people of all other races, the Japanese should intermarry with them as quickly as possible in order to acquire their higher ethnic qualities."⁴⁰ Japan's defeat in the second world war has certainly contributed to such perceptions continuing in contemporary society. Perhaps not surprisingly notions such as these have carried over into the mindset of a number of Japanese new religions. Hence while successful proselytizing campaigns abroad may yield a degree of legitimation to Japanese new religions, not all foreign cultures are perceived to possess equal legitimating powers. Certain countries, America, Britain, and France for example, seem to carry more legitimating strength than Asian countries. Such notions seems to have influenced a number of Japanese new religions, including Shinnyoen. This unbalanced view of other countries perhaps explains why the dedication of Shinnyoen USA warranted a special issue of its own in the Shinnyoen publication, *The Nirvana*,⁴¹ while the opening of Shinnyoen Singapore was met with comparably little fanfare. The grand opening of Shinnyoen Hong Kong was relegated to the next to the last page in the October 1992 issue of *The Nirvana*, and its rebirth as a full-fledged overseas branch temple one year later still was only news enough to make the inner pages of the Shinnyoen publication.⁴²

From Places to People

If certain lands or countries are perceived by Japanese new religions as possessing more legitimating powers than others, it follows that its peoples be viewed in a similar manner. As suggested earlier, one's ethnic background may determine to some extent the relationship between researcher and subject, which, in turn, may influence the outcome of his or her study. If one's nationality helps garner cordial treatment in terms of living accommodation, research assistance, access to members, etc., one would tend to look on a

⁴⁰Varley (1984) p. 209.

⁴¹November 1992, no. 262.

⁴²*The Nirvana*, October 1993, no. 273, p. 3.

subject more favorably.⁴³ By the same token, should one be treated with indifference or abruptness by a subject based on one's ethnic heritage then a less favorable interpretation of a subject may be expected.

In a group such as Shinnyoen, which adheres to a rigid hierarchical organizational structure in which spiritual levels and personal turmoil are ranked, combined with the overall perception that certain countries are superior to others, perhaps it is not surprising to learn that some members in the religion may also have a ranking system in their minds when it comes to overseas followers. On several occasions in Japan, I observed in Shinnyoen a pattern of preferential treatment afforded to certain overseas followers and cases of hasty regard given to others. Being Japanese American, and therefore largely indistinguishable in the sea of Japanese believers, I was treated differently from other foreigners. I was not courted and pampered in the same manner as some of my white European and American counterparts were; nor was my presence at temples, the International Followers counter, and at various meetings acknowledged with similar congeniality. I was, however, seemingly treated with more patience than other Asian followers were and the tone of voice used when Shinnyoen members addressed me seemed more polite. Answers to my questions, for example, were not as hurried and my opinions seemed to be given more consideration when compared with Chinese followers from Taiwan. Not surprisingly many of the American followers were more enthusiastic about Shinnyoen when it came to attending meetings and volunteering for services than their Chinese counterparts. Due to experiences such as these it became clear that a researcher's ethnic and national background will have some influence in shaping his/her perception of Shinnyoen. In my view, a white American professor from an Ivy League university visiting Shinnyoen in Japan is apt to have a different experience and therefore interpretation of the religion than a visitor from Southeast Asia.

⁴³Ethnicity, nationality, and race are used interchangeably here because for many Japanese there are clear stereotypes of what ethnic types inhabit each nation. For example on several occasions in 1994-95 a number of Japanese American and Korean American applicants were not granted interviews at certain English language schools in Japan because employers wanted "real Americans."

Foreign Members as Window Dressing

While initial contact with the religion may be pleasant, the preferential treatment afforded to some overseas members of Shinnyoen is rarely more than cosmetic, however, and the chances of a foreigner penetrating into the core of the religion and scaling its organizational heights are indeed slim. All Shinnyoen followers are encouraged to strive to reach the level of reinôsha and along with attaining this cherished spiritual level comes added responsibility within the organization. This does not seem to be the case concerning foreign reinôsha in the religion, however. One of the top foreign reinôsha in the religion, a French woman who had spent three years in Sôka Gakkai before joining the Shinnyoen ranks, complained that despite reaching this highly regarded spiritual level she was still not treated on equal par with her Japanese counterparts and despite her hopes to the contrary, she still had "no say" in the religion.⁴⁴ While more foreigners are reaching the reinôsha level every year, it is still rare for overseas followers to gain important positions in the religion. One need only to observe a Shinnyoen service in Japan to understand the position of foreigners in the group. Except for certain "special" occasions, foreigners are often led to the back of the worship hall or into another room altogether before the start of a service. This treatment seems to extend to certain overseas branches as well. A Shinnyoen France follower complained at an International Meeting in Tokyo that the only time foreigners are given prominent positions at services in France is when there is a visit by the heads of the religion (Keishu-sama or Yôshu-sama, the founder's daughters). On these special occasions, branch temple heads place the local French followers in conspicuous seating areas during the service in order to give the Shinnyoen leaders the impression that the particular overseas temple is successful with the native population. According to this frustrated Frenchman, "foreigners are just for show."

⁴⁴Information gathered from interview with reinôsha on March 26, 1995 at the Shinnyoen main temple in Tokyo.

The accusation that Shinnyoen uses foreigners "just for show" is corroborated by my own experiences with the religion. I visited Shinnyoen UK several times over an eight month span from October 1993 to May 1994, just prior to its grand opening in June. During the course of my visits there were only three regular British followers among the 50 or so followers but one would never guess this by the propaganda produced by the religion.⁴⁵ Although there were only three British followers in the group, each was given an important and prominent role for the Shinnyoen UK grand opening ceremony. Subsequent videotapes and photographs in Shinnyoen publications covering the Shinnyoen UK event showcased the three Britons and if one did not know any better, one would think that Shinnyoen UK was a great success with the local population.⁴⁶ Videotapes of Shinnyoen France likewise followed this pattern as they featured extensive close-up shots of French followers in an obvious attempt to disguise the small number of local followers participating in the services.⁴⁷ There were similar maneuverings at the grand opening ceremony in New York. Again pictures and videos of the New York ceremony highlighted the faces of white Americans even though more than 80% of the New York membership is Japanese and a significant number of the non-Japanese membership is Chinese.⁴⁸ Are these photographic ploys crude attempts to convince the viewer that Shinnyoen is a truly international religion? If so, who are the targeted audiences? Because videotapes and photographs of the religion's events are only circulated within the organization, one must assume that these were not meant for non-members' eyes. Moreover, because the videotapes are narrated in Japanese we can also assume that they were meant mostly to be seen by the members in Japan. We can conclude that the video journals and photo displays showcasing foreign followers are largely efforts by Shinnyoen to convince its own members of the legitimacy and universality of the religion.

⁴⁵50 followers is by my own count. Shinnyoen UK, however, insisted that it had over 100 members in 1994.

⁴⁶*The Path of Shinnyoen in 1994* videotape.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Data gathered from informal interview in Japan with a visiting New York follower (March 25, 1995).

Shinnyoen is certainly not the only Japanese new religion to use overseas followers as showpieces. Other new religions also utilize foreigners to impress themselves and others as Catherine Cornille, in her study of Mahikari states: "members from abroad are paraded as evidence of the international dimension and the world-wide relevance of the movement."⁴⁹ Similarly at the Hawaii Johrei Fellowship, an offshoot of the Japanese new religion Sekai Kyûseikyô, the same white professor constantly appeared in videos and publications to hammer home the truths of the religion. In this case not only the follower's ethnicity, but his profession also served as a legitimating vehicle for followers. Why the need for Shinnyoen and others to convince their followers of the religions' success with non-Japanese? These attempts may be viewed as a strategy utilized by the movements to mobilize the faithful with strong solidarity and ideological incentives to act on behalf of the religions.⁵⁰ Such actions may include renewed enthusiasm to proselytize or a commitment to deepen one's faith, both vital for the success of the religion.

Concluding Comments

A number of important issues have been introduced in this chapter that require further examination. The ideological and organizational construct of Japanese new religions, for example, which include their worldviews, resources, and proselytizing motives, are key themes that will influence their efforts to expand abroad. In order to increase the likelihood of a successful proselytizing campaign overseas, it is important for new religions to have within their system an appropriate worldview to generate and support missionary activities. Although Japanese new religions may have a sense of possessing universal truths, that they are often expressed through localized i.e. Japanese forms of practice has consequences for the religions' growth in non-Japanese cultures. In short, it is a matter of form not supporting

⁴⁹Cornille (1994) p. 95.

⁵⁰Snow (1987).

content. As will become clear in the following pages, this interplay between form and content has repercussions for Shinnyoen abroad.

It is important to acquire a detailed understanding of the dynamics of a particular new religion in order to frame our look at the spread of Japanese new religions abroad. This study of Shinnyoen will show how the proselytizing strategy and success of a Japanese new religion in lands beyond the Japanese archipelago are tied to the religion's ideological and organizational traits. It is to these central characteristics of Shinnyoen, along with its historical development then, that we turn and examine in the next two chapters.

Chapter Two: History and Organizational Structure

1. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND¹

This section outlines the history of Shinnyoen and argues that the ethos of the religion is, in large part, influenced by the number of crises the movement has endured. Moreover in addition to the usual history that is described and dogmatized in Shinnyoen publications, I offer a slightly different interpretation of the Shinnyoen story. The roles of Itô Eiko and Itô Atsuko (the two eldest daughters of the Shinnyoen founders) for example, have been downplayed in the unfolding drama of the group. In fact, followers who have joined the religion since 1977 are largely kept unaware of the existence of the two daughters, as the issues surrounding their departures from Shinnyoen are problematic and sensitive ones for the religion. In my interpretation of the history of Shinnyoen that follows, I not only add Eiko and Atsuko to the Shinnyoen historical framework, but more importantly I look at the impact they had on their parents' religion. There are a number of other significant events in the history of Shinnyoen, however, that have also shaped the character of the religion. The death of the two Itô sons, the arrest and imprisonment of the founder, the premature passing of the "mother" of the religion, and the feud between the Itô daughters all underline the interpretation of the history of Shinnyoen as a story of crises.

Shinnyoen: Foundations and Influences

Itô Shinjô (1906-1989), known as *Kyôshu-sama*² among followers, first began in 1936 what was later to become Shinnyoen, one of the largest of the new religions in Japan.³ Born Itô Fumiaki on March 28, 1906 in Yamanashi prefecture, he was the second son of Itô Bunjirô and Yoshie. Bunjirô managed a farm and was an influential man in the village, and it

¹For a detailed biography of the Shinnyoen founders and background of the religion, see Numata (1995) pp. 359-395.

²*Kyôshu* literally means head of a religion or sect and *sama* is an honorific attachment.

³Kawabata Akira (1995), Akiba Yutaka (1995), and Djumali Allam (1994) rank Shinnyoen fourth behind Sôka Gakkai, Risshô Kôseikai, and Reiyûkai.

was from him that Fumiaki learned a form of divination practice called *byôzeishô*.⁴ Over the course of three years starting in 1918 Itô Bunjirô trained his son in the family practice.

Although its origin is not clear, the practice seems to have largely consisted of the interpretation of casted lots. Byôzeishô was passed down orally through the generations in the Itô family, often utilized during farm work to help bring about a bountiful crop.

Fumiaki's knowledge and practice of the family divination art then set the background for his spiritual interest and subsequent religious training.

In 1932 Fumiaki moved to Tokyo and was employed by the Tachikawa Aircraft Company where, according to Shinnyoen accounts, he worked as an aeronautical engineer.⁵ The use of byôzeishô made Itô quite popular among his co-workers as he was able to help them with various problems in work and personal matters. Fumiaki's popularity soon attracted a small following and at this point he began to entertain thoughts of forming his own religious movement. It was not until December 28, 1935, however, when Itô first enshrined the image of Fudô Myôô in his home that the first concrete steps toward formalizing an organized religious group began to emerge.⁶ It was also at this time when Itô first chose a priestly name for himself, "Tensei" (Clear Sky).⁷

Although Shinnyoen is considered a new religion, the group does possess characteristics taken from other religious traditions as well, including those that can be traced to traditional Japanese Buddhism, Japanese folk religion, and Christianity. Indeed this eclectic nature is a characteristic of Japanese new religions as a whole. In Shinnyoen's case,

⁴The three Chinese characters used to write *byôzeishô* mean illness, divining, and selection. However according to Shinnyoen Hawaii staff members, the characters function more as a mnemonic device than as a true spelling of the family practice. Byôzeishô was passed down orally and Itô later assigned the three characters to the term to help him remember its pronunciation.

⁵According to some accounts, Itô worked not as an aeronautical engineer but as a professional photographer. See for example Djumali (1994) p. 161. The fact that Itô excelled in photography supports this view.

⁶According to Shinnyoen accounts, the sculptured image of *Dainichi Daishô Fudô Myôô* (Great and Holy Mahavairochana Achala) which Itô enshrined was the work of Unkei (?-1223), a master Buddhist sculptor of the Kamakura era (1185-1333). Fudô Myôô holds a sword of wisdom in one hand to cut away illusions and a lasso in the other in which to lead beings to the "other shore" of enlightenment (Shinnyoen 1992b). In Shinnyoen it is believed that this enshrined image of Fudô Myôô helped lead Itô Shinjô and Tomoji enter into a religious life. Shinnyoen (1993a) p. 207.

⁷*The Nirvana*, December 1994, no. 287, p. 6. Itô later received the priestly name, Shinjô, at Daigoji.

one need only look to its founder to discern a prominent reason for the close association between Shinnyoen and traditional Japanese Buddhism.

Itô trained in the esoteric Shingon Buddhist tradition at Daigoji in Japan for several years, undergoing various spiritual austerities including meditating beneath waterfalls, repeatedly pouring buckets of ice over himself during winter, burning candles on his arm, and walking through burning coals. These practices helped him eventually achieve the rank of "great teacher" as well as attain an aura of power and charisma. On October 27, 1939 Itô completed training for "Ein-kanchô," which was the highest rank afforded to a lay person by Daigoji. Less than two years later, on March 3, 1941 he completed training for the title of "Kentai-ryôbu-dempô-kanchô," the highest priestly rank at Daigoji. In addition Itô was awarded the mandalas of Kongô-kai (Diamond World) and Taizô-kai (Womb Store World).⁸ It was also during this period that Fumiaki received his priestly name, Shinjô.

From 1936 until the end of World War II, Itô's group remained under the auspices of the Shingon Buddhist sect.⁹ Yet even after the group declared its independence from Shingon Buddhism, Itô maintained his relationship with Okada Yûshû, who was to later become archbishop of Daigoji.¹⁰ The bond between the two was such that Okada was later asked to conduct the wedding ceremony for Itô's daughter and successor, Masako.¹¹ Shinnyoen has continued to enjoy a favorable relationship with the Daigoji branch of Shingon as the construction in 1997 of a special hall dedicated to Shinnyoen on the grounds of the Daigoji headquarters in Kyoto attests. The *Shinnyo Samaya Hall* was constructed "in praise of the virtue of the Shinnyo Founder" and commemorates "Sooya-sama's (the

⁸As told to members at the Tokunaga lineage meeting on November 10, 1995.

⁹Under the "Contribution to the Nation through Religious Activities" act, the Japanese government implemented control over all the religions, dissolving the respective headquarters of the Shingon schools in order to form one Shingon group.

¹⁰The exact nature of the relationship between Shinnyoen and Daigoji is not clear. What is clear is that at the very least the relationship is a financial one as Shinnyoen has donated large sums of money to Daigoji for temple construction on at least three separate occasions. For example in 1966 Itô donated ten million yen to support Daigoji. Maintaining a relationship with Daigoji also serves to legitimate Itô's priestly titles and Shinnyoen's claim that it descended from traditional Buddhism.

¹¹*The Nirvanians*, December 1973, no. 34. Okada conducted the wedding ceremony of Itô Masako and Saitô Isao on October 2, 1973. Itô's youngest daughter, Shizuko, married Kobayashi Yasuhiro on May 17, 1972. *The Nirvanians*, June 1972, no. 16.

Shinnyoen founder and his wife) meritorious deeds of devoting themselves to leading people toward the enlightening and saving teachings of the Buddha."¹² In this manner Shinnyoen has firm roots in traditional Shingon esotericism, which explains the large amount of Shingon terminology utilized by the group albeit with altered nuances.

While Shinnyoen cultivated many of its early features out of Shingon Buddhist soil, its distinctive character is largely shaped by the founder's interpretation of the Nirvana sutra and by the spiritual abilities of his wife, Itô Tomoji (1912-1967), whom followers affectionately refer to as Shôjuin-sama. It is through Tomoji that one can trace the Shinnyoen ties to Japanese folk religion. Born into humble surroundings in the village of Takane in Yamanashi prefecture near the base of Mount Fuji, Uchida Tomoji was orphaned at a young age and raised by her paternal grandmother. At the age of 20 she married her distant cousin, and the couple set off for the suburbs of Tokyo to begin a new life together and eventually found a new religion.

It should be noted here that Fumiaki and Tomoji brought with them an assortment of religious leanings to Shinnyoen in addition to the above influences.¹³ As a child Fumiaki regularly attended Tenrikyô services with his mother and later became an enthusiastic follower of Christianity due to his elder sister's influence. Tomoji, on the other hand, was raised by her grandmother as a devotee of Kannon and Yakushi Nyorai. Both deities are popular figures of worship in Buddhism and Japanese folk religion. Moreover they are not only identified with traditional Buddhism but with esoteric Buddhism as well. These religious foundations then clearly underline the eclectic nature of the group and helped influence the religious development of Shinnyoen.

One could argue that Itô Tomoji was as influential (if not more so) in shaping the character of Shinnyoen as Shinjô. She underwent 30 days of winter training with her

¹²*The Nirvana*, October 1997, no. 321, pp. 6, 8.

¹³There are an assortment of figures of worship in Shinnyoen, including the guardian gods of the Itô and Uchida families: "My family's guardian is of the heavenly lineage with Bezaiten as the primary deity, while Shôjuin's was of the earthly lineage of Kasanori. My family's guardian protects the day while Shôjuin's protects the night." *The Nirvana*, July 1993, no. 270, p. 2.

husband beginning on January 5, 1936, in order to purify and strengthen her spiritual self. More importantly however, she was the one responsible for introducing into the religion the pillar of Shinnyoen training--*sesshin* (practice whereby members receive spiritual guidance from Shinnyoen mediums). Tomoji is also the one who, through her shamanic abilities, pressed Shinjô to finally give up his job at the aircraft company on February 8, 1936 and devote his life solely to religion.¹⁴

According to the Shinnyoen story, on the winter morning of January 31, 1936, near the conclusion of the winter training that consisted of 30 days of cold water ablutions, Tomoji went into deep prayer in front of the Fudô image while observing a *goma*, or esoteric fire rite. In the midst of the flames she saw an image of her husband wearing Buddhist robes. Tomoji interpreted this vision as a religious calling for her husband to earnestly pursue the path of religion and provide a means of salvation for everyone. In a manner consistent with a number of religious prophets, however, Shinjô was reluctant to heed his religious calling. During those early days of religious practice the young family (the couple now had a daughter and a son) struggled financially and thus the decision for Shinjô to leave his post at the aircraft company and the money it brought was not an easy one to make. After several unsuccessful attempts at a compromise with Tomoji and her vision however--at one point she became mute while in a trance and refused to speak until Itô complied with the Buddha's wishes--he decided to quit his job and dedicate the rest of his life to religion. Tomoji then, received the most important revelation in the history of the Itô religion, the one that led to the birth of Shinnyoen. It was also Tomoji's vision and communication with the Buddha that provided the legitimation for Shinjô's early religious quest. In this sense it is clear her role in the founding of Shinnyoen is significant.

Sesshin, or what was to later be called sesshin, was the religious tradition of the Uchida family, originating with Tomoji's paternal grandmother, Kin. It is said that Kin's practice included performing exorcism and treating illness through faith healing. Kin then

¹⁴Shinjô had toyed with the idea of becoming a "man of religion" but changed his mind on several occasions.

passed the practice to Tomoji's aunt. On February 4, 1936, Aunt Tamae formally initiated Tomoji into the family's religious tradition and helped Tomoji refine her shamanic abilities which were subsequently polished further by her experiences with Shinjô.¹⁵ On February 8, 1936, Tomoji and Shinjô vowed to devote their entire lives to helping others through their religious practices. Thus the combination of Itô Shinjô's esoteric Shingon background and Tomoji's folk religious influence in large part accounts for the traditional content of Shinnyoen belief.¹⁶

A Story of Crisis

Perhaps the character of Shinnyoen can best be illustrated by the amount of obstacles i.e. personal tragedies and hardships that the founder and organization have had to endure and which have since shaped the beliefs and practices of the group. Throughout the history of Shinnyoen there have been several crises that have threatened to undermine its existence. The first in a series occurred on June 9, 1936 at the outset of Itô's religious mission. Only months after Shinjô and Tomoji had formed a core group of followers under the name Risshôkaku,¹⁷ Chibun, their eldest son, who was not yet two years old, suddenly passed away. Understandably the grief this caused the couple was intense and overwhelming. Shinjô struggled with the loss of his son, at one point asking followers to discard all of Chibun's belongings perhaps in an effort to clear his memory of his son's death. The death of Shinjô's son also shook the faith of many followers who, no doubt, took this as an inauspicious sign from the gods and left Itô.¹⁸ While most of Chibun's belongings were discarded by faithful followers in accordance with Shinjô's demands, Tomoji could not part

¹⁵The seminal study of shamanism in Japan is Carmen Blacker's *The Catalpa Bow* (1975).

¹⁶The shamanic female working in conjunction with a priestly male is a theme common to a number of Japanese new religions. The female often functions as the channel to the spiritual world while the male organizes and interprets its messages. This pattern of female charisma and male leadership can be found in such examples as Tenrikyô (Nakayama Miki and Izô Iburî), Ômoto (Deguchi Nao and Deguchi Onisaburô), Reiyûkai (Kotani Kimi and Kubo Kakutarô), Risshô Kôseikai (Naganuma Myôkô and Niwano Nikkyô), and Tenshō Kôtai Jingûkyô (Kitamura Sayo and Nakamura Kimitake).

¹⁷The three Chinese characters used for Risshôkaku mean standing, illuminating, and tower.

¹⁸Shiraimizu (1979) p. 421.

with the memory of her son and, disregarding her husband's orders, secretly kept her son's baby blanket (chanchanko). Her efforts to maintain a bond with her son manifested itself at the 100th day service after Chibun's death, where Chibun (posthumously known as Kyôdôin among followers) communicated with Tomoji, transmitting "spiritual utterances" to his mother. According to Shinnyoen teaching this event enabled Tomoji to enter into immediate trance and establish a direct connection to the spirit world. The death of the first Itô son was later interpreted by Shinnyoen as a sacrificial act for the sake of his parents' religious mission:

Looking back, we can see that Kyodoin-sama passed away in exchange for the life of Kyoshu-sama (*Itô Shinjô*). Kyoshu-sama had been going through severe ascetic training, performing water ablution in winter and placing lit candles on his arms. He also had very little to eat. If Kyoshu-sama had gone to the spiritual world then, neither we nor the Order would be where we are today.¹⁹

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl writes, "Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice."²⁰ Here we can see two grieving parents struggling to come to terms with a devastating personal loss. Interpreting Chibun's death as a great sacrifice helped Shinjô and Tomoji make some sense out of incredible "non-sense." It gave meaning to their suffering. Chibun's death also sharpened Tomoji's capacity to communicate with the spiritual world. In this way Shinnyoen took a potentially debilitating event and transformed it into something positive for the religion. The number of followers soon increased and in 1938 the religious association Risshôkaku became the Shingonshû Tachikawa Fudô Kyôkai.

¹⁹*The Nirvana*, June 1992, no. 257, p. 6.

²⁰Frankl (1963) p. 179.

The second critical period for the group occurred in 1950 when, on August 20, Itô was arrested and jailed for 40 days. He was sentenced to seven months imprisonment with a three year stay of execution equivalent to a period of probation.²¹ Itô's arrest centered on allegations of the physical abuse of his followers.

Itô seems to have had a history of difficulty with anger management and was given to fits of violent outbursts. One reinôsha (Shinnyoen spiritual medium) recalls how the head of Shinnyoen was commonly referred to as "Kaminari Kanchô" (Thunder Chief) by followers as Itô would often pound things with his fists when angry.²² Another Shinnyoen member recalls another incident which characterizes Itô's temper:

When Kyoshu-sama would get angry, it would be like the clap of ten thunders erupting simultaneously. One time, Shindoin-sama (the religious name of Itô's second son, Yûichi) talked back to a member of the temple office,...The staff member was probably wrong, but Kyoshu-sama reprimanded Shindoin-sama. Shindoin-sama, however, did not accept Kyoshu-sama's admonishment.

So Kyoshu-sama put him in an outdoors toilet and nailed the door shut with long nails. We just stood about not knowing what to do...²³

Some of the formal charges leveled against Itô during his arrest included the following allegations of physical abuse: 1) in August 1948, for the suspected theft of the religion's finances, a follower sustained injuries at the hands of the organization's leaders to the extent that it required 10 days to recover, 2) in September of the same year, with the intent of punishing a member for delinquent conduct, Itô meted out a beating to a follower which resulted in injuries that required one week to heal; 3) in July 1949 the fiancé of Itô's eldest

²¹ Shiraimizu (1979) p. 423.

²² From Chiryû Gakuin video sermon on November 18, 1995 at Shinnyoen Hawaii.

²³ *The Nirvana*, July 1993, no. 270, pp. 4-5.

daughter and two female followers were beaten for their suspected involvement in a deceptive love affair. The fiancé needed two weeks to recover from his injuries while the two female followers required one month for their injuries to heal.²⁴ The Tokyo courts found Itô guilty of the charges.

There are variations in the stories and conflicting reports about the events surrounding the arrest and imprisonment of the Shinnyoen founder, however. According to stories circulated in Shinnyoen, for example, the events leading to Itô's arrest are markedly different. While undergoing one of several ascetic training sessions, a member with a responsible position in the group *asked* to receive physical blows by Itô in order to deepen his religious practice. Instead of showing gratitude for the opportunity to deepen his practice, however, this fellow turned around and filed a complaint against the founder. Moreover the complainant, a 23 year old executive director of Makoto Kyôdan (the new name of Tachikawa Fudô Kyôkai since 1948), was all the while engaging in promiscuous affairs with female followers and seeking to seize control of the religious order. After having been found out, he left the religion in the fall of 1949 bearing a grudge against Itô only to return the next year, bringing with him legal action against the founder. What is more, the local newspapers, eager to portray the group as a danger and threat to society, picked up on the story and related charges of fraud, tax evasion, bribery, torture and harassment against Itô. This helped to turn public sentiment against the religion.

In Shinnyoen videos and publications this time of controversy and upheaval is referred to as the period of religious persecution.²⁵ However Tomoji rallied the followers during Itô's stay in prison and Shinnyoen used this occasion of perceived persecution to intensify the faith of its believers. In this manner the religion was not only able to withstand the crisis, but expand in numbers as well, as Itô's subsequent release from prison renewed

²⁴Inoue et al., eds. (1990) p. 509.

²⁵According to Shinnyoen teaching, there were four such periods of persecution: in 1951 when Itô was imprisoned, 1958 when a number of staff members including relatives of the Itô's left the religion; and in 1968 and 1977 when the two eldest Itô daughters left Shinnyoen.

the enthusiasm of the group. Nevertheless this period in Shinnyoen history has had lasting consequences for the group. Largely as a result of this experience, Shinnyoen is wary of granting much authority to members outside the immediate Itô family which in turn affects its overseas development. I will comment more on this in a later chapter.

On June 21, 1951, in an attempt to make a fresh start, Itô changed the name of his group from Makoto Kyôdan to Shinnyoen.²⁶ Paralleling the tragedy which marked the start of Itô's religious career, however, a third crisis befell the religion when Yûichi, the Itô's second son, died on July 2, 1952, at the age of 15. He had suffered from caries, a degenerative bone disease of the hip joint, and was first admitted to Jutendo hospital in the summer of 1949. After Yûichi's death there again was talk among people questioning the power and truth of the Itô religion:

If it is such a splendid religion, bad things should not have happened. If their faith can heal people's illness, they should not have lost their own child.²⁷

Yet the tragic death of a second son was again interpreted by Itô as a compassionate and important religious event for Shinnyoen: "Shindôin sacrificed his life in order to protect the Order."²⁸ According to Shinnyoen belief, Shindôin, as Yûichi is known by followers, along with his brother Kyôdôin (together addressed as Ryôdôji-sama²⁹) were sent to the spirit world by their parents in order to relieve the sufferings of Shinnyoen members:

²⁶Makoto Kyôdan can be translated as the "Religious Order of Truth or Sincerity." Shinnyoen (1992b) p. 206. The group itself translates Shinnyoen as the "Order (borderless garden) of Truth." Shinnyoen (1992a) p. 221.

²⁷Shinnyoen (1992a) p. 117.

²⁸*The Nirvana*, September 1987, no. 200, p. 2.

²⁹Shinnyoen translates *Ryôdôji* as "both virtuous boys."

There are two different spiritual lineages of *bakku* and *daiju* ; one traces its salvation to Shindôin-sama, who lifts our sufferings (*bakku*), and the other to Kyôdôin-sama, who shoulders them for us (*daiju*).³⁰

For a third time, the religion was able to withstand a potentially debilitating event and transform it into something positive for its development, as the important Shinnyoen concept of bakkudaiju (vicarious suffering) was born after the deaths of the two Itô sons .³¹

Death of Tomoji

In 1967 Tomoji traveled to Europe accompanying Shinjô on a mission of promoting religious friendship with foreign nations. The whirlwind tour, which ran from June 11 to July 4 and took them through eight countries (including Vatican City where she and Shinjô met the Pope), was a struggle for Tomoji and it took a physical toll on her body. She tired easily and began to show signs of being seriously ill. On her return to Japan, despite her illness, Tomoji kept up her hectic pace, ministering to followers all the while taking care of her own family and putting the concerns of others before her own. This proved too much for her and the mother of Shinnyoen was dead in less than a month. Tomoji died at 5:10 p.m. on August 6, 1967 at the age of 55. Itô himself says in a Shinnyoen video presentation that Shinnyoen lost a vital aspect of its character when Tomoji died. Tomoji was mother not only to her own children but to followers as well. She cooked for followers, fed those who were hungry, and on occasions dressed those who were poor. The annual Shinnyoen bazaar, which offers baked goods, plants, and housewares to surrounding communities, was first started by Tomoji when she would purchase vegetables and give them to followers who were most needy.

³⁰ Shinnyoen (1992b) p. 118.

³¹ Dead children continuing to help their parents' religious mission from the spiritual world is not something unique to Shinnyoen. Other examples include Heung Jin Nim, the deceased son of the Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, who sends spiritual revelations to his father. Pierce (1994) p. 417.

There are numerous stories by followers in Shinnyoen publications of Tomoji's care, concern, and compassion for others.³² Her premature passing was thus a severe blow to the religion. Despite this major setback Shinnyoen continued to forge ahead and make strides in terms of membership and doctrinal advancement. Tomoji's death, like his two sons' deaths, was interpreted by Itô as an act of mercy and compassion for both followers of Shinnyoen and non-members of the religion as well:

The sudden death of Shôjuin during this auspicious time must have been the eternal Buddha's will, something beyond the scope of understanding for ordinary human beings. It must have been in order to extend the Buddha's mercy and compassion unlimitedly to all.³³

Tomoji's death facilitated the doctrinal development of Shinnyoen further as the teaching of *shôju* became an official part of the religion's teaching. According to Shinnyoen doctrine, *shôju* is "the embracement extended equally to all beings without distinction between friends and foes, not only to all in this world but also to all in the spiritual world."³⁴ Although Shinnyoen followers do not know the exact medical cause of her death, they are taught that Tomoji's illness was the product of shouldering responsibility for all of the spirits of Europe that were in anguish and comforting them during her tour. According to a Shinnyoen publication, Tomoji "departed for the Spiritual World to extend the salvation transcending all the differences in languages, religions, and nationalities."³⁵ Indeed, after the death of Tomoji, steps toward internationalization were taken as Shinnyoen opened its first overseas branch temple in Hawaii and has since constructed temples and Propagation Centres in Europe, North America, South America, and Asia.

³²Shinnyoen has published a collection of these in the two volume work, *A Wisteria Cluster* (1992).

³³Shinnyoen (1992b) p. 140

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵*What is Shinnyoen?* p. 3.

Tomoji's death in 1967 ushered in another crucial period in the history of Shinnyoen. While Shinnyoen has gone largely unscathed in terms of the secession that afflicts many Japanese new religions, Tomoji's passing did bring about a period of serious internal conflict. The Itô's had six children, two boys and four girls. The uprising which followed Tomoji's death resulted in all four of Itô's daughters leaving Shinnyoen at one point or another.

The Wayward Daughters ³⁶

Given the tradition among Japanese new religions to promote family members to leadership positions (see below), it is not surprising that the Itô children figure prominently in the history of Shinnyoen. What is perhaps surprising is that two of the children, the two elder daughters, have rebelled against the religion and have caused no little confusion and embarrassment for staff officials and members alike. What follows is a brief description of Itô Eiko (b. May 1933) and Itô Atsuko (b. July 1940) and their impact on Shinnyoen.

Information concerning the two daughters is shrouded in mystery as Shinnyoen officials are not eager to shed much light on the controversy between the four Itô daughters that led to the departures of Eiko and Atsuko.³⁷ Needless to say squabbles within the Itô family are not events the religion is wont to advertise and thus information about the daughters is scarce and often severely biased. Most Shinnyoen leaders are quite uncomfortable speaking about the two wayward daughters and I have been warned against

³⁶As mentioned, Shinjô and Tomoji had six children, four girls and two boys. According to various Shinnyoen publications they were rather sickly children with the two boys dying at an early age and the two younger daughters coming close to death due to illness at one time or another. See for example the collection of Itô Tomoji's memoirs in *A Wisteria Cluster*.

³⁷It should be noted that in *Ichinyo no Michi* (1984) (The Path of Oneness, published by Shinnyoen), which contains the history of Shinnyoen and is the religion's primary scripture, the names Eiko and Atsuko cannot be found. The writers and/or editors have clearly attempted to eliminate all references to Eiko and Atsuko except in a few cases where their presence is necessary to advance the religion's teaching. Yet even in these few instances where the daughters exclusion is not possible, Eiko and Atsuko are not referred to by name but instead alluded to under the ambiguous term "our daughter." Due to efforts on the religion's part such as these, most junior and/or new members have little or no idea who Eiko and Atsuko are. Shinnyoen seems content to let them believe that Itô only had two daughters.

asking questions concerning Eiko and Atsuko. A senior member at Shinnyoen Hawaii for example predicted that should I continue to pursue information regarding the two elder daughters I would be inviting a host of negative spirits into my life and accumulate such evil karma that it would be impossible for me to be rid of. She ultimately refused to provide any information on the two elder daughters but instead cautioned me against concerning myself with matters that would surely have harmful consequences for my spiritual progress. Only saying, "hontô ni abunai desu yo" (it's really dangerous!), she urged me to concentrate all my attention on the two younger daughters instead. Nevertheless, by continuing to ask questions about Eiko and Atsuko and by eliciting responses from a variety of people--temple staff members and followers alike--a rough sketch of the conflict that led to the departures of Eiko and Atsuko emerged.³⁸

According to Shinnyoen members, shortly after Tomoji died a power struggle pitting the two eldest daughters against the two younger ones arose within the religion.³⁹ One of the issues involved in the struggle was the possible remarriage of Itô to a woman whom Eiko, the oldest daughter, had arranged for her father to meet. She was concerned that her father, who was now left all alone, would have no one to take care of him. Masako and Shizuko (the present heads of Shinnyoen) vehemently opposed Itô's remarriage especially since their mother had only died shortly before.⁴⁰ Due to strong suggestions and maneuverings by Eiko and Atsuko however, Shinjô did consider remarriage. According to a

³⁸My attempts to try and locate the daughters were unsuccessful. Neither Shinnyoen staff members nor scholars at Taishô University and Kokugakuin University knew of their whereabouts.

³⁹The following information was procured during a two hour interview with a high ranking member at the Shinnyoen headquarters in Tachikawa, Tokyo on December 11, 1994. Hence one should bear in mind that the information may have been presented in such a way as to portray the younger daughters in a positive light. While the struggle between the daughters is common knowledge among senior members in Shinnyoen, this information is withheld from junior members and the general public. A different version of the conflict surrounding Itô's remarriage can be found in Numata (1995). In Numata's account, all four daughters were against their father's remarriage to the extent that the three younger daughters left Shinnyoen leaving only Eiko with Itô. Two years later however the three daughters returned to the religion only to have Eiko, her husband, and others leave Shinnyoen for unexplained reasons.

⁴⁰In yet another account of the conflict, it was Eiko who opposed the idea of her father remarrying. Her opposition to Itô's remarriage was to such an extent that she was in the end disowned (*gizetsu*) by her father. Eiko left Shinnyoen, taking with her her husband, who was until then being groomed to be the religion's successor. Yokoyama (1978) p. 143.

former resident minister at Shinnyoen Hawaii, in 1967 the two youngest daughters were severely "attacked" by the forces of the two eldest daughters and left the religion. However the two younger daughters were able to garner enough support from certain Shinnyoen officials to rejoin the religion a short time later. Understandably Itô was torn by these circumstances and the religion experienced intense turmoil and confusion as followers took sides. Itô did eventually remarry. The result after everything was said and done however, was the departure of Eiko in 1968 and subsequently of Atsuko in 1977. According to a former Shinnyoen Hawaii resident minister, the departures were bitter ones as Eiko attacked the religion in several interviews with various magazines after her exit from her family's religion. Itô was hurt by his daughters' betrayal and remained bitter to the end as the words of Masako, his third daughter, make clear:

...in the case of my two older sisters, up until the very end he refused to see those who had turned against the Teaching even if they were his own flesh and blood. I remember saying to him, "Please tell me if you ever want to see my older sisters who left the Order."

He responded, "I have no wish to see them."

Even after I asked him, "If your condition deteriorates, you would want me to call them, right?" his reply was, "There is no need for that either."⁴¹

Not surprisingly Eiko and Atsuko were stripped of their status as reinôsha when they left the family religion.⁴² This practice of rendering reinôsha spiritually powerless once outside the religion continues in Shinnyoen, as mediums are stripped of their spiritual faculties once outside the temple. Placing such restrictions on the spiritual power of reinôsha

⁴¹*The Nirvana*, July 1996, no. 306, p. 5.

⁴²Eiko achieved reinôsha status in 1946 while Atsuko achieved the spiritual rank in 1947. Interestingly, Atsuko achieved reinôsha status before her older brother Yûichi.

has helped Shinnyoen to avoid the secession that is characteristic of other Japanese new religions which focus on spiritual power, e.g. Mahikari.

Witnessing his own children bickering among themselves and leaving Shinnyoen at one time or another must have put a terrible strain on Shinjô and the organization. It is not surprising then that in 1976, just before Atsuko left the religion, the founder of Shinnyoen fell critically ill and required two months of hospitalization. During this period of illness and turmoil Shinjô was forced to consider the future of his religion and decide who would succeed him. His eldest child, Eiko, was gone and deep trouble was brewing with his second oldest surviving child, Atsuko. This left Masako and Shizuko as his only viable options.⁴³ Yet each had previously left the family religion and the possibility of them leaving again had to be considered. The will (teiki) that Itô drafted in 1977 addressed this complex issue and apparently the will itself was complicated and unclear. After his death in 1989, Shinjô's will was revealed to the religion which supposedly clearly outlined his wishes for succession. However, the fact that some confusion and conflict still ensued over who would head Shinnyoen (different factions supported different daughters) leads one to believe that until the very end Shinjô was troubled by the infighting among his own children. Whether or not a significant number of members followed Eiko's and Atsuko's departure is unclear. However at least a few teaching parents left the religion which caused some confusion within the lineage system.⁴⁴ Shinnyoen has since tightened its organizational structure and has emerged from the departure of Itô's two eldest daughters largely unscathed and organizationally intact.⁴⁵

I have presented this brief outline of Shinnyoen history and development in a crisis framework. The Japanese word for crisis consists of two Chinese characters--danger and

⁴³On October 15, 1983 a ceremony at Shinnyoen was held to announce the succession of both Masako and Shizuko to the Shinnyo "dharma-stream." However having both daughters succeed Itô at the same time resulted in some initial confusion in the organization after the founder's death.

⁴⁴*The Nirvana*, October 1993, no. 273, p. 8.

⁴⁵One example of a splinter group is the now defunct Shinkô Meien, founded by Ishida Kôren, who was a Shinnyoen spiritual medium.

opportunity. Indeed, for the most part Shinnyoen has turned critical and dangerous times for the religion into opportunities for advancement and doctrinal sophistication.⁴⁶ However, Shinnyoen may just now be emerging from the midst of perhaps its most important crisis, the death of its founder.⁴⁷ The history of Japanese new religions is replete with examples of groups which have declined after the founders' death, becoming "rooted in the process of memorialisation and reflection on the past."⁴⁸ This is in stark contrast to the time when the founders were alive, a period in which these religions seemed to exude a sense of vigor and newness all the while anticipating the future. Itô Shinjô died on July 19, 1989 at 12:23 in the morning and his loss is still deeply felt by followers.⁴⁹ For example at a service at Shinnyoen UK in October of 1993, when Itô appeared on video several of the members began to weep openly. This affected other members who also began removing tissue from their purses. The loss of Shinnyoen's charismatic founder may yet lead the religion down the same path which many other Japanese new religions before it have tread. However, if the continued emergence of branch temples abroad is any indication, although the religion has lost the innovative guidance of its founder, Shinnyoen is once again transforming the dangers of decline into opportunities for growth.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

⁴⁶See the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 21, no. 2-3, especially the Introduction by Reader and Tanabe for further discussion on how conflict or crisis in Japanese religion can lead to opportunities for growth.

⁴⁷Currently at the head of the Shinnyoen order is the Itô's third daughter, Masako (Keishu-sama), who is assisted by Shizuko (Yôshu-sama), her younger sister.

⁴⁸Reader (1993) p. 240.

⁴⁹Followers are taught the exact times Itô Shinjô, Tomoji, Chibun, and Yûichi passed away; and many set their watch alarms accordingly to offer prayers or observe a moment of silence at these specific times daily. See Appendix for times.

The following sections detail the scripture of the religion, its objects of veneration, and organizational structure. These components contribute to Shinnyoen's distinctive character and help to maintain its organizational solidarity.

The Nirvana Sutra

On November 3, 1957 the Nirvana image of the Buddha, which Shinjô himself had carved, was consecrated in Shinnyoen and became, in theory, the principal figure of worship in the religion.⁵⁰ The consecration of the Nirvana image was the result of Shinnyoen incorporating the Nirvana sutra into its teaching, which in turn was another step in the religion's developmental process. Shinnyoen, like many other Japanese new religions, is eclectic in nature and as it developed from a small band of followers to one of the largest new religions in Japan, it adapted to the surrounding religious milieu of the day. Moreover Shinnyoen has collected for itself a diverse assortment of religious figures, practices, and teachings, as over the course of development the religion has shifted and reshifted its spiritual locus in efforts to expand its membership base. One of the most obvious shifts has been from the image of Fudô Myôô as the primary spiritual focal point of worship to the Nirvana image—a change induced by the shift from oral scripture to a written one. Here it is interesting to speculate on the function of the Nirvana sutra in Shinnyoen.

In numerous Shinnyoen publications aimed at new or potential members, the group makes much of the religion's emphasis on the Nirvana sutra, which is reputed to be the final sutra preached by the historical Buddha. Shinnyoen, the pamphlets claim, is the only known religion based on these final teachings. That Shinnyoen contains the ultimate and conclusive truths which the Buddha himself expounded, according to the group's literature, is what separates this religion from others:

⁵⁰As I will later demonstrate, the actual figure of worship for Shinnyoen followers is the founder, Itô Shinjô.

Founder Itô further studied the Buddha's teachings and came across a set of scriptures known as the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, the "last teachings" of the Buddha. Reading this sutra, Founder Itô realized that this was the answer he had been searching for. The essence of everything he had learned was available in this body of teachings, which could be revealed to everyone without restriction.

Shinnyo-en is the only order today whose canon (doctrine) and practice are based on the Mahaparinirvana (Great Nirvana) Sutra. In it, the Buddha reveals that it contains all His previous teachings and is the supreme one among His other discourses.⁵¹

A careful look at the history of Shinnyoen reveals that the Nirvana sutra was not always the central text of the religion. In fact when questioned, ministers and staff members alike acknowledge that the Nirvana sutra only formally became a part of the Shinnyoen teaching in 1956, 20 years after the formation of Itô's religious movement.⁵² Why the Nirvana sutra entered so late in the history of the group's development and why it was selected in the first place is the focus of this section.

Claims in Shinnyoen publications that the religion is based on the Nirvana sutra are not entirely accurate.⁵³ The main themes and teachings essential to Shinnyoen, such as *bakkudaiju* (vicarious suffering) and *sesshin* (heart to heart training), were already clearly formed and put into practice by the time the Nirvana sutra was officially incorporated into the religion. Other tools for enlightenment in the Shinnyoen construct, namely *otasuke* (proselytism), *kangi* (donations), and *gohôshi* (volunteer work) are practices certainly not

⁵¹ *What is Shinnyo-en?* p. 1.

⁵² Itô began in 1936 what was later to become Shinnyoen. After several name changes the group became formally known as Shinnyoen on June 21, 1951 (see Shinnyoen 1992b, p. 55). However, according to the introduction in the group's chanting book, "Shinnyoen was founded in 1936, the 11th year of Showa." *Shinnyoen: Morning and Evening Chanting*. Still another Shinnyoen source claims that the group was renamed Shinnyoen in 1952 (see Shinnyoen 1993a, p. 119).

⁵³ See for example Shinnyoen (1993b) p. 3, where the religion claims *sesshin* is based on the Nirvana sutra.

unique to the religion nor sutra. Hence claims by Shinnyoen that the Nirvana sutra gave Itô great spiritual insight and formed the basis for his religious ideas cannot be taken seriously. Then what, one may ask, has the Nirvana sutra contributed to the Shinnyoen faith?

The most obvious contribution of the sutra to the religion is the image of the reclining Buddha--the Buddha just prior to entering Nirvana.⁵⁴ The incorporation of a traditional Buddhist image into the religion was not something new, however. In fact as already mentioned, in the early history of Shinnyoen, then known as Risshôkaku, the main image of worship was Fudô Myôô. While Fudô Myôô still occupies an important position in the religion it is the Nirvana image which now holds the central place in all Shinnyoen sanctuaries.⁵⁵

Despite its primary location in Shinnyoen temples, the role and authority of the Nirvana image seems cursory at best. In the past, invoking the power of the Fudô Myôô image was an essential part of the religion's training. Faith in Fudô held such an important part in the early days of Shinnyoen that for a time the religion was known as the Tachikawa Fudô Kyôkai. In fact during the early history of the religion, sesshin, the pillar of Shinnyoen training, centered on faith in Fudô Myôô: "Back in the 1940's, Sesshin training would start only after the person guiding the meditation had circled around the trainees shaking a staff-like *shakujô* (Buddhist crosier) and had chanted, 'Namu Fudô Myôô, Namu Fudô Myôô.'"⁵⁶ This is not so with regards to the Nirvana image. Shinnyoen followers are told repeatedly to focus and concentrate on the images of the founder, his wife, and his two sons during periods of intense meditation or in times of need. One does not hear or read about examples where the Buddha of the Nirvana image is venerated over a member of the Itô family or Fudô Myôô.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Including traditional gods in the pantheon of new religions is not unique to Shinnyoen but is characteristic of many new religions. As Inoue (1992, p. 247) points out, "similar to traditional religions, the new religions also officially parade the names of various Kami and Buddhas as objects of veneration."

⁵⁵In fact, Shinnyoen branch temples cannot be officially opened until several criteria are met, including the enshrinement of a blessed carved image of the reclining Buddha (the Nirvana image).

⁵⁶*The Nirvana*, October 1993, no. 273, p. 8.

⁵⁷Shinnyoen has been criticized for being little more than a religion that worships the Itô family. Indeed, the founder, his wife, and his two sons hold vital positions in the Shinnyoen cosmology and are the focus of

What then is the role of the Nirvana sutra in Shinnyoen? The answer is not clear, not even to Shinnyoen members themselves as was evident when I posed this question at a meeting with several members and reinôsha. I received varied answers and there was also open disagreement and confusion among members. On a separate occasion however a high ranking Shinnyoen believer who is also a scholar of religious studies at a Japanese university perhaps gave the best answer to my question when he replied, "legitimation." He qualified his answer by stating that he himself did not believe legitimation to be the reason the Nirvana sutra was selected but it is what his professors would assume. Yet virtually any sutra could have been arbitrarily selected and implemented to help facilitate the legitimation process of a fledgling new religion. Was the selection an arbitrary one? Part of the answer seems to lie in the traditional position of the Nirvana sutra vis-à-vis other sutras. Because the Nirvana sutra traditionally contains the last teachings of the Buddha, the sutra is deemed to be the Buddha's final and authoritative teaching by Shinnyoen and thus holds significant legitimizing powers for the religion.

The timing of the inclusion of the Nirvana sutra into Shinnyoen is also an important consideration. The sutra made its appearance in Shinnyoen in 1956. Why? While there are no clear answers we can speculate on possible reasons. As already mentioned, Itô was jailed in 1951 and this incident probably did much to damage Shinnyoen's public relations. It is therefore entirely possible that the Nirvana sutra was incorporated into the religion as a means of damage control. The sutra may have functioned as a means of providing legitimation to a new religion which had run foul of the law and gained a negative reputation only a few years earlier.

Shinnyoen and the new religions were, and to some extent still are, viewed as "quasi" or "evil" religions by society.⁵⁸ At a propagation meeting at the Tokyo temple on December

prayers and meditation. That the face on the Nirvana image venerated in Shinnyoen resembles one of his own sons also lends credence to this critique (see Shinnyoen 1992b, p. 99).

⁵⁸Shinnyoen and other new religions were referred to by such terms as *ruiji shûkyô* and *jakyô* (false religions). There are stories of people throwing salt at Shinnyoen members who had come to their homes proselytizing. Salt is a purifying agent and thus casting salt at Shinnyoen members was thought to cleanse

18, 1994 for example, there were still stories of members hesitating to let family members know they belonged to the religion for fear of criticism. Indeed when I filled out an application to visit a particular Shinnyoen temple earlier in the year, one of the questions asked in the questionnaire was whether or not it was permissible for Shinnyoen to telephone my home and mention to whomever might answer the phone that Shinnyoen was calling. This perception of new religions as suspicious and fallacious organizations is not an altogether unjustified one as numerous organizations in the past have tried to evade taxes by taking advantage of the religious law implemented after Japan's defeat in the second world war. Thus a hair salon listed itself as a religious group that worshipped a god of beauty and an electrical company tried to gain religious tax exemption by setting up Thomas Edison as its chief image of worship. Some of the new religions possessed a more dangerous and criminal element as well. Incidents of rapes, abortions, and homicides gave people legitimate reasons to be suspicious of the new religions.⁵⁹ The recent Aum Shinrikyô incident has only contributed to the perception of Japanese new religions as dangerous groups.⁶⁰

One of the ways in which many of the new religions seek to dispel the negative connotation of new religions is to demonstrate that they are not new at all but in fact have deep roots in Japanese history or, as in the case of Shinnyoen and other Buddhist derived new religions, have links that can be traced to the historical Buddha.⁶¹ By claiming to be based on a particular sutra or other ancient text, new religions can distance themselves from the perception of being new and all of the prejudices that come along with the label. Indeed when asked, members of Shinnyoen will deny that their religion is a new one and instead point to the Nirvana sutra to legitimate their traditional Buddhist heritage. This theme can also be found in other Japanese new religions such as Agonshû. While Agonshû is considered a

the negative spirits that the religion brought to people's homes. See also Morioka (1994) for example of the effects media criticism of Japanese new religions can have on the groups.

⁵⁹Inoue (1992) p. 101.

⁶⁰See Yamaori (1995).

⁶¹One of the few Japanese new religions which does not shy away from the "new religion" label is Kôfuku no Kagaku. In fact Kôfuku no Kagaku embraces the tag, claiming that it is the only adequate religion for the modern world.

new religion, Ian Reader states that "the message it puts across, however, is that it is a very old, traditional religious movement. In fact it claims to be a return to the true and original Buddhism of Sâkyamuni the historical Buddha as (it believes) is expounded in the Âgama (Japanese: Agon) sûtras from which it takes its name."⁶²

One must also keep in mind that Yûichi's death occurred only a few years earlier. This life altering event may have contributed to a spiritual quest of some sort on Itô's part. Indeed in a sermon dated July 2, 1974, Itô says, "through the death of Shindoin, I was able to grasp the very core of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra. That was why, for us, even though the deaths of Ryodoji were sad events from a human point of view, they were certainly not in vain."⁶³ Whether or not Yûichi's death facilitated the incorporation of the Nirvana sutra into Shinnyoen is not clear however, and one must be careful not to make connections where none exist.

How concerned is the Shinnyoen rank and file follower with the Nirvana sutra? My own investigations show that members are content to learn that the religion is based on the text. Members have little knowledge about the Nirvana sutra and will experience difficulty when pressed for an explanation of the sutra's contents.⁶⁴ Members are not encouraged to read the sutra on their own, indeed I have been discouraged from doing so by Shinnyoen staff members claiming that the teachings contained therein are too esoteric and difficult for the untrained reader. There is certainly a little irony in this. While Shinnyoen claims that one of the special traits of the sutra is its emphasis on saving the ordinary person, the group at the same time discourages members from reading the text claiming that it is too difficult for the ordinary person to comprehend.⁶⁵ Of course the irony is resolved to an extent by Itô.

⁶²Reader (1988) p. 237.

⁶³*The Nirvana*, July 1996, no. 306, p. 1.

⁶⁴In fact, members have little understanding of the contents of the Shinnyoen chants, which are such a central part to any Shinnyoen service. The highest ranking temple staff member at the Hawaii temple guessed that followers, including himself, only understood about two to four percent of what they were chanting. (From lineage meeting on November 30, 1995) This is not unique to Shinnyoen. Sôka Gakkai and Reiyûkai members are also told that it is not necessary to understand the meaning behind the chants in order to benefit from their power (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994, Hardacre 1984).

⁶⁵Discouraging rank and file members from reading Buddhist sutras is certainly not a practice limited to Shinnyoen. Agonshû followers too are dissuaded from reading the Agamas on their own and Bryan Wilson and

Shinnyoen stresses that one should rely on the founder's understanding and interpretation of the sutra since he had mastered all of the necessary Buddhist training. Again parallels can be found in Agonshû. According to Reader:

There is actually very little emphasis on the Âgamas as texts, and virtually no systematic study of them in Agonshû. Kiriyaama does give talks on the texts (and copies of these talks are available on video at all Agonshû centers for those who wish to watch them), but members as a rule do not use the texts as a means to understanding Buddhism...Kiriyaama's discovery of the "essence" of the Âgamas is enough. They can provide the key to "true" Buddhism even if members do not read them.⁶⁶

It is not the Nirvana sutra, therefore, which members are encouraged to read but the beliefs of Itô Shinjô, which are contained in the collection of writings known as the *Ichinyo no Michi* (The Path of Oneness). It is this book which is the actual canon of the religion and the spiritual manual for followers.⁶⁷ Concerning *Ichinyo no Michi*, the current head of Shinnyoen, Itô Masako, states, "By reading it with the sincere prayer of oneness with the Buddha, with Shinnyo Sooya-sama, and with Ryodoji-sama, you can find salvation."⁶⁸ Her younger sister and vice-head of Shinnyoen, Shizuko, further adds:

Karel Dobbelaere, in their study of Sôka Gakkai in Britain, found that the religion also discourages its members from reading the Lotus sutra: "...actual study of the *sutra* is seen to be, at least initially, unnecessary for lay people." (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994, p. 8) Proof of this policy is found in Sôka Gakkai's English-language publication, the *UK Express*, which informs members that, "In practising Nichiren Daishonin's teachings...the study of the Lotus Sutra is unnecessary for us to deepen our faith and help us attain Buddhahood in this lifetime." (Ibid.)

⁶⁶Reader (1988) p. 250.

⁶⁷Incorporating the writings of a founder into the canon of a religion is certainly not unique to Shinnyoen. Other Japanese new religions, Kurozumikyô for example, also uses its founder's writing as scripture (Hardacre 1986, p. 75).

⁶⁸*The Nirvana*, April 1993, no. 267, p. 9.

Kyoshu-sama described the *Ichinyo no Michi* as being comparable with the Christian Bible, and is something that everyone should want to carry around with him or her as a source of spiritual nourishment. It is the very core of the Shinnyo doctrine, and therefore it is important for us to read again and again, as well as being active in applying what we read.⁶⁹

By its own admission then, the text of Itô Shinjô and not the Nirvana sutra is the central scripture of Shinnyoen. In addition to being a vessel containing the ultimate and conclusive truths which the Buddha himself expounded, in Shinnyoen the Nirvana sutra seems to have the distinctive role of fending off detractors who would criticize Shinnyoen as a new religion.

Objects of Veneration

In the Shinnyoen main temple at Tachikawa, a host of deities are venerated, among the more prominent of which are Fudô Myôô, the Eleven-faced Kannon, and the Nirvana image of the Buddha, collectively known as the "Three Wheel-bodies of the Buddha."⁷⁰ Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes evident that the deities in the "Three Wheel-bodies" as well as the numerous other deities in the Shinnyoen pantheon are at best marginal figures of worship. If, as I have suggested, the Nirvana image is not the central figure of worship in Shinnyoen then what or who is? After several years of observing Shinnyoen i.e. attending services, receiving sesshin, participating in meetings, doing volunteer work, reading publications, and interviewing members, in my view the main figures of worship are the Itô family, but especially Itô Shinjô, the founder of Shinnyoen.

The founder as the primary figure of worship is not a phenomenon unique to Shinnyoen, but is instead a common theme among Japanese new religions. While new

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁰*The Nirvana*, March 1993, no. 266, p. 2. Other figures which Shinnyoen followers venerate on a lesser scale include such Buddhist and Shinto deities such as Benzaiten, Jizô, and Inari.

religions such as Shinnyoen deify its founder in a subtle manner,⁷¹ others are more candid in their claims. Kôfuku no Kagaku for example, openly and aggressively asserts that its leader, Ôkawa Ryûhû, is the Buddha incarnate.⁷² In fact, the religion has advertised in newspapers to make this claim.⁷³ Such open and public displays of deification are on the whole not widespread among the new religions in Japan but they do underline a common theme concerning the status of founders in the new religions.

All in the Family

A quick glance at the current leaders of Japanese new religions reveals that the overwhelming majority of them are related in some way to the founder of their religion. There are cases of sons, daughters, wives, son-in-laws, granddaughters, adopted sons and daughters, etc., as successors to the founders. For example Tenshû Kôtai Jingukyô is headed by Kitamura Sayo's granddaughter; Ennôkyô is currently lead by Fukuda Chiyoko's oldest son; Mizuno Fusa's adopted daughter heads Kaminagarakyô; Shûyôdan Hôseikai is presently led by Idei Seitarô's wife, Kikuno; Myôchikai is headed by the son-in-law of Miyamoto Mitsu; and Shinnyoen is currently lead by Itô's two youngest daughters.⁷⁴

While Shinnyoen is not as publicly forthright about the status of its founder to the extent that Kôfuku no Kagaku is, within the organization itself Shinnyoen believers are told in no uncertain terms who Itô Shinjô was. During a special service at Shinnyoen Hawaii on February 19, 1998 commemorating the death of its founder, for example, a Shinnyoen follower gave a testimonial in which she described Itô as "a super human and true Buddha."

⁷¹ According to a Shinnyoen reinôsha and minister, Itô is ranked lower than Shakyamuni Buddha. However, most members believe Itô *is* the Buddha and the religion does little, if anything, to discourage such a perception. Indeed Shinnyoen videos, testimonies, and other propaganda encourage such a belief.

⁷² See for example Astley (1995).

⁷³ Under the heading, "The Return of the Buddha," the religion took out an advertisement in *The Japan Times* (March 10, 1995) announcing the sale of Ôkawa's latest book. The title of Ôkawa's book, *Buddha Speaks: Discourses with the Buddha Incarnate* clearly bespeaks his status in the religion while a picture of his face on the cover, emanating from that of the Buddha's in the background, leaves no room for doubt who the religion believes the Buddha incarnate is.

⁷⁴ The most notable exception is Sôka Gakkai, whose current head, Ikeda Daisaku has no family relations with the group's previous leaders.

That Shinnyoen followers should afford Itô and his wife the status equivalent to the Buddha is also made clear in a sermon by Itô Masako, the Itô's third daughter and current head of the religion, delivered on January 29, 1992:

Therefore, I believe we can say that the Shinnyo Parents are tathagatas.⁷⁵ So, for Shinnyo followers, to offer prayers to the Buddha is equivalent to offering prayers to Kyoshu-sama, the Founder, and Shojuin-sama, the originator of the Shinnyo Spiritual faculty.⁷⁶

There is some confusion, however, among followers as to whether the Shinnyoen founder is *the* Buddha or *a* Buddha. Once during breakfast at a B&B lodging in London in February 1994, a Japanese female Shinnyoen follower (who was also having breakfast at another table and did not know of my involvement with Shinnyoen) tried to convert me to the religion. While trying to impress me with miraculous stories of Itô, she told me that he was the Buddha of long ago reborn. Not moved by her stories, I casually mentioned that I was a Buddha too, since we all have the Buddha nature. She immediately and zealously corrected me by stating that we are only *like* the Buddha but Itô Shinjô *is* the Buddha. Not all Shinnyoen believers view their founder in the same manner as the women above, however. At a lineage home meeting in Hawaii on November 10, 1995, for example, lineage parents clearly stated that Itô was one of many Buddhas but did not equate him with the historical Buddha.⁷⁷

As is the case with a number of Japanese new religion founders, the ability of Itô to persevere through sufferings and hardships sharpened his spiritual insights and has helped to mold him into an admired religious leader among his followers. In his lifetime Itô Shinjô

⁷⁵Jpn. Nyorai; another term for the Buddha. Shinnyoen (1993a) p. 218.

⁷⁶*The Nirvana*, February 1993, no. 265, p. 4. See also *The Nirvana*, February, 1992, no. 253, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁷All Shinnyoen members were connected to the religion through a "guiding parent." This is the person responsible for introducing him or her to the religion and who also helps the new convert to practice.

suffered through the tragic death of his two sons, the loss of his wife at a relatively young age, and was no doubt torn by the internal squabbling and struggles for power among his four daughters and their subsequent departures. Painful as each experience was, Itô seems to have survived each episode by interpreting and believing each event to be part of an overall scheme the Buddha had laid out for him. Chibun and Yûichi's death were interpreted as sacrifices for the shortcomings of his followers, his religion, and himself. Tomoji's passing was also understood as a willed and unselfish act on her part to advance the organization overseas. The departure of all four daughters at one time or another was interpreted as a necessary part of his religious training, and the final and angry exits of his two oldest daughters were seen as concrete expressions of the Nirvana sutra--where, according to Itô's own interpretation of the sutra, two of the Buddha's own three children abandoned him as well.⁷⁸ Indeed Itô seems to have lived his life in accordance with the words Tomoji taught and in which their followers believed, "Something you cultivate through suffering is a seed that will blossom and turn you into a harmonious leader for society."⁷⁹

Molding bitter and painful experiences into expressions of religious truths and sacrifices not only helped Itô deal with family tragedy but has shaped his followers' understanding of the Itô family as well. Save for the two "prodigal" daughters, each family member has been deified and made an object of veneration and worship. Even the Buddha of the Nirvana image, in which he reclines and is ready to enter the blissed state, has a family resemblance--the face on the figure resembles that of Itô's second son, Yûichi.⁸⁰

Itô had a deep appreciation of art, as the Shinnyoen museum can readily attest, and was himself a talented sculptor. In fact Itô personally fashioned some of the figures of worship with his own hands, including the Nirvana image, numerous images of Fudô Myôô, and other Buddhist figures. Whether or not overlaying the Buddha's face with Yûichi's

⁷⁸The last interpretation is especially interesting as I have yet to find reference anywhere that Sâkyamuni had three children. Perhaps Shinjô created and convinced himself that his situation paralleled the Buddha's in order to understand and cope with the turmoil caused by his quarreling daughters.

⁷⁹Shinnyoen (1992a) p. 142.

⁸⁰Shinnyoen (1992b) p. 99. This according to daily records kept during the sculpting of the Nirvana image.

features was a conscious act on Shinjô's part will never be known, but an excerpt taken from a daily journal kept during the time of his sculpting of the Nirvana image may provide us with some insight.

According to the *Ichinyo no Michi*, Itô would sculpt the Nirvana image while in deep devotion and reverent prayer.⁸¹ Perhaps in this sort of meditative state beliefs and reflections that are held deep in the recesses of one's mind are honed and allowed to come to the fore and shape one's actions, sometimes without one being consciously aware of the process. This seems to be the case with Itô during his moments of creativity. After reading the journal which kept a record of his acts while sculpting, Itô states, "I felt as if I were discovering an unknown part of myself."⁸² Under these circumstances perhaps the search for the meaning of a son's death combined with religious conviction and what resulted was a new understanding of a life altering event. Concerning the sacred image which resembles his son's face and which was carved in a state of spiritual devotion, Itô states, "The Nirvana image of Shinnyo-En was born out of my faith and personifies it. In other words, it reflects my own view of the Buddha; otherwise, the image would be lifeless."⁸³ Shinnyoen followers are taught that Yûichi was born on April 8, the traditional day of the Buddha's birth. However, believers learn that Yûichi and the Buddha not only share identical birthdays, but due to Shinjô's skillful hands they share the same body and hence the same degree of veneration.

Since the new religions share a propensity to deify their founders, perhaps it comes as no surprise that the actions and words of the founders are also considered scripture for their followers. In Tenrikyô and Ômoto, for example, the writings of the respective founders Nakayama Miki (1798-1887) and Deguchi Nao (1837-1918), both known as *Ofudesaki*, are the groups' primary scripture. This theme of placing the writings of a new religion's founder at the center of the religion continues in contemporary society among new religions such as

⁸¹ Shinnyoen (1992b) pp. 94-95.

⁸² Ibid., p. 97.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 95.

Kôfuku no Kagaku, where it was the practice of the group until recently to require potential members to read ten of Ôkawa's books, and then pass an examination based on its contents.⁸⁴ Even among new religions which claim to be based on traditional texts or sutras, such as Agonshû (Agamas) and Shinnyoen, a closer examination of their practice reveals otherwise. As mentioned, members are often discouraged from reading the traditional sutras but instead are told to rely on the founders' understanding of those texts, since (s)he has had the proper spiritual training and experience to penetrate the depths of the truths contained therein. Members, therefore, are encouraged to read (and believe) the founders' interpretation of these highly spiritual texts. In this manner it is a short leap from relying on the founders' words and interpretations of sacred texts, which purport to contain eternal virtues, to believing that the founders are themselves the manifestation of the truths expressed in the writings.⁸⁵ Along this course the founder is transformed from an ordinary person with extraordinary experiences to an extra-ordinary figure in an ordinary world. When this is done the deification process is complete and the founder becomes the religion's actual object of veneration.

By virtue of their relationship with the founder, family members are given reverential status as well and likewise, the followers of the religion, due to their association with the founder and his or her family, believe themselves to be on a level closer to religious truths than their non-member counterparts. This explains why Shinnyoen members can claim to be saved and their non-Shinnyoen counterparts not. In a sense then, the deification process does not only affect the founders and their families but to a lesser degree their followers as well. Dynamics such as these enable the new religions to spread in modern Japanese society.

Multilevel Marketing of the Buddha

⁸⁴Even now Ôkawa's writings are used as scripture for the group.

⁸⁵Here a good example is Reiyûkai, whose leaders "rewrote" the Lotus sutra for its followers.

During a home meeting of a large multilevel marketing⁸⁶ company, I was struck by the organizational similarities between this multi-billion dollar free enterprise system and Japanese new religions such as Shinnyoen. Had those at the meeting donned certain Buddhist vestments and substituted the Itô family for the detergent and cleansing products being solicited, this could have easily been a Shinnyoen lineage meeting. Like the pyramid schemata of many multilevel marketing organizations, the Shinnyoen hierarchy is well structured for incorporating new members and providing them with incentives for gaining converts of their own. In this section I examine the Shinnyoen organizational structure and search for clues for its success.

Certainly one of the strengths of Shinnyoen is its organizational structure. The fact that the religion has experienced no major schism during its 60 year history when it is often the case that many Japanese new religions split (e.g. Sekai Kyûseikyô and Reiyûkai) is in part a testament to the organizational skills of its leaders and the soundness of the structural framework implemented.⁸⁷ The manner in which Shinnyoen is organized renders the possibility of secession highly remote. Leaders within the religion undergo periodic checks, evaluations, and testing by other Shinnyoen high ranking officials to ensure that no one with significant influence in the organization is straying too far from the religion's orthodoxy. The power and charisma of Shinnyoen reinôsha too are restricted and made uniform in order to limit possibilities of splinter groups forming around a particular medium. As mentioned, one of the most effective ways Shinnyoen guards against overly charismatic and influential reinôsha is to strip them of their spiritual powers once outside a Shinnyoen temple.

⁸⁶Multilevel marketing is a method of retailing products directly to customers through a network of distributor-salespeople set up in pyramid fashion. Each distributor is encouraged to recruit and train additional distributors, so that eventually a particular distributor may be responsible for a number of subsidiary salespeople and will earn commissions on their sales as well as on the sales he or she makes.

⁸⁷Although Itô's two eldest daughters left Shinnyoen, their departures did not have any significant schismatic effect.

In the Shinnyoen construct, members of the Itô family are regarded as vessels of the sacred and it is only they who have direct access to this sacrality, regardless of time or place. For the rest in the Shinnyoen system, it is the place that is deemed sacred i.e. Shinnyoen temples, and not the person i.e. reinôsha. Moreover reinôsha are limited to certain times when they may receive spiritual messages. That a reinôsha can only enter into trance in areas designated by the organization and only on certain occasions is one of the most effective ways the religion limits deviation from the group and its doctrinal framework.

Shinnyoen hierarchy

At the top of the Shinnyoen hierarchy is Itô Masako (known as Keishu-sama by followers), Shinjô and Tomoji's third daughter. She emerged as the head of Shinnyoen after some initial confusion concerning the leadership role following the founder's death in 1989. The slight confusion arose due to the strong support for Itô Shizuko (known as Yôshu-sama), the Itô's fourth and youngest daughter, as the leader of Shinnyoen. Shizuko is now second in command. Below the two daughters are a host of bishops of various ranks whose responsibilities include overseeing the various departments within the organization which, among others, include the Doctrine Division, Publication Division, and International Division.

While in theory any Shinnyoen follower may achieve the rank of bishop depending, of course, on his or her spiritual ability, in practice the ordinary believer has his or her sights set on a slightly more modest goal--the rank of spiritual medium, or reinôsha. Followers who are persistent and consistent enough may reach the first level of spiritual medium anywhere between 10 to 14 years. There are five ranks of reinôsha with each rank determining the type of spiritual consultation he or she is allowed to perform. While low ranking reinôsha may still be in the realm of the ordinary follower, high ranking reinôsha are often cast as ministers and temple staff supervisors. Regardless of rank, however, all Shinnyoen reinôsha have leadership functions in the religion.

The status of reinôsha is not guaranteed however, as it can be revoked at anytime. As mentioned, the reinôsha themselves have various ranks with the lower ranking ones regularly monitored by the higher ranking mediums to ensure proper teachings are being transmitted to Shinnyoen followers. This check system, known as *ennai sesshin*, also minimizes the possibility of charismatic individuals from splitting off from Shinnyoen and forming new groups.⁸⁸

There are still four other ranks beneath the level of reinôsha and it is here where most of the religion's energy lies. From these rank and file members the religion receives most of its financial support, proselytizing enthusiasm, and army of volunteers. New Shinnyoen members receive the rank of beginner or Shôjô (small vehicle).⁸⁹ After meeting certain requirements, which include recruiting a number of new members, monetary donations, volunteer work, and graduation from Shinnyoen's own religious courses, the neophyte may be considered for promotion to Daijô (great vehicle). Should the Daijô follower continue to pour his or her efforts into the religion and fulfill requirements stiffer than those of the beginner, he or she becomes eligible to apply for Kangi (happiness) status.⁹⁰ In between the Kangi and Reinôsha levels lies the rank of Daikangi (great happiness). Again Kangi followers may be considered for promotion to Daikangi if they have demonstrated continued progress in their practice.

Promotions to higher spiritual levels are determined by the religion's governing body in Japan. While fulfilling the stated number of requirements for each level renders one eligible for advancement, it does not guarantee promotion. To be successfully promoted to higher ranks in Shinnyoen one must also pass a spiritual test. The candidate must submit an application fee and appear in an evaluation session known as *eza*, where applicants are

⁸⁸Perhaps because Shinnyoen has experienced internal strife in the past, in order to minimize the chances of splinter groups, the organization is very cautious about giving recognition to members outside of the immediate Itô family. This even extends to authors of articles written in the various Shinnyoen publications whose names are not mentioned.

⁸⁹This term is used to refer to Theravada Buddhism and is also used pejoratively to describe someone who is narrow minded. Shôjô can thus be contrasted with Daijô, or great vehicle (Mahayana Buddhism).

⁹⁰At an international meeting on Jan. 15, 1995 at Tokyo, members learned that after reaching the Kangi level, there is no need to be reborn unless one wants to!

required to sit in meditation while their spiritual qualifications are measured by high ranking reinôsha and, for those applying to the higher ranking spiritual levels, the Itô daughters themselves. Rarely does one receive promotion on the first try. In fact, before one is allowed to sit for his or her first eza, one must first apply for and sit through one or two "practice" eza. This long and drawn out application procedure functions as a tight screening process for Shinnyoen, ensuring that only the most qualified and persistent are rewarded.

The selection committee utilizes the *eza* to weed out and/or deny promotion to those whom they feel are not sufficiently "Buddha-centered." "Buddha-centered" here can be read as "Shinnyoen devoted." This criterion is applied especially to those seeking advancement in the Shinnyoen reinôsha levels, as the religion must guard against allocating power to those who may leave the religion to form a separate religious group.⁹¹ Eza and the tight control Shinnyoen exercises over its followers then account for the organizational solidarity that has kept it relatively free of secession.

Mobilization

The basic unit in the Shinnyoen organizational scheme is the cell group referred to as the *suji* (lineage). The head of the *suji* is the *suji oya* (lineage parent), a high ranking follower (usually at the *kangi* level or higher) in charge of a number of junior members. When one joins Shinnyoen--and one cannot simply join the religion on one's own but must be formally "connected" to the religion by an already existing member--he or she automatically joins a lineage and is placed under the tutelage of the person who connected him or her. This person is known as the *michibiki no oya* (guiding or teaching parent). The *michibiki no oya* will accompany the *michibiki no ko* (guiding or teaching child) to services and be responsible for his or her initial development in the religion.

A lineage therefore, in its simplest form, consists of a lineage parent, guiding parents, guiding children, and, should the guiding children proselytize successfully, guiding

⁹¹ Shiraimizu (1979) p. 439.

grandchildren. The lineage parent is directly in charge of the guiding parents, they in turn are responsible for the practice of their teaching children, and the teaching children must properly guide their own teaching children, the lineage's grandchildren, forming a neat pyramid scheme of responsibility. Although Shinnyoen employs the terms "parent" and "child" in its lineage system, age is not a factor in differentiating teaching parents from teaching children. Were I to connect my mother to Shinnyoen, for example, she would become my teaching child and be obligated to follow my directions. Likewise a wife connecting her husband would become his guiding parent. After a teaching parent has successfully gathered a number of teaching children and grandchildren (overseas followers must have a minimum of 20 teaching children while Japanese followers must have a minimum of 100) he or she may apply to form a new lineage and become its suji oya.

This organizational scheme is certainly not unique to Shinnyoen. Many other new religions, Reiyūkai and Tenrikyō for example, also form cell groups and utilize the michibiki no oya-michibiki no ko relationship. However perhaps no other Japanese new religion has used this form of organizational structure to its advantage to the extent that Shinnyoen has. Shinnyoen utilizes its lineage system to strengthen the religion and maintain its solidarity while simultaneously expanding in size by multiplying its spiritual offspring. Reiyūkai and Tenrikyō on the other hand, have seen this form of organizational structure work against them as numerous splinter groups have formed as the result of a particularly strong group leader or michibiki no oya seceding from the parent organization, e.g. Niwano Nikkyō.⁹² Due to the careful screening system employed by Shinnyoen which requires organizational leaders to undergo periodic spiritual checks, and also to the strict limitation placed on reinōsha which strips them of their spiritual abilities once outside temple precincts, this has not been the case in Shinnyoen.

⁹²Niwano Nikkyō (1906-) was a highly successful leader of a Reiyūkai center who eventually seceded, along with fellow Reiyūkai member Naganuma Myōkō (1889-1957), to form his own movement, Risshō Kōseikai.

In addition to the lineage system, Shinnyoen members are, regardless of spiritual rank, mobilized into numerous cross-sectional groups or units. Hence followers from separate lineages may have the opportunity to meet one another in cell groups based on age (such as the youth, prime, and senior divisions), gender, and interests (such as the choir and taiko drum groups; or the softball team). Although the above cell units are equipped with their own leaders and set of responsibilities, they are intended to support the lineage system, which is the backbone of the organization.

One of the primary functions of the lineage system is to maintain group cohesion. Lineages help to keep the religion in contact with individual members as well as provide a support system for new and/or troubled followers. The lineage meets regularly outside the temple, usually in the evening at the suji oya's home. Home meetings are occasions for discussing questions and problems junior members may have and for passing along important information such as those regarding upcoming events within the religion. Home meetings are also used to encourage and, as I have often discovered, reprimand and admonish members lacking in their religious practices. These meetings play a vital role in keeping the lineage intact by reeling in straying members who may not be attending services on a regular basis. It is no coincidence that such terms as parent and child are employed in the lineage as teaching parents will telephone their guiding children when the child has been absent for services and sometimes nag until the child promises to attend the next service. In this manner the lineage system functions as a control mechanism for the religion ensuring that members are kept on a tight leash and under the watchful eye of senior members. Clearly the Shinnyoen lineage system keeps the chances of splinter groups forming to a minimum as everyone, lineage parents and reinôsha included, must answer to their seniors.

Home meetings are also occasions to develop intimate relationships with fellow believers. Sharing personal stories of triumph and failure, joy and heartbreak, can often lead to deep and meaningful friendships. There is much individual attention paid to each Shinnyoen follower despite the relatively large size of the religion and this in turn renders

Shinnyoen into a uniform and harmonious group. For those who find everyday life stressful and volatile, the lineage system and home meetings are places to find comfort and encouragement. This can be quite attractive for those seeking religious answers as well as for those who find themselves in a new job, relationship, or, as I have discovered, even in a new country. This last point was made clear to me during my research on Shinnyoen UK.

In London I met followers who were merely "paper" members in Japan but became quite active in the religion once in Britain. For these followers, the home meetings provided moments of comfort and familiarity during their sojourn abroad. At such home meetings Japanese expatriates could speak in their mother tongue, share Japanese food, and pass along news and stories about events in their home country. Thus for certain overseas followers, it was not the teachings of the religion which brought them to the home meetings but the yearning to be in a comfortable and familiar place which they found attractive. These points are addressed in the chapter on Shinnyoen abroad.

The organizational structure of Shinnyoen is responsible for the group solidarity that the religion enjoys. The tight-knit structure in turn has been shaped in part by the past experiences of the religion where those with a degree of religious power abused their authority and brought turmoil to Shinnyoen, namely during the period surrounding Itô's imprisonment. The organizational structure of Shinnyoen also enables the religion to effectively transmit its beliefs and practices to believers, and it is to these aspects of Shinnyoen we now turn.

Chapter Three: Beliefs and Practices

1. WORLDVIEW

There are several themes common to Japanese religions in general which Shinnyoen also shares. The religious worldview which Shinnyoen subscribes to, for example, is primarily one in which the demarcation between divine and human and sacred and profane is often ambiguous. In other words it is a worldview typical of the Japanese religious landscape. The deification of religious founders and popular figures, a common practice in Japan, underscores this belief in the continuity that exists between the human and divine realm.¹ In the Japanese religious world not only humans, but animals and inanimate objects as well are considered to possess spiritual qualities and are therefore worthy of respect and gratitude, especially if they have contributed to the well-being and happiness of those in the world. That Shinnyoen shares this worldview is clearly evident in a video sermon by a minister in Japan who related an anecdote in which Shôjuin (Itô Tomoji) taught him to show gratitude to all things, even towards his bicycle, which carried the burden of transporting him from temple to home along unpaved roads.²

Since this worldview resonates in Shinnyoen, it is not surprising that the founder, his wife, and their two sons occupy important positions in the Shinnyoen cosmology and are venerated by members who look to them for solace and salvation. Specifically, Shinnyoen followers believe that through the spiritual guidance of Kyôshu-sama, Shôjuin-sama, and Ryôdôji-sama it is possible to attain a cherished state of eternal bliss, referred to in Shinnyoen as *Jô-Raku-Ga-Jô*.³ More specifically, *Jô-Raku-Ga-Jô* is also understood by Shinnyoen followers as "the land of true happiness where one can be one with the eternally-abiding Buddha."⁴

¹Hori (1968) p. 13.

²From a sermon broadcast during a service on January 31, in the midst of the 1994 Winter Training period.

³Shinnyoen translates the four Chinese characters used to write *Jô-Raku-Ga-Jô* as permanence, bliss, self, and purity. Shinnyoen (1995) p. 158.

⁴Shinnyoen (1992a) p. 47.

The ambiguity between the secular realm and the divine, and the resulting ease of deification of mortal figures may have proselytizing implications overseas, however, as such a worldview can be perplexing to those not accustomed to these sort of beliefs. A British visitor to Shinnyoen whom I interviewed, for example, had much difficulty accepting this aspect of Japanese religion and criticized the religion as being little more than the worship of the Itô family.

Another theme common to the worldview of many Japanese religions is the emphasis on *genze riyaku* (this-worldly benefits)--the possibility of finding meaning and happiness in this life and of achieving practical benefits in the here and now. In order to assist the person living in modern society, a society where traditional social ties are tenuous and vocational circumstances are often fraught with anxiety and uncertainty, Japanese temples and shrines offer a wide selection of amulets and talismans for sale which ward off bad luck and procure good fortune. At Shinnyoen too members may purchase such charms which are believed to be efficacious for ensuring traffic safety and others which promise safe and easy pregnancy. Still other amulets can be worn on the person and function as a buffer against bodily injury. What is more, followers are taught that as members of Shinnyoen they can expect to receive material gains as well.⁵ Spiritual and material rewards are all a part of Jô-Raku-Ga-Jô , which, Shinnyoen followers believe, can be attained in this lifetime. Towards this end amulets and talismans aid the follower striving towards this goal by making the path along the way safe and secure.

In the Japanese spiritual scheme, religion does not necessarily entail a belief in doctrine.⁶ This is clear in Shinnyoen where depending upon the intellect to grasp the essence of the teaching is regarded as futile effort:

⁵Shinnyoen (1993b) p. 78.

⁶See Reader (1991) especially Chapter One and Yanagawa (1992) p. 9.

The wisdom of Nirvana, the Spiritual Faculty, cannot be dissected for analysis, no matter how hard one may try. You cannot study it as you would do on components of a machine by dismantling it. The Spiritual Faculty is alive, and as such, it cannot be analyzed logically.⁷

Indeed when asked, Shinnyoen members often have much difficulty elucidating and defining the religion's core teaching. Shinnyoen followers instead emphasize the spiritual abilities of the founder and the primacy of action over doctrine and belief.⁸ In the view of many followers, the religion cannot be grasped intellectually but only by experiencing the teaching through practice can the Shinnyoen truth be fully realized as in this comment by a Shinnyoen member:

I know this sounds strange and difficult to believe. I thought so too before I got involved and started to do the practice, but when I did it I began to realize its truth. If you do it you will understand too.⁹

The above themes, common to Japanese religion as a whole, are evident in the beliefs and practices proffered throughout Shinnyoen temples in Japan and abroad. What distinguishes the Shinnyoen worldview from the general Japanese religious landscape is the role of the Itô family. For Shinnyoen followers, the Itô family and their spiritual powers are not only the underpinnings of their worldview but also their focus: "We need to pray to the eternally abiding Shinnyo Parents and, through practice, make efforts to attain higher wisdom through the help of the Shinnyo spiritual faculty, which, as many followers quickly realize, is an essential tool that the Buddha has bestowed to us for our spiritual growth."¹⁰ In

⁷Shinnyoen (1990) p. 5.

⁸In fact my lineage parent told me that I could "pretend to believe" and still be the recipient of Shinnyoen merit as long as I "practiced."

⁹Shinnyoen believer as quoted in Reader (1991) p. 18.

¹⁰*The Nirvana*, June 1995, no. 293, p. 1.

the Shinnyoen construct, the above religious themes of *genze riyaku*, *Jô-Raku-Ga-Jô*, and even the deification of mortal figures, cannot occur without the spiritual powers of the Itô family. The following sections examine some of the more important teachings and practices in Shinnyoen and how they support the Shinnyoen worldview.

2. SESSHIN

Sesshin, the practice whereby followers consult Shinnyoen *reinôsha* (spiritual mediums) for spiritual guidance, is the main pillar of Shinnyoen practice. All Shinnyoen members are strongly encouraged to take part in this training at least once a month. The importance of sesshin training is underlined by the fact that missing a month usually results in some form of admonishment from one's guiding parent.

According to Shinnyoen teaching, "'Sesshin' literally means to bring your soul into contact with the great Existence of the Buddha with the help of a spiritual medium."¹¹ Specifically, it is a practice whereby Shinnyoen *reinôsha*, after a brief meditation period during which they perform Shinnyoen esoteric hand gestures which prepares them for access to the Shinnyoen spiritual world, relay *reigen* (spiritual messages) to fellow believers in the form of guidance and counseling. It should be noted here that the deceased members of the Itô family reside in the Shinnyoen spiritual world and send their messages to followers through the *reinôsha* who function as conduits and mirrors, reflecting the spiritual states of followers. Moreover the power of *reinô* (spiritual faculty) cultivated by the *reinôsha* is tapped from the same source of spiritual power passed down the generations through Shôjuin's family which, according to Shinnyoen doctrine, was strengthened and made complete through Shôjuin's association with Shinjô and the passing away of their two sons. Thus sesshin centers on the spiritual powers of the Itô family.

Through repeated practice Shinnyoen believers learn to rely on sesshin for all matters of guidance. This is evident in *proofs* (oral testimony of the efficacy of the Shinnyoen faith)

¹¹*The Nirvana* , December 1993, no. 275, p. 4.

where followers share experiences of turning to sesshin before important personal decisions are made. In short, sesshin works as a mechanism to introduce, strengthen, and protect the orthodoxy of the Shinnyoen worldview for beginner and reinôsha alike.

Context

Sesshin is offered several times a month at each temple and not surprisingly on these occasions the religion sees the largest follower turnout. Followers wishing to receive sesshin on the designated day must first register with temple staff members. There are five levels of sesshin training depending upon the needs and/or problems of members: *kôjô* or elevatory sesshin is the most elementary of the five and is where a follower waits in prayer and meditation for the medium to give guidance that is to be reflected on and put into practice; *kôjô sôdan* or basic consultation sesshin, in which followers may ask the medium a question about their practice; *sôdan* or consultation sesshin, in which followers may ask about matters concerning themselves or someone related so that they may receive direction and insight; *tokubetsu sôdan* or special consultation sesshin, in which more light on the spiritual background of a situation is shed; and *kantei* or decision-making sesshin, in which followers who are faced with a decision of some kind require further insight into the spiritual background before taking action. During kantei sesshin, the Itô divination practice of byôzeishô is utilized to assist the reinôsha and follower in reaching a decision. Not all branch temples offer the higher levels of sesshin, however. The level of sesshin offered at a particular temple is dependent upon the spiritual rank of the resident reinôsha i.e. reinôsha at the *kôjô* level can only perform *kôjô* sesshin, while reinôsha at the *kantei* rank may perform all five types of sesshin. Other than *kôjô* sesshin, I have experienced *kôjô sôdan* sesshin only once. And since the contents of other members' special sesshin training are not readily shared, I will here primarily comment on the features of *kôjô* sesshin training.

Kôjô sesshin, which serves the beginner as well as the more experienced member who needs only "general" training, is required of each follower at least once a month if he or

she is to remain in good standing with the religion. Other than basic sesshin, members are required to "apply" for the higher levels of sesshin. Inquiries or problems followers wish to have addressed during sesshin must be written on an application form, after which staff members or reinôsha will determine whether the problem/inquiry warrants the particular sesshin level requested. Each type of sesshin has a price tag, with the higher levels of sesshin commanding the higher monetary costs. In 1995 kôjô sesshin cost £2.40 in the UK, \$4 in Hawaii, and ¥1,000 in Japan. At Shinnyoen Singapore a "donation" of S\$5 or more was requested for those wishing to take kôjô sesshin. At the other end of the sesshin scale, in 1995 kantei sesshin cost ¥8,000 in Japan and \$35 in Hawaii.

Before new Shinnyoen followers are allowed to receive sesshin a number of criteria must be met. Junior followers must have first attended a minimum of five temple services, listened to three sermons by the founder, participated in a special service honoring Itô, and have performed at least one of the three practices (monetary donation, proselytism, and volunteer work). In other words only those more disposed to accepting the Shinnyoen worldview are allowed to participate in sesshin. Having met all the prerequisites for sesshin, the neophyte is then coached on how to properly sit and concentrate during sesshin. Followers are instructed to focus on the Itô family, but especially Kyôshu-sama, the founder. Furthermore, during the neophyte's first three times of receiving sesshin, his or her guiding parent must be present. The guiding parent acts as a coach, interpreting and reinforcing the spiritual words given by the reinôsha. Moreover followers are not permitted to ask any questions of the reinôsha during basic sesshin. Questions are reserved for higher levels of sesshin. However, even at these higher levels, questions are not spontaneous as guiding parents instruct their teaching children beforehand on how to ask questions and what kinds of questions to ask.

Form

In preparation for receiving basic sesshin then, members break up into small circles centering around one or more reinôsha and, with eyes closed and hands clasped before them, assume a sitting position considered conducive for sesshin.¹² After a brief meditation period, the reinôsha raises his arms over his head, performs a number of mudra, and enters into a trance-like state. An audible component also accompanies the spiritual transformation as the reinôsha will often grunt and groan as if he or she has just been punched in the belly. All of this takes not more than a minute or so after which the transformation is complete. The reinôsha then moves to sit directly facing a particular follower and is ready to mediate between the believer and the Shinnyoen spiritual world, acting as a mirror to reflect the spiritual condition of the follower. The reinôsha proceeds to relay spiritual messages to the follower from the Shinnyoen spiritual world in an effort to strengthen the believer's endeavor in the teaching. After several minutes of spiritual guidance the reinôsha will move to the next member, who has been sitting silently in meditation, and so forth until all followers participating in sesshin have been addressed.

Although there is an effort to relay spiritual messages consistent with the Shinnyoen worldview, the style and manner in which they are delivered will vary greatly depending on the reinôsha. Some reinôsha are adept at creating vivid imagery during sesshin, making themselves popular among followers. The opposite is also true as some reinôsha who, due to their rough manner and "boring" style of delivering reigen, are not particularly liked by some members resulting in certain followers abstaining from taking sesshin at that particular service.

¹²The first two levels of sesshin are held in a large circle with other followers while the next three levels are held on a one-on-one basis in a private room.

Content

While the religion does not make the distinction itself, spiritual messages promulgated during sesshin training are usually of two types--those that deal with practice (ethics) and those that focus on ancestral spirits (magic).¹³ There are times when the two are intertwined to the extent that clear separation is impossible. Sesshin training where an ethical emphasis is embedded in the spiritual message is usually simple and straightforward: The follower is encouraged to faithfully practice the religion's teachings on a daily basis. The Shinnyoen practice of sesshin manifests the four patterns of action that Hardacre identifies as crucial to the worldview of Japanese new religions:¹⁴ First, the idea that "other people are mirrors" is most obvious in sesshin as reinôsha perform this exact function, reflecting the spiritual state of followers and thereby forcing believers to confront their own shortcomings. Secondly, the emphasis on the exchange of gratitude and repayment of favor is evident in spiritual messages that emphasize the willingness of the founder and his family to endure hardship and suffering for the sake of their followers. Feelings of obligation produced among believers by the second emphasis often result in a third pattern of action--the quest for sincerity. This pattern of action is readily apparent in sesshin when members are encouraged to strive earnestly in the teaching or admonished about practicing with a lack of sincerity, as was the case when I was chastised for letting my practice be "like a well without water." Finally, adherence to paths of cultivation is most evident in the religion's emphasis on the three practices of monetary donation, proselytism, and volunteer work.

Sesshin also enables followers to participate directly in a magical and spiritual experience, which is, in part, what makes the religion attractive. Often accompanying this mystical experience is the revelation of the existence of an ancestral spirit suffering and seeking succor in the spiritual world. Based on the view that there is continuity between the

¹³I discuss the relationship between magic and ethics in greater length at the end of this chapter and in Chapter Six.

¹⁴Hardacre (1986) p. 21.

physical and spiritual realms, Shinnyoen teaches that problems followers' experience may be caused by turmoil in the spiritual world:

During sesshin, the suffering of ancestral and related spirits is sometimes indicated. Their suffering is often reflected in this world as phenomena unfavorably affecting us and our family members or others related to us. Our suffering (and those of people related to us) is linked to the suffering of our ancestors and related spirits. That is why it is important that we receive support from the spiritual world in order to deliver them from their pain.¹⁵

To the believer basic sesshin is then, among other things, the gateway to the spiritual world where one may contact such ancestral spirits, receive ethereal remedies for mundane ailments, and find solutions to everyday problems. To the non-believing outsider however the contents revealed during sesshin may at times resemble spiritual intimidation, as thoughtful admonishments could easily be misunderstood as threats against abandoning the Shinnyoen practice.

A personal testimonial, or "proof" as it is known in Shinnyoen, given at the Hawaii temple on January 30, 1995, for example, demonstrates the ambiguity between the messages of comfort and intimidation offered in sesshin. "Natsuko," a young female follower, testified that sesshin helped alleviate her back pain, which, she discovered through sesshin training, was caused by anguished ancestral spirits. A Shinnyoen medium revealed to her that not only had sesshin comforted her ancestral spirits and hence relieved her of her pain, but had she not received sesshin her back pain would have also spread to her husband and with more severity. According to the reinôsha, Natsuko's ancestral spirits were making their suffering known through her back pains, and hence had she not sought help from Shinnyoen the

¹⁵Shinnyoen (1995) p. 21.

spirits would have next attacked her husband in an effort to gain spiritual attention.¹⁶

Natsuko ended her testimony by saying how grateful she was towards Shinnyoen for lessening her back pain and for saving her husband from sure suffering.

Function

Whether or not ancestral spirits cause back pain is not of primary concern here. What is particularly interesting is how sesshin is utilized by both religion and follower to create and sustain a uniform worldview. For the religion, sesshin provides a dependable avenue through which to introduce and reinforce central teachings and beliefs. For the follower, sesshin offers a method for dealing with and interpreting the unexplainable, the uncontrollable. In short it provides a means to make sense out of a situation that was until then replete with "non-sense."

Clearly sesshin is part of a process to shape various followers into uniform Shinnyoen believers. Through sesshin followers learn proper behavioral patterns, including the acceptable ways of interpreting events and asking questions. Reinôsha too are not exempt from having set behavioral patterns prescribed for them. In a study on Shinnyoen mediums, Shiraimizu Hiroko argues that reinôsha are trained during a 12 to 18 month period of instruction in what to say and how to act during sesshin:

To put it more precisely, members selected by top-ranking mediums to become mediums themselves are still something less than mediums at the time of their selection. They become mediums only by going through this period of instruction and through learning, in spiritual guidance sessions, what forms of behavior to adopt. In other words, only on completion of the course of

¹⁶Davis (1980) points out this sort of theme in Mahikari as well.

training in how to act as a medium can they be recognized as mediums in Shinnyo-en.¹⁷

Shinnyoen reinôsha whom I have interviewed vehemently deny this, claiming instead that the reigen received during sesshin are spontaneous messages from the spiritual world. However, the fact that followers are coached on how to behave during sesshin, including what questions to ask and how to ask them, seems to support Shiraimizu's claim.

As stated, there are different levels of sesshin, and in order to qualify to receive the higher grades of sesshin one must have already invested a large amount of time, money, and effort. Followers therefore receiving higher levels of sesshin are likely to be more devoted to the teaching than those at the lower levels. Such a large and significant investment in Shinnyoen renders leaving the religion less likely as an offering of time, money, and effort is commensurate to an offering of allegiance. In addition, senior members are charged with the supervision of a number of junior members and this responsibility functions to keep both senior and junior members enmeshed in a network of social ties. Although higher ranking followers may be the most loyal to the religion, they are also the ones who receive the most scrutiny by the organization. Reinôsha, for example, are required to undergo a periodic sesshin training known as *ennai sesshin*, which functions as a checkpoint to ensure that reinôsha are not deviating from orthodox Shinnyoen practice.

There are several aspects of sesshin that appeal to rank and file members. Whether spiritual messages are of a magical or ethical sort, sesshin provides an avenue of personal, intimate contact by speaking to the individual needs of believers thus followers learn to rely on the training and the religion for comfort and support. This emphasis on close personal relationships is a vital aspect of Shinnyoen as it creates an adhesive effect, producing feelings of obligation and responsibility among members. Sesshin then not only functions as a

¹⁷Shiraimizu (1979) p. 437.

training device for the religion but serves as a vehicle that helps the religion maintain its organizational solidarity and steady growth.

"What Happens When Sesshin Fails?"¹⁸

There are numerous examples when sesshin helps followers address personal problems relating to health, relationships, and spiritual anxiety. At Shinnyoen services and in the religion's videos and publications one can find cases when Shinnyoen believers turn to sesshin for guidance in reaching important decisions and for help in overcoming illness. For example the following story relates how Shinnyoen and sesshin helped a couple be rid of the husband's suffering from hepatitis :

In December of 1977, when I was connected to the Shinnyo teaching, my husband was in a hospital suffering from chronic hepatitis which he had had for 10 years. It had grown worse. That was the fourth time for him to be hospitalized. I was told by the doctor that I had to be prepared for the worst since he was in a critical condition.

A stubborn person, I told myself that I would do anything to make him healthy again. Even if I had to seek and depend on divination or some religion when medicine could not help him. I just could not let him die as the doctor had said...

On one of those days, a person living in my neighborhood led me to the Teaching as she could not stand by and see me in despair any more. Her words were filled with the truth. I was connected to the Teaching as if I were a drowning woman who would grab onto a rope thrown to her. I started to visit Oyasono (Shinnyoen's main temple), though I had my hands full with

¹⁸Other accounts of when sesshin works and its impact on believers are discussed in the section on testimonials in Chapter Five.

my business. Being cheerfully greeted with "Okaerinasai!" (Welcome home!) at the side-gate, I remember that I suddenly felt refreshed and got an impression that everyone there looked happy...

Through a Sesshin before long, a person whose mind had been offended by my husband's words was indicated. When I told him to apologize to that person in his heart and to chant Gosandai (Shinnyoen prayer), he replied obediently, "Yes, I will," and put it into practice. Then, a miracle happened!

Abdominal dropsy diminished. The swelling of his face recovered to normal little-by-little. My husband's condition turned for the better so fast that I was soon looking forward to the results of his examination.

It was the doctor who was most astonished with it. He permitted my husband to leave the hospital, saying, "It was very serious hepatitis. You have recovered incredibly well." I kept on repeating the names of Sooya-sama (the founder and his wife) and Ryodoji-sama (their two sons) in my heart with sincere gratitude...¹⁹

Testimonials or proofs such as the above are utilized by the religion to demonstrate the insight and efficacy of sesshin. Followers, by listening to and reading the experiences of other believers with sesshin, learn to turn to this Shinnyoen practice on a regular basis but especially during times of need. Yet what happens to the faith of followers when sesshin does not (at least from an outsider's point of view) lead followers to a hoped for cure or better situation?

At a Shinnyoen Hawaii lineage meeting on July 30, 1994, an uncomfortable situation arose when I questioned the efficacy of sesshin in the presence of a minister and reinôsha.²⁰

¹⁹*The Nirvana*, February 1986, no. 181, pp. 7, 8.

²⁰My questions at this particular meeting raised the ire of a number of my "teaching siblings," one of whom openly charged me with possessing an "impure heart."

My curiosity regarding the efficacy and accuracy of sesshin stemmed from my experiences with the practice in Hawaii, London, Tokyo, and Singapore. Having received sesshin at a number of different geographical locations and from a number of different reinôsha apparently confused the spiritual lines of communication as my guiding spiritual words were at times seemingly contradictory and irrelevant to my life. For example sesshin at Shinnyoen UK revealed that my ancestral spirits were deeply suffering, yet sesshin in Japan found my ancestral spirits rejoicing. Sesshin in Hawaii often resulted in an admonition for being spiritually stubborn, while sesshin in Singapore counseled me to take advantage of my open-minded nature. During one particular sesshin, a visiting reinôsha to Singapore mistook me for a Singapore resident and rambled on about how fortunate I was to live in Singapore and how Kyôshu-sama was depending on me to become the seed in the country and connect other Singaporeans.

Even sesshin at a single location brought curious spiritual tidings. I was told on one occasion at Shinnyoen UK that a relative of my father's died by being buried in the mountains of Japan under heavy snowfall and this suffering ancestor spirit was a major cause of all my problems (although I denied having any problems at the time the reinôsha ignored my protest and insisted that I did). I was then advised to purchase a special petition that offered prayers to the ancestor and had the effect of appeasing its troubled soul. Since no such relative of my father's existed I had a follow-up sesshin with a different reinôsha. This sesshin revealed that the relative who perished in the snow was not related to my father but to my mother. Again I was advised to purchase the special petitions for prayers. Since no such relative on my mother's side existed as well, I had yet another follow-up sesshin, this time at a higher level. Sesshin at this higher level from a third reinôsha revealed that the person buried in the snow was indeed not a relative at all. In fact, the non-relative who died in the snow did not die in the mountains of Japan but in the mountains of an unknown place, perhaps somewhere in South America.

Part of the reason for the confused sesshin can be blamed on my physical appearance. Because I am of Japanese descent some reinôsha mistake me for a Japanese national and my sesshin is given in accordance with this. The medium who told of an ancestor dying in the mountain snows of Japan mistook me for a Japanese national. The medium who "saw" that the person perishing in the snow was not a relative and did not die in Japan knew that I was four generations removed from Japan and also thought I was part Hawaiian. Complicating matters for the reinôsha were my travels between several branch temples which forced mediums to give sesshin to a person they were not familiar with. It should be mentioned that despite the varying "state of the spirits" address, I have received one constant spiritual guidance in all four countries--to purchase a special rite to help alleviate the spiritual pains of ancestral spirits.

Taking a cue from *Dojo*, Winston Davis' study of Mahikari in which he examines the reactions of members failed by okiyome, the principal spiritual practice of the religion, I asked a Shinnyoen minister to account for possible inaccuracies and failures of the spiritual guidance offered through sesshin. I expected the minister to dismiss the possibility of an erroneous Shinnyoen spiritual message. Saying otherwise would undermine the spiritual powers of the Itô family, on which the Shinnyoen spiritual world is based. When the minister replied as anticipated, I brought up stories that I collected from Shinnyoen members in the UK and Hawaii which suggested that the spiritual guidance offered was inaccurate at best and wholly wrong and damaging at worst.²¹

Gathering such stories was not an easy task as the subject matter of higher levels of sesshin is of a personal and private nature. Nevertheless certain members were willing to share their experiences with me. In the first instance, "Yuko," a Japanese national studying at a university in London and a member of Shinnyoen UK was badly guided by a high ranking Shinnyoen medium concerning Yuko's academic future. During sesshin, the medium advised Yuko to drop out of school, return to Japan, and get married. Several years later, however,

²¹I also collected stories of inaccurate or questionable sesshin from Tokyo.

after Yuko had refused the guidance from the Shinnyoen spiritual world and was nearing completion of her university degree, Yuko received sesshin to again help her decide on her future plans: should she return to Japan and settle down or go on to an exotic land where she could utilize the knowledge gained in her area of study? While I sat with Yuko waiting for her turn to receive sesshin, she confided in me that she was not optimistic about her upcoming sesshin as it was with the very same medium who had earlier told her to quit school. During sesshin, however, to the surprise of Yuko the medium told her to pursue her educational and occupational goals. Puzzled, Yuko later approached the medium for an explanation concerning the contrasting sesshin. The medium, since she travels to many Shinnyoen branch temples and gives numerous sesshin, could not recall Yuko's earlier sesshin and laughed off the apparent contradiction. The contrasting sesshin may have seemed amusing to the Shinnyoen medium but had Yuko followed the medium's earlier advice her life would have been significantly altered.²²

When I relayed this story to the Shinnyoen minister at the lineage meeting in Hawaii, he placed all the blame for the confusion on Yuko. He claimed that Yuko, and others like her, probably misunderstood the medium since sesshin contains messages of a highly spiritual nature. Besides, he argued, sesshin usually does not tell people to leave their school or jobs.²³ This is not accurate as examples of believers being told to quit their jobs can be found in issues of *The Nirvana*. When I mentioned this, the minister replied that Yuko's situation was completely different from those in *The Nirvana*. He did not elaborate. Clearly agitated and eager to defend sesshin, the minister then criticized the overseas practice of Shinnyoen

²²One might argue that the two sesshin Yuko received were not inconsistent at all, especially if one allows for the fact that if time elapses situations change. It could very well be that if Yuko had followed the advice of her first sesshin and returned to Japan all sorts of wonderful things would have happened to her. However, because she stayed in England and did not follow the first set of advice her circumstances changed. The second sesshin could have been valid then since it addresses Yuko's new set of circumstances.

Although the above argument is logical, it is not how Yuko understood the different advice given between the two sesshin, nor, for that matter, judging by their responses, did the reinōsha and minister understand the different sesshin in this way. Furthermore, while the above argument makes sense it is Yuko's, the reinōsha's, and the minister's understanding of the situation that counts.

²³How would the minister know what sesshin "usually" indicates unless mediums have a preset pattern of responses? The minister's answer seems to affirm Shiraimizu Hiroko's study which suggests that Shinnyoen reinōsha are trained and taught to perform in certain ways before they become mediums.

branches in general as being too lenient and openly criticized Yuko for probably not being qualified to receive the higher levels of sesshin (he made this claim without inquiring about Yuko's status). In order to support his claim, the minister charged that because the regulations of overseas branches are not as strict as those in Japan, members who are not yet qualified for certain forms of sesshin are allowed to participate in it. Furthermore, since messages transmitted from the Shinnyoen spiritual world are highly potent and complicated, followers, Japanese and non-Japanese alike, may not have had the proper training beforehand to correctly understand and appreciate the guidance offered. I suggested that this might be more the fault of the Shinnyoen system than it is the individual members'. I also hinted that since it seemed to be the religion's fault for allowing members not ready to take sesshin to engage in the practice, perhaps Shinnyoen should reimburse the money to those members since they gained nothing from the encounter (certain forms of sesshin cost £20 in the UK).

The lineage meeting became quite lively then as most of the members spoke up in defense of the minister and the religion. A room filled with visibly agitated religious practitioners was not a comfortable place to be, especially when the agitation was directed at me. As I got up to leave, however, a girl who had been silent until then nervously announced to the group that she too had had an experience with sesshin which made her doubtful at times about the practice.

Dubious spiritual messages concerning ancestral spirits may not have much affect on members' lives (except financially of course) but questionable advice concerning health problems can carry harmful consequences. "Lisa," a Japanese American Shinnyoen Hawaii follower, received sesshin concerning a heart problem which could have had dire consequences. Lisa was obviously intimidated by the others as she first made it very clear that unlike me, she believed in Shinnyoen strongly and that she was very grateful to the religion for the positive impact it had on her life. She then proceeded to relate her experience some years ago of a sesshin concerning her medical condition that went awry. During

sesshin, a medium advised her to stay on a particular medication which was later found out to be harmful to her health. Lisa had a heart condition and was seeing the same physician for a while and was also taking prescribed medication but without positive results. During special sesshin she asked the medium if it would be to her advantage to change doctors. The response was no. Lisa explained that after about a year of unsatisfactory progress she consulted her lineage parent who suggested that it might be a good idea to seek a second doctor after all. Lisa's new doctor, a specialist in the field, was surprised to learn that she was on her particular medication and told her to stop taking it immediately as it could prove to be harmful for her in the long run. After following the advice of the specialist, Lisa's condition improved. Lisa's experience caused her to have a difficult time with proselytizing as her negative experience with sesshin had dampened her enthusiasm to bring others into the religion. The minister again placed all the blame for the unfortunate situation on Lisa's part, first questioning who was she with during sesshin and suggesting that she misunderstood the sesshin or else it was mistranslated for her. Lisa denied this. Everyone was silent except for the minister who by now was quite upset at the home meeting's turn of events and stubbornly blamed the misunderstanding on Lisa. Lisa became quite flustered by the attack and looked as if she was about to burst into tears. At this point I left the room as the tension and tempers seemed to be reaching a breaking point and I felt that my departure would calm things down a bit.

Certainly there are other occasions of inaccurate or failed sesshin that are not recorded here. If or when this spiritual practice fails, why do those receiving such sesshin continue to be a part of Shinnyoen and not leave? Perhaps many do but clearly some do not. It has been several years since Lisa received her questionable sesshin yet she faithfully attends services and lineage meetings despite Shinnyoen being unable to rid her of her heart problem. And though Yuko is no longer in London, she is still an active Shinnyoen member in Tokyo. Why? What a Sôka Gakkai member in Britain states about failing to reap the benefits of her chanting can be applied to Shinnyoen and sesshin: "if you chant for something which is not

really right for your happiness, then you often don't get it, or how you expected...but then, in hindsight, you may see/understand why you didn't get what you wanted and get what you do really need to be happy."²⁴ Here, the believer rationalizes the shortcomings of the practice so that the religious worldview of the follower is left intact, thereby assuring her a sense of order which she can later seek to influence. Yumiyama Tatsuya's insight into the psychology of healing is quite helpful here:

Thus religious people speak not only of diseases that are cured through faith but of diseases that, uncured, occasion the realization of the true meaning of life or the perception of erroneous ways of thought. Such experiences may be rooted in any number of beliefs, including those that see all illness as karmic in origin or that preach the grateful acceptance of all that befalls one. Such beliefs change one's perception of reality, imparting meaning to a pain-filled universe that earlier seemed utterly devoid of unifying significance.²⁵

Davis describes the process of how doubt is absorbed by belief and action in the case of Mrs. Wakimoto, a Mahikari believer whose husband died of stomach cancer.²⁶ In this example, the faith of a follower in a new religion grew and became complete despite the failure of a hoped for cure or miracle to appear. With the help of her seniors and fellow believers, Mrs. Wakimoto was able to piece together a worldview or theodicy which helped to impart meaning to a painful experience which had until then seemed meaningless.

Shinnyoen members also often understand tribulation and suffering as part and parcel of their spiritual training. Through such trying times Shinnyoen members are encouraged to practice patience, humility, and gratitude, which in turn may result in a deeper appreciation of life and the realization of higher religious truths. Occasions of hardship and confusion can

²⁴Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 200.

²⁵Yumiyama (1995) p. 269.

²⁶Davis (1980) pp. 231-237.

thus be interpreted as opportunities to learn and put into practice the valuable teachings of Itô and the religion he left behind. In this sense the accuracy of sesshin pales in importance with the chance the practice offers to understand and carry out one's spiritual training, whatever it may be.

Yuko and Lisa received sesshin at the higher level and therefore their experiences greatly differ from the guidance received at the basic sesshin level. At higher levels of sesshin one may pursue questions and issues in a detailed manner not afforded to those at the basic sesshin level. The higher levels of sesshin however are not open to any member but only to those who have met certain prerequisites. Usually those who have met the requirements for special sesshin are the ones who have invested much more time (and money) in the religion and are therefore doctrinally more committed and, theoretically, devoted than the average follower. Understandably those who have invested much time and energy in the religion are less likely to doubt and challenge their authority figures in the system thus it comes as little surprise that Yuko and Lisa did not seriously question the advice given them from the Shinnyoen spiritual world.

Basic sesshin, on the other hand, offers general guidance. Although the religion encourages followers to interpret events in a manner consistent with the Shinnyoen worldview, the ambiguity of messages received during basic sesshin allows followers certain leeway to interpret and apply the spiritual words to their life as they see fit. This of course affords the Shinnyoen spiritual world a degree of flexibility in its guidance as perceived inaccuracies and the like can be blamed on misinterpretation or misapplication by followers. Interestingly (but understandably) followers are more willing to accept the blame for a misguided sesshin instead of insisting the fault lay with the medium or spirit world. Accepting blame for sesshin gone awry allows the member to maintain participation in the Shinnyoen worldview, while placing blame on the Shinnyoen system in effect cancels one's membership. There are occasions when any answer is better than no answer (even though no answer is a form of answer). Examples may include the struggle to comprehend why a

physical ailment persists despite proper medical treatment. When one finds oneself in a deeply troubling or crisis situation, an answer, no matter how far fetched and fanciful, may provide the comfort and strength to endure. It may also help the afflicted make sense of what was until then "non-sense." Answers to the cause of, or reason for pain is sometimes the first step towards eliminating the pain. To paraphrase Frankl, suffering ceases to be suffering the moment the suffering has a meaning. Thus as Yumiyama suggested above, Shinnyoen members can be healed without being cured and in this sense, then, sesshin is also appealing. Winston Davis' examination of Mahikari members who were not cured but nevertheless healed arrives at the same conclusion: whether or not religious practices actually cure those afflicted with illness is secondary to the worldview they provide members in which to understand suffering.²⁷

3. THE THREE PRACTICES

Though there is no shortage of spiritual practices in Shinnyoen, there are several at the core of the religion that are considered a vital part of the Shinnyoen experience. From the moment of joining the religion members are constantly encouraged to train diligently and with sincerity in the *three practices* : *kangi* (donation), *gohôshi* (volunteer service), and *otasuke* (proselytizing). Followers are regularly taught that through these "three steps" of Shinnyoen practice one can purify the heart and become "Buddha centered."

Kangi

Kangi is a necessary and important practice for the Shinnyoen member. Indeed, followers are taught that "Sesshin and kangi are the cornerstones of your happiness. How can you have happiness without this foundation?"²⁸ While all Shinnyoen training purifies the follower, members are taught that kangi is a practice especially efficacious in purifying the

²⁷Ibid., pp. 223-238.

²⁸Shinnyoen (1995) p. 11.

mind. According to Shinnyoen teachings, *kangi* enables Shinnyoen followers to rid themselves of selfish desires and worldly attachments while simultaneously cultivating the spirit of compassion--the characteristic so much associated with the founder and his wife. Members are encouraged and expected to make a donation to the religion every month, especially if they are vying for spiritual promotion. In explaining to followers the reason behind a follower's promotion to the Reinôsha rank, for example, the founder states, "In the case of Mrs. Takemura, her succession to the Shinnyo spiritual faculty was due to her sincere repentance of her misdeeds and her extensive practice of *kangi*, which is one of the Six Paramitas (perfections)."²⁹ The Shinnyoen faithful are taught that while it is good to make donations at other Buddhist temples, money offered at Shinnyoen temples will procure more merit for oneself.³⁰ And lest one should be confused on how much is an appropriate donation to make, Shinnyoen temples have on display a number of donation envelopes, each labeled with a separate price range, for the believer to place his or her money.

Shinnyoen followers have a goal of building a utopian religious site known as the "Universal Training Ground." The creation of this site will not only be accomplished through the sweat of followers' proselytizing efforts but with their financial backing as well.

According to a sermon to Shinnyoen followers by Itô Tomoji:

As I remind you every month, you are able to amass virtue without any hindrance this month, too, because you are under the protection of the Buddha. Gratitude is the first step towards enlightenment. I believe the Sogo-Dojo (*Universal Training Ground*) will be built by *Kangi* (*monetary donations*) offered out of your sincere gratitude for that precious protection. I am sure you will rejoice in seeing the Sogo-Dojo being completed by your

²⁹Shinnyoen (1993) p. 46.

³⁰Video sermon by Hashimoto Eikichi at Shinnyoen Hawaii Chiryû Gakuin, June 14, 1996.

accumulation of sincerity. With that feeling of joy, you'll be able to continue in your effort to purify your karma.³¹

The construction of an earthly utopia through the generous donations of believers helps to cement their commitment to the religion and its causes.

While large sums of money do go towards the construction of branch temples, annexes, etc., it would be a mistake to view the collection of donations by the religion for self-serving purposes only. Members also donate money to special funds set up by the religion in order to aid people around the globe. Examples include the response of the Shinnyoen branch in Hawaii to the devastating earthquake which rocked Los Angeles in January 1994. Within a matter of days the temple set up a relief fund and members made unselfish contributions in order to help those whose houses and lives were leveled by the natural disaster. A similar response was made by the religion in reaction to the deadly earthquake which leveled much of the city of Kobe in Japan in 1995.

Towards the end of every Shinnyoen service, members in unison recite out loud the items of practice for the year. Throughout 1994 one such item of practice contained the following words: "Enrich our practice at holy temples, promoting harmony and linking all." The Shinnyoen practice of *kangi* enables members to cut their attachment to greed while concurrently offering help to others in the world. In this manner the practice is also a means through which idealistic maxims are transformed into concrete deeds.

Gohôshi

If *kangi* purifies the mind, *gohôshi* is believed to purify the body. For example in preparation for the grand opening of Shinnyoen UK in 1994, a small contingent of Shinnyoen UK followers would gather at the temple to perform roughly two hours of *gohôshi* on most Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. While *gohôshi* may

³¹*The Nirvana*, December 1986, no. 191.

manifest itself in various forms, until the Shinnyoen UK temple was formally consecrated in June 1994, this Shinnyoen practice inevitably meant cutting and clearing the wild underbrush in the temple's immediate vicinity in preparation for the construction of the religion's facilities. Dressed in gardening gloves and boots and armed with rakes, clippers, and hoes, members would slowly but steadily labor from mid-morning to early afternoon preparing the land for the grand opening of Shinnyoen UK. While pulling weeds and clearing shrubs fraught with menacing thorns may not seem an enticing way to spend the best part of the day for most people, Shinnyoen members believe that this kind of strenuous yard work is also a means to effectively purify the body and polish the soul. In short, gohōshi occasions the opportunity to build a sense of responsibility and commitment. This form of practice is not unique to Shinnyoen but has parallels in other Japanese new religions as well, e.g. Tenrikyō and Ittōen. By polishing the soul the Shinnyoen member is able to not only deepen one's understanding of the teaching, but performing gohōshi is also a necessary prerequisite if a member wishes to rise in the ranks of the religion. Followers must log in a number of volunteer hours in order to be considered for spiritual promotion. While in theory gohōshi may be performed anytime and anywhere, Nagai Mikiko points out that in actual practice gohōshi is usually limited to inside the temple or the vicinity around it:

The "particularity" of Shinnyoen practice is clearly revealed in the gap that exists between the ideal image of self-cultivation and its actual practice. According to the Shinnyoen teachings, self-disciplinary activity is based on the universal presence of the Buddha(s) and directed toward all of humanity. In actual practice, however, the concrete figures of the founders and their children assume a far greater importance than the Buddha, and one's family and fellow believers are far more often the focus of religious activity than anyone outside this circle. In other words, Shinnyoen practice is in reality largely internal, a fact that enables a thoroughgoing practice within the

organization. It is also deeply connected to Shinnyoen's institutional solidarity.³²

Car park attendants for Shinnyoen services, temple yard workers, and temple greeters and cleaners are just some of the volunteer capacities in which members may sign up and serve. Hence the practice of gohōshi benefits both the individual believer and the religion for while the believer cleanses the temple precincts, the practice cleanses the believer's soul and readies him/her for spiritual promotion.

Otasuke

All Shinnyoen members are expected to strive earnestly to accomplish the "three steps" of practice. Besides participating in gohōshi, and kangi, winning new members (otasuke) is an important responsibility of each member if (s)he is to move up in the Shinnyoen ranking system. Otasuke then is a vital component in Shinnyoen practice yet judging from the various personal testimonies, or "proofs", as Shinnyoen terms it, it is also one of the more difficult aspects of being a Shinnyoen member. Otasuke is a difficult practice for most followers because it requires the cooperation of a second party. Kangi and gohōshi, on the other hand, can be performed alone and whenever one is so inclined. Because otasuke is the most difficult of the three practices, members are taught that successful proselytizing will gain them greater merit than the other two required practices. In the highly structured organizational scheme of the religion, successfully recruiting new members into the Shinnyoen fold raises one's spiritual status within the group. What is more, the extra spiritual credit that otasuke carries and the fact that it is heavily emphasized in Shinnyoen (one cannot participate in a number of Shinnyoen functions unless one has successfully "connected" a required minimum number of new members) provides an organizational built-in impetus for the spread of the religion abroad.

³²Nagai (1995) p. 317.

Otasuke is proselytism, and successful proselytism is necessary for both rising in the religion's ranks and making one's spiritual training complete. Otasuke is often presented as a matter of spiritual life or death. Saving someone by connecting him or her to the religion is equivalent to gaining salvation oneself, as the words of Itô Tomoji clearly state:

You will be saved only when you save others, for only true efforts will produce good results...Remember that there is no such thing as futile effort. Every sincere effort you make to guide others, no matter how small, will be accumulated as virtue in the Spiritual World. That is why you should practice otasuke earnestly and diligently.³³

In a Shinnyoen video sermon Yoshida Junko, a senior ranking reinôsha, urged followers to practice otasuke due to the merit it procures. As mentioned, of the three practices that are central to the Shinnyoen teaching and required of all followers (otasuke, kangî, gohôshi), otasuke or propagation activities has the most spiritual merit, being directly tied to salvation.³⁴ The accumulation of spiritual merit in Shinnyoen is significant not simply because it benefits the individual follower, but because the salvation it offers is transferable to others, especially to ancestral spirits who are anguishing in the spiritual world. Shinnyoen followers are taught that successful otasuke immediately transfers the merit gained to deceased relatives suffering in the spiritual world. How do followers learn of the pained existence of such spirits? As we have seen, Shinnyoen members learn of particular ancestral spirits in agony during sesshin and are encouraged by the reinôsha to perform certain spiritual consolation rites to appease such spirits. Shinnyoen believers do not understand this scheme as spiritual blackmail (this term and charge were used with reference to Shinnyoen by the resident priest of the Shingon Hawaii headquarters during a personal interview in

³³Shinnyoen (192b) pp. 81-82.

³⁴Shinnyoen Hawaii Chiryû Gakuin video sermon on August 24, 1996.

September 1993) but as a means through which they may begin to take charge of their destinies. Since misfortune in their lives is often explained as the result of unhappy ancestral spirits, followers now have a means of exercising control over their situation. What if the unfortunate circumstances in which they find themselves continue to persist? Two explanations are offered: other suffering spirits, eager to receive succor, have made themselves known in the believer's life; the anguish of the ancestral spirit is to such an extent that more merit (which can be read as: connect more new members) needs to be transferred.

As I have mentioned, the desire to extend compassion and salvation to others is not the only motive for Shinnyoen members to spread their faith. In order to rise through the spiritual ranks of Daijō, Kangi, Daikangi, and Reinōsha, acquisition of new members, along with the practices of gohōshi and kangi, is an important prerequisite. Achieving the rank of reinōsha is certainly one of the goals aimed for by Shinnyoen followers. As of 1993 there were more than 1,200 active mediums. Needless to say, winning one convert will not promote a member to the rank of Reinōsha. Successful proselytism is therefore a driving force for the spiritual well-being of the Shinnyoen member. The force of this drive is so compelling, however, that some followers engage in dubious practices in order to achieve their proselytizing goals.

False Recruitment

The emphasis Shinnyoen places on otasuke, combined with followers' desire to succeed in the religion, can at times lead to questionable proselytizing schemes. It is known that new religious movements tend to inflate their figures for public purposes.³⁵ The unreliability of membership figures released by Japanese new religions stems in part from their counting methods. There are instances of religions using questionable counting practices such as including the ancestors of members to inflate their size and importance, thus giving a false impression to believers and the general public alike. In some cases anyone who walks

³⁵Reader (1991) pp. 195-196.

through the temple doors of a group and signs a "guest book" is counted as a member of that religion. In other cases attendance at a free seminar offered by a religion is enough to gain membership. This happened when I attended a two hour "special seminar" by Seichô no Ie, a Japanese new religion with Shinto and Christian leanings and also an offshoot of Ômoto, yet another Japanese new religion. Unbeknownst to me at the time, Seichô no Ie considered this act on my part as a membership declaration and now counts me as a member. I now consistently receive membership material from Seichô no Ie through the mail, including tickets to other Seichô no Ie events, which I am to distribute to friends and family. In Shinnyoen however there is an interesting twist to the equation. False recruitment practices committed by followers in Shinnyoen are examples of the believers themselves hoodwinking the religion.

As mentioned, similar to many of the other Japanese new religions, one of the ways available for Shinnyoen members to rise in the organization's ranks is through successful proselytization. Not only must one be successful in "connecting" (*musubu*) new converts to the religion, but the converts themselves must bring in a new member for the "teaching parent" to become eligible for advancement. Having a teaching "grandchild" is therefore one prerequisite for spiritual elevation. Through testimonies, stories, and interviews I have learned that while it is already difficult to successfully convert someone to Shinnyoen, it is even more so to have that person in turn convert someone else. However during my research on the religion I have learned of a scheme that explains how some members become eligible for promotion quicker than others, through propagation fraud.

In March 1995 during an international meeting at the Tokyo main temple members sheepishly shared personal stories of how they were able to qualify for spiritual elevation quickly due to "connecting" family members and friends without the person's knowledge or consent. Some went so far as to pull names from a telephone book. By placing these newly connected members under an already existing teaching child, they could quickly and easily

gain a "grandchild."³⁶ I was told that it is quite a common practice among members to circumvent the religion's requirement in this manner and I was encouraged to do likewise. Perhaps reacting to my surprise at such clandestine behavior, members assured me that it was almost impossible for officials at the main temple to detect this tactic. "Besides," a male follower rationalized, "by connecting people even without their knowing, some of the Shinnyoen spiritual merit will be transmitted to them, making them happier." "And who knows," another male follower continued, "connecting unsuspecting friends may actually lead them to the teaching one day." I thanked them for their insight and promised to consider their examples.

My experience at the Shinnyoen meeting is an interesting example of a religion's own members deceiving the organization by using dubious tactics to increase membership and raise their own personal status within the group. Initially I suspected the religion may be advocating this particular propagation practice but the manner in which members shared their own stories--with caution and slight embarrassment--led me to believe that this is done independent of the organization, although the religion may indeed know about this practice but chooses to look the other way.

4. OTHER TEACHINGS

Besides the three practices there are a host of other teachings offered by Shinnyoen to its faithful. One of the more central teachings that is often emphasized at services are the benefits accrued by Shinnyoen followers through *bakkudaiju* (vicarious suffering).

Bakkudaiju

Bakkudaiju is another concept central to the Shinnyoen teaching. It can be translated as vicarious suffering but many followers use it interchangeably with *blessing*. Followers

³⁶I myself was placed under the guidance of a Shinnyoen member different from the person who connected me.

are taught that bakkudaiju is the act of the two departed Itô sons taking on the suffering of Shinnyoen believers in an effort to alleviate their spiritual and physical pains. More specifically, members learn that the Shinnyoen founder sent his two sons to the spiritual world in order to bring salvation to the Shinnyoen faithful.

The idea of a father sacrificing his sons for the salvation of others may ring a familiar bell, especially to those in the Christian faith. While we can only speculate on any possible influence Christianity may have had on the Shinnyoen founder, we do know that at one point early on in Itô's religious life he was a devout Christian. Due to the influence of his elder sister, Itô studied Christianity in earnest and even took to the streets to proselytize for the religion. There are stories of Itô proselytizing in public, shaking a tambourine in the street in an effort to raise money for the Christian religion. Because Itô was a devout and enthusiastic follower of Christianity in his early years, we can suppose that the young Fumiaki was quite aware of the Christian concept of the crucifixion. Whether or not Shinnyoen's concept of bakkudaiju was influenced by Itô's involvement with Christianity is unclear but the parallels are striking and the assertion certainly tempting.

Ideas must change, be reinterpreted, and at times be reinvented if they are to remain meaningful to those removed from the circumstances which produced them. Bakkudaiju, born when the two Itô boys died, may have first functioned as a means through which Shinjô and Tomoji could cope with their devastating loss. The idea then grew into a majestic doctrinal scheme of holy children willingly sacrificing their lives for the salvation of the impure masses. For the ordinary Shinnyoen follower, however, bakkudaiju is often simply and pragmatically understood as this-worldly blessing and protection.

An example of bakkudaiju occurred on December 11, 1995 just prior to the evening service at the Shinnyoen Hawaii temple. I was part of a team performing gohōshi as temple parking lot attendants when a car with a mangled mess of crushed metal for its front left side pulled noisily into the car park. Out of the car emerged a visibly shaken middle aged woman. I hurried over to assist her and inquired about her health. I also asked about her car.

According to the woman, on her way to the evening temple service she crashed into another car on the highway causing substantial damage to her brand new car.³⁷ "Harold," my fellow gohōshi mate and a Daikangi follower trying to impress me with the efficacy of Shinnyoen, pointed out that while the woman did get into an accident, she did not suffer any serious injury. This certainly was proof to him that Shinnyoen followers are blessed with divine protection, bakkudaiju. He went on to point out that Shinnyoen offers car blessings to help protect cars from getting into accidents in the first place.³⁸ According to Harold, some cars have lots of negative karma due to the people who built them in the factories, and, thus it is necessary to have the destructive karma removed via Shinnyoen blessings. He completed his testimony with examples of drivers, including himself, who were able to avoid accidents due to the bakkudaiju received from the Shinnyoen car blessing. Harold's enthusiasm in relaying to me these Shinnyoen beliefs was such that I did not dare inform him that the car which was involved in the accident did indeed have the Shinnyoen decal which is given to blessed cars. Nor did I bother asking if it ever occurred to him that the woman's accident could be interpreted by some as a sign of the teaching's impotence and not omnipotence. To me, who would see this as a process whereby fate is bound by faith rather than the other way around, a different view might occur. However, one cannot state with certainty that Shinnyoen did not spare this woman from a fate worse than mangled metal. On that December night, it became clear to me that bakkudaiju is a hermeneutical tool that enables members to transform crises into comforts, and thereby protect the Shinnyoen worldview.

The Shift from Magic to Ethics

³⁷A perusal of cars in the temple parking lot seems to indicate that Shinnyoen members, at least in Hawaii, are financially quite well off. BMWs, Acuras, Jaguars, and members being dropped off in limousines are a common sight. "Part of the blessing of the teaching," I was told, by the husband of a lineage parent when I commented on the high number of expensive vehicles in the car park.

³⁸Car blessings, charms for bringing couples together, and special sashes to ensure safe pregnancies are just some of the *genze riyaku* (this-worldly benefits) services offered at many temples throughout Japan.

A common pattern found among the history of many Japanese new religions is the movement from a magical based religion to an ethically oriented one. One factor that facilitates the shift in orientation is the passing of a charismatic founder. Risshô Kôseikai, for example, began its shift towards an emphasis on doctrine soon after Naganuma Myôkô (1889-1957), the cofounder credited with strong spiritual powers, passed away.³⁹ A similar situation occurred in Hôseikai after its founder, Idei Seitarô (1899-1983), died.⁴⁰ Another consideration to account for the shift in orientation lies with the size of the religious group. Yumiyama writes, "it is commonplace for new religious groups to place a strong emphasis on healing experiences as they build their membership and then, as they become increasingly established, to turn to the intellectual refinement of their teachings and doctrine."⁴¹ Shinnyoen has experienced both the passing of its founder and an increase in growth during the eighties.

In Shinnyoen publications one can readily see the transformation of a magico-healing religion to one emphasizing ethics. In the early 1970s, just prior to the spectacular growth of Shinnyoen, proofs or testimonies of followers who were miraculously healed by the religion filled the pages of *The Nirvana*, one of Shinnyoen's publications. In the August 1971 issue, for example, there is a moving story of a follower who was healed of a seemingly incurable skin disease that virtually paralyzed the follower's hands. The May 1972 issue contains a follower's testimony of being miraculously cured of cancer, and a convincing story of a follower having a tumor weighing two kilograms removed with the spiritual help of Shinnyoen is found in the January 1973 issue. These stories appeared in the pages of my first three randomly selected issues. I did not have to diligently hunt for them. I found numerous other stories of healing while thumbing through the first hundred issues of *The Nirvana* but space allows me to list only a few. I am not suggesting that there were no

³⁹Nakamura (1997) p. 95.

⁴⁰Shimazono (1992b).

⁴¹Yumiyama (1995) p. 268.

stories upholding the virtues of ethical behavior in *The Nirvana* during this period, but it is clear that the emphasis in the early years of Shinnyoen focused on magical healing.

Later issues of *The Nirvana* however offer quite a different set of selections of testimonies for followers to read. In contrast to stories of magic and healing as described above, issues of *The Nirvana* in the nineties emphasize practice and an ethical aspect of the religion. The April 1995 issue, for example, highlights the story of a Shinnyoen follower who uses the teachings of the religion to better himself in his work as a company diver. The climax of the story is the follower's vow to clean and protect the ocean:

Shinnyo Kyoshu-sama, I will protect our oceans. I will convey to even one more person the true situation of the seas, which the average person can never know fully by just going to resorts. Through this, I will inspire people to stand up and protect our precious oceans. This is what someone like me, someone protected by the blessings of *bakku-daiju* and who is closely linked to the sea, can do to "save humankind, the earth, and the universe."⁴²

Notice how salvation is equated with ethical behavior in the above example while in earlier issues of *The Nirvana* it is understood largely in terms of healing. This equation is repeated in other issues, such as the September 1994 edition, which tells of a female follower who is able to provide excellent care to the elderly as a result of her practice in Shinnyoen where she learned patience and compassion. The September 1993 issue details the story of a young male follower who is learning "through his volunteer efforts to discover how to be a whole person as well as a member of Shinnyo-en." In these testimonies there are no tales of healing, and few encounters with magic. The July 1992 issue of *The Nirvana* however provides the clearest contrast between the religion in its early years and Shinnyoen in its present direction. In this issue one finds a story of a woman beset with cancer and the

⁴²*The Nirvana* April 1995, no. 291, pp. 4-5.

struggles her family faces in light of her illness. Like earlier issues the testimony here provides quite a bit of detail concerning the cancer and its spread. However, unlike the stories told in *The Nirvana* during the seventies, there is no miraculous recovery from cancer. The Shinnyoen follower in the July 1992 issue succumbs to cancer and dies. Yet the story makes it very clear that there is triumph even in her passing as she dies peacefully in the presence of her loved ones, not suffering in the manner of most patients with cancer. The proof is meant to be a moving testament to the power of the Shinnyoen teaching and practice as it helped a follower bravely face tragedy, even removing the sting of death. The story also emphasizes that through her religious practice and examples of upright behavior, her family was able to draw closer and gain courage to face the difficult days after her passing. Again this is not to say that magic no longer has a role in Shinnyoen for it clearly still does. In fact, up until the late eighties Shinnyoen was still largely perceived as a healing religion.

"Richard," an ex-member of the Hawaii temple, says that one of the first things new members were asked when he joined Shinnyoen in the late eighties was, "What do you want to be healed of?"⁴³

Although one may continue to come across stories of miraculous healing in the pages of *The Nirvana* in the 1990s, stories such as these are not found as frequently as they were in the 1970s.⁴⁴ Because narratives found in *The Nirvana* are selected and edited for publication by the Shinnyoen publication department, it seems to be a conscious effort on the editors' part to present readers with stories emphasizing practice and behavior over miracle and magic. Proofs, therefore, in *The Nirvana* over the span of three decades allow for the following conclusion: stories in the nineties are models for behavior while those in the seventies are tales of magic.

⁴³From interview conducted on May 17, 1996.

⁴⁴Stories of miraculous healings can still be heard, though with less frequency, during testimonials at Shinnyoen services, however. For example during a proof given at Shinnyoen Hawaii on January 15, 1998 followers heard a heart-wrenching story of how a young boy came back to life and recovered from cancer after having been pronounced dead at the hospital.

In many cases the death of a founder provides the impetus for such a shift in emphasis from magic to ethics. For example, in a study of the Japanese new religion Hôseikai, Shimazono points out that the death of its founder Idei Seitarô in 1983 led the religion away from the practice of spiritual healing and miracles and towards an emphasis on ethical training in everyday life.⁴⁵ The loss of a charismatic leader, who was the primary focus of the religion and underpinning of the organization, forces the group to grope for other means of maintaining its membership support. An emphasis on ethics in many cases is the most natural step in such a scenario. The charismatic founder may be gone but his or her life can still be a model for members to pattern their actions on. Some religions do not make the transition smoothly however and often times are troubled by secession and/or a drop in membership as a consequence. Shinnyoen has followed a similar pattern of emphasizing ethics over magic but unlike some of the other religions, has avoided the pitfalls of schisms and the loss of a significant number of followers. Perhaps the most important reason why Shinnyoen has not been beset with some of the problems usually accompanying such a shift can be traced to the fact that the religion initiated the movement from magic to ethics while Itô was still alive, hence his passing did not suddenly force an intense change in direction for the organization and send shock waves throughout the membership. The death of a founder is traumatic enough for a religion and its followers without the added blow of a sudden shift in teaching orientation. The slow but sure change in teaching emphasis which began roughly around time the *Nirvana Sutra* was incorporated into the religion (1955) in many ways helped ease the passing of the leadership torch from Itô to his daughters.⁴⁶

Since the transition from magic to ethics did not occur as the result of the death of its founder, what was the stimulus behind this change for Shinnyoen? In my view the tightening of control of the religion and its members by the Itô family is largely responsible for the shift

⁴⁵Shimazono (1992b).

⁴⁶Risshô Kôseikai, another Japanese new religion, is similar to Shinnyoen in this regard. The organization was at one time a magic oriented religion but it too has successfully shifted teaching emphases and leaders during the lifetime of Niwano Nikkyô, its co-founder.

in teaching emphasis. The history of Shinnyoen, as I suggested, is one filled with a series of crises, some of which included attempts to seize control of the religion by high ranking members within Shinnyoen, reinôsha breaking away from the religion, and Itô's own daughters leaving the religion. These crises did much to threaten the very existence of the religion and Itô sought to eliminate such threats by limiting the power and charisma of others within the Shinnyoen hierarchy save his immediate family. This shift seemed to have occurred especially after Tomoji died, as she was the most powerful among the reinôsha. In the early days of the religion the reinôsha were quite passionate, charismatic, and unpredictable during sesshin.⁴⁷ A follower recalls what sesshin was like at this time:

Strange things would sometimes happen, however. For example, there would be some followers whose hands would not come apart after being put together in prayer, or some who couldn't lift their heads off the floor because of spiritual forces, or others who were pulled away by spirits and could not return to a normal state even after the chanting was over.⁴⁸

While Tomoji was alive, she would allow the reinôsha to be in contact with powerful spirits:

After the mediums chanted the *Goshinjinpo* and formed the *mudras* (spiritually empowering hand gestures) for communion with the spiritual world, Shojuin-sama would send the spirits she was communing with to the various mediums. Occasionally, when she did that, the mediums would flip over backwards after receiving them...⁴⁹

⁴⁷Later, the ability to exercise complete control over the reinô faculty is what Shinnyoen claims separates their group from other religions and religious practitioners. See Hashimoto (1995).

⁴⁸*The Nirvana*, May 1995, no. 292, p. 3.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

As the head reinôsha Tomoji could oversee the spiritual behavior of the various mediums. After Tomoji died, however, there was less restraint on reinôsha to keep to the fold. During this period the threat of a popular reinôsha accumulating followers of his or her own was quite real. Shifting the emphasis in Shinnyoen from magic to ethics therefore limited the influence of the reinôsha, lessened the possibility of splits and leadership challenges, and provided more control for the Itô family. In my view the issues of *The Nirvana* are the expression of this transition. Today the shift is continuing and while magic will probably always play a role in the religion, our study of the beliefs and practices in Shinnyoen suggests that it will be secondary to the ethical emphasis. As our study of sesshin, the main pillar of Shinnyoen training shows, the practice is utilized by the religion as a process to mold various Shinnyoen followers, from the beginner level to the ranks of reinôsha, into uniform believers willing to support and promulgate the Shinnyoen worldview. The attempt to promulgate and support such a worldview overseas is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Shinnyoen Abroad: UK, Hawaii, and Singapore

1. THE NUMBERS GAME

According to an employee in the translation section of the Shinnyoen publication department, non-Japanese followers of the religion accounted for less than one percent of the total Shinnyoen faithful in 1995.¹ Exactly how many members does Shinnyoen have? As we have seen in Chapter Three, membership figures of Japanese new religions are generally unreliable as groups and their members tend to use questionable counting methods that often inflate their numbers.² With this in mind, we note that Shinnyoen counted approximately 720,000 believers among its fold in 1996. The religion did claim to have more than two and a half million members at one point in 1989 but to its credit it has since kept a more accurate count of its followers. This has been accomplished by keeping track of how many members actually practice sesshin on a regular basis and not by how many people have ventured into the temple precincts at one time or another. Shinnyoen has established branch temples and propagation centres in numerous parts of the world including the UK, the US, France, Singapore, Italy, Taiwan, Germany, Hong Kong, Belgium, and Brazil. Keeping in mind that membership numbers are "estimates," here are some figures for certain key Shinnyoen branch temples around the world:

Europe

One of the newest branch temples abroad is Shinnyoen UK. Although already in Britain since the late seventies, the London temple officially opened in June of 1994. During my period of study of Shinnyoen UK from October 1993 to the following June, the British

¹Information gathered on February 25, 1995 through an interview with a staff member at the Shinnyoen main temple in Tachikawa.

²Inaccurate membership counts are not always the result of new religions attempting to mislead. Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 38, point out that "To obtain even the crudest indicators of the size and composition of minority religious movements is by no means always easy. Sects tend to be, if not secretive, then at least wary about divulging information on such matters. Quite apart from such caution, they are often ill organized and do not always know the social parameters of their own organization."

membership remained small. For example at a service on October 29, 1993 there were 30 followers present, 27 of whom were Japanese expatriates. The February 24, 1994 service had only 25 members in attendance, again most of whom were Japanese followers. More telling for our purposes, however, were the monthly meetings held for non-Japanese members. The March meeting saw only four members in attendance, all of whom were males. Two months later, at the May meeting for non-Japanese followers, I was again privileged to spend an hour or so with the same four members.

Although at no time did I ever count more than 40 pairs of shoes placed in the shelves before the Shinnyoen doorway, I was repeatedly assured by Shinnyoen UK staff members that there were more than 150 Shinnyoen faithful in the UK. The following year, 1995, at a meeting in Tachikawa, Japan for international members I had the good fortune to meet again a Shinnyoen UK follower. During our conversation she mentioned that the UK membership had not changed much but still insisted that there were over 100 followers present in Britain. Even if her figures are accurate, just over 100 Shinnyoen members (almost all of whom are Japanese expatriates) after nearly twenty years in the UK cannot be very encouraging for the religion.

While Shinnyoen UK is one the newest temples abroad, Shinnyoen France is one of the oldest. Shinnyoen France opened in 1985 and was the first branch temple in Europe. The situation in Paris seems, however, to be similar to (if not worse than) the London one. On two separate occasions in April 1994 I observed services at Shinnyoen France. There were twenty members in attendance at one service (17 of whom were Japanese expatriates) and 17 at another (15 of whom were Japanese nationals). Members there told me that Shinnyoen France membership figures exceed 300 but one staff member confided that there were only 35 "active" members.

U.S.A.

According to the calculations of a Shinnyoen follower living in New York, in February 1995 the membership figures at the branch temple there numbered roughly 200 with 80% or higher being Japanese nationals.³ The branch temple in San Francisco, by comparison, was the first Shinnyoen temple to open on the American mainland yet it fares poorly compared with the temple in New York in terms of non-Japanese membership figures. A long time Shinnyoen follower at the San Francisco temple estimated that 99% of the believers there in 1995 were Japanese nationals.⁴

By all accounts Shinnyoen Hawaii is the largest of all branch temples abroad in terms of the number of followers it has. Lineage parents, staff members, and other temple heads there claim that the religion has well over 1,000 members. Yet by my own count the number of followers at the Hawaii temple has never reached 300 on any occasion.⁵ There were several times when I counted over 200 followers but these were during a special service or ceremony. The "usual" services attracted anywhere from 50 to 200 followers. For example at the Ichinyo Kinen service held on May 18, 1997, there were roughly 120 followers present. My own generous estimate of 500 Shinnyoen Hawaii followers was corroborated by the later admission of one Hawaii staff members who "guessed" that the actual membership figure of Shinnyoen Hawaii is somewhere near 400.

Asia (Other than Japan)

At first consideration one might expect Shinnyoen to do well in Asia membership-wise as opposed to the mainland US and Europe. Most Asians are familiar with Buddhism and its worldview and hence someone from Asia becoming a member and making the transition to Shinnyoen should not find it as awkward as someone coming from a Judeo-

³A Shinnyoen Hawaii staff member who has access to temple figures in the US estimates that the actual membership number is closer to 100.

⁴From informal interview on March 26, 1995 in Tokyo with an American follower who first joined Shinnyoen in San Francisco in 1982.

⁵My counts are based on my observations during my period of participation in Shinnyoen from 1993-1998.

Christian background. Indeed Rodney Stark's (1987) theoretical model which studies how new religious movements succeed underlines the importance of the cultural continuity factor. While it is generally true that it is easier to make the transition to a new religion that one is culturally familiar with, there are important exceptions as I will illustrate later. As the following membership figures for Shinnyoen Asia show, the religion has not been successful everywhere.

In June 1995 Shinnyoen Hong Kong could claim only 20 to 30 members.⁶ Shinnyoen Singapore fared slightly better. A temple staff member at Shinnyoen Singapore believed that there were 1,000 members at the branch as of September 1995 but this is an overly generous count on her part. Several months earlier, in late May, I was told by the same staff member that Shinnyoen Singapore had 200 followers (this in spite of the fact that on three separate occasions I never saw more than 20 members in attendance). Unless the religion grew 500% in that short time span (again during a visit in September I did not see more than 20 members) one cannot take her figures seriously. I will make detailed comments on the Shinnyoen Singapore situation later. Shinnyoen Taiwan seems to be the most successful branch temple abroad in Asia. As I have not visited Shinnyoen Taiwan I cannot confirm this but if the large Taiwanese contingent present at international services in Tachikawa is any indication, Shinnyoen Taiwan certainly enjoys the largest membership of Shinnyoen temples abroad in Asia.⁷

Cultural continuity (or the lack thereof) is but one important factor that influences the various membership figures of Shinnyoen missions abroad. Cultural factors in the host countries--for example the long tradition of Christianity in the UK and France, the strong Asian religious tradition in Singapore, and the large Japanese American population in

⁶Information from informal interview with Shinnyoen Hong Kong follower on June 17, 1995.

⁷Taiwan as a whole seems to be a land conducive for the establishment of Japanese new religions. Other new religions besides Shinnyoen, Tenrikyô, Konkôkyô, Seichô no Ie, and Reiyûkai, for example, have conducted successful proselytizing efforts there. Japanese new religions first entered Taiwan in 1895 after the Sino-Japanese post war treaty ceded Taiwan to Japan. Their overall success can be explained in part by the favorable reception Japanese culture receives there.

Hawaii--have all influenced Shinnyoen's overseas development as well as its proselytizing strategies. In this chapter we look at Shinnyoen in these contrasting lands, seeking to bring to light some of the issues and dynamics which influence the propagation strategies of these branch temples abroad.

2. SHINNYOEN UK

"Welcome home, everyone!"⁸ This phrase, which opens a typical Shinnyoen service, is emotive and comforting for the Japanese expatriate in the UK and also engenders a feeling of warmth and friendliness to the often times hesitant first time British visitor. Shinnyoen commenced its grand opening ceremony in June 1994 with this very phrase as the religion officially opened its temple doors to the UK public.

This section focuses on the religion's UK branch and examines its history, organizational structure, beliefs and practices; and membership profile in order to glean a picture of Shinnyoen's plan for overseas development in the UK. Particular reference to the British membership profile will be made in order to assess the needs and strengths of the Shinnyoen overseas expansion strategy. We begin with a brief sketch of the religion's history to help us understand the developments which led to the establishment of Shinnyoen UK.

History of Shinnyoen UK

As mentioned, Shinnyoen held the inauguration of its UK temple on June 25, 1994. This was an extravagant affair as the head of the religious order, Keishu-sama, the founder's daughter, along with members from all over Europe and Japan descended onto the quiet suburb on the outskirts of London and celebrated the event with festivities complete with

⁸In Japanese, "Okaerinasai" but at English speaking branch temples abroad the English equivalent is used.

music, speeches, and special performances.⁹ However Shinnyoen, though loosely organized, had been active in the UK since 1984 despite being without a permanent place of worship.

When the Shinnyoen founder Itô Shinjô visited Europe for the second time in 1979 (the first being in 1967 with his wife, Tomoji) there were already members present in Britain. However, it was not until 1984 that organized home meetings began to be conducted on a regular basis. The first Shinnyoen meeting in the UK is generally understood to have occurred in the home of a Japanese woman, a certain Mrs. Fukuhara. Married to a Japanese businessman, she accompanied her husband to England when his company sent him abroad for work. Meetings at her home did not last however, as she returned to Japan with her husband after his business purposes in the UK were completed. For the next seven years the remaining Shinnyoen followers attempted to secure a location in the London area on which to construct a temple but without positive results. Problems ranged from protests by the neighbors of potential building sites to the refusal by the Shinnyoen headquarters in Japan of certain possible construction areas. The reasons and complaints varied but one thing remained consistent: Shinnyoen was still without a permanent abode. Various members' homes served as meeting places in the meantime until 1991, when the group was granted the use of a town hall in Kensington. This all changed in 1993 when Shinnyoen received permission to purchase the Manor House in Long Ditton, Surrey.

Since 1985 the Manor House had been owned by an Arab group and functioned as a schoolhouse for Arab children. However, over the years the Manor House school became a propagation point for Muslim fundamentalism which caused some concern in the neighborhood. For reasons which are not clear, the school suddenly shut down and since the maintenance of the Manor House had been largely neglected over the years, what remained was a vacant rundown building for sale. This came to the attention of a middle aged couple,

⁹ According to Shinnyoen sources, whenever Keishu-sama presides over the grand opening of a temple, miraculous atmospheric phenomena occur such as the formation of a halo around the sun, heavy rains abruptly stopping, and gray skies suddenly turning clear blue.

members of Shinnyoen who, since 1987, had played a major role in helping the religion search for an adequate temple site. Shinnyoen found the location in Surrey suitable and soon the land was purchased and renovation of the Manor House and the nearby Coach House was begun.

That Shinnyoen took over a structure used for religious purposes other than its own and transformed it into a Shinnyoen temple is a fairly common practice in the history of the group. Among the number of Shinnyoen temples in Japan there are structures which once served as temples for other religions such as Tenrikyô and Tendai Buddhism but which were purchased and renovated to suit Shinnyoen. Besides being cheaper than building a temple from the ground up, a question of religious status and power may also be at play here. Building over an existing site to demonstrate one religious tradition's superiority over another tradition is a common practice. Bernard Faure, in an article focusing on the interaction between Buddhism and popular religion in China and Japan, showed how Buddhists "felt compelled to convert or subdue the local deities, to erase the memory of the places, to reconvert or desacralize spaces, to decode and reencode legends."¹⁰ By taking over and renovating another's religious structure, Shinnyoen seems to be exerting its spiritual authority over the former religion and in the process implicitly confirming members' belief in the superiority of Shinnyoen.

The present temple location is situated immediately adjacent to a Christian church and also borders on an unkempt and melancholy graveyard. Despite what some would see as an awkward situation between two neighboring places of worship, Shinnyoen seems to enjoy a good rapport with the surrounding community and especially with the Rector of the Anglican Church.¹¹ The Rector believes Shinnyoen's renovation of the run-down structure will only add to the well-being of the community, and from a personal standpoint finds the religion less threatening to his church than the Muslim fundamentalist group which previously

¹⁰Faure (1987) p. 341.

¹¹From February 1994 interview with Reverend Colin Pritchard.

occupied the Manor House.¹² In turn the leaders of Shinnyoen UK have assured him that they will be working towards a similar goal of helping people and improving lives.

In the short time between the 1993 purchase of the neglected Manor House and the 1994 grand opening of the new Shinnyoen temple, the religion, contracting a construction company but relying especially on its followers, worked fervently to transform the site. Charged with renovating the property, Shinnyoen members were divided into groups and worked two hour shifts three to four times a week. Armed with gloves, boots, and raincoats, they cut wild underbrush and pulled weeds, building on their enthusiasm and commitment along the way. There were many other tasks which needed to be attended to in order to ready the new temple and the faithful performed them with much zeal. To the religion and its followers' credit, the remodeling of the Manor House and its surrounding area was completed in advance of the given deadline and the impressive grand opening of Shinnyoen UK commenced as scheduled.

Branch Organization

One of the risks that Japanese new religions run by expanding overseas is the possible faction split which can occur when a branch temple becomes too autonomous and declares its independence from the main temple, in effect forming a separate new religion. This problem has occurred from time to time among other Japanese new religions overseas and is a constant cause of worry for many new religions such as Shinnyoen, which guards against this by keeping a close rein on its branch temples.¹³ Various measures are taken to ensure that practices and teachings at all Shinnyoen temples follow the same agenda.

¹²In fall 1993 the local "ladies group" had the British couple who staff the Shinnyoen temple in to talk to them and that was well-received.

¹³See for example the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1991, vol. 18, no. 2-3) issue covering Japanese new religions abroad, especially Shimazono Susumu's article "The Expansion of Japan's New Religions into Foreign Cultures" pp. 105-132.

A Hi-tech Religion ¹⁴

One of the first things a British visitor may notice about Shinnyoen is its use of modern technology. Large video screens placed near the main altar and high-tech speakers dangling from the ceiling are used by followers to view and listen to videotapes of the various services in Japan. In this manner the use of modern technology allows overseas congregations to participate in religious services with their counterparts in Japan creating a sense of unity among all followers. Shinnyoen members chant, applaud, and bow along with those on the video monitor as if they were there in Japan at that very moment and not almost half a world away and separated by recorded tape delay.

Besides their recording capacities which help the religion maintain a sense of unity among followers everywhere, video equipment is also utilized for instructional purposes, helping to teach and guide Shinnyoen members in their practice. Instructional videos ensure that what is taught to members in the UK is consistent with teachings in Japan. Proper contact between the main temple in Japan and its branch temples abroad is crucial for overseas management as poor communication may lead to irreconcilable differences. Such differences, be they in operations or teachings, may have the ill-effect of causing strong branch temples to break away from the parent religion. Shinnyoen ministers and staff members insist that there are virtually no differences between the main temple in Japan and the numerous branch temples abroad. Indeed fax machines, computers, and other audio/video equipment ensure that the temples keep in close contact with each other, dispersing bits of information which help minimize potential differences in daily operations. Even in the potentially dividing and difficult area of language, Shinnyoen utilizes technological advances which enable non-Japanese speaking members to understand sermons, testimonies, and such by using headsets that simultaneously translate services into

¹⁴Live video feeds of a service or festival in Japan, through telecommunication satellites, is a means through which some of the new religions effectively promulgate their teachings. Shinnyoen utilized such technology in May 1998 to transmit the broadcast of its fire festival to branch temples around the world. The Shinnyoen fire festival was performed in the UK, the first time the event was held outside Japan.

the member's own native language. At a service in France, for example, there were headsets available for French, English, and Japanese speaking followers.

The firm organizational control of Shinnyoen can render overseas development of branch temples difficult, however, as a degree of autonomy is essential if the religion is to adjust and adapt to foreign cultures. During my period of research at Shinnyoen UK it was on a rare occasion when a sermon or teaching catering to the needs of the local membership was delivered live and in-person by a minister at the overseas branch temple. Almost always Shinnyoen UK members received their spiritual lessons via videotape from Japan. The use of video recordings of sermons and services at the London and Paris temples, therefore, indicated the intent of Shinnyoen to strictly regulate the operations of its overseas branches. This restriction leaves little room for temples abroad to develop their own character thus making it less suitable for non-Japanese members. This may in part explain why Shinnyoen in the UK and France struggle in their recruitment of local followers.

The Minister Merry Go Round

Perhaps the most effective means through which Shinnyoen minimizes the possibility of strong branch temples gaining too much autonomy and seceding from the religion lies in the position of ministers at branch temples. None of the branches overseas have a permanent or local minister. All Shinnyoen ministers come from Japan and their location abroad is determined by the religion's International Division. In this way Shinnyoen is able to exercise control over branch temples and keep them dependent upon the main temple in Japan. Ordained officials are allocated to a particular branch temple for a period of roughly six months after which they are rotated with everyone returning to Japan for further training at one point before setting off to a new location. This policy prevents certain charismatic ministers from building a devoted following of his or her own. Furthermore, the fact that ministers are required to attend reinô (spiritual faculty) training twice a month at designated Shinnyoen temples ensures that the charismatic level and what the ministers teach are

consistent throughout the Shinnyoen world. This strict form of organizational control may hinder the development of branch temples overseas but it effectively reduces the chances of Shinnyoen following the path of many other Japanese new religions, including Reiyūkai and Sekai Kyūseikyō, that have been rent with secession.

Especially in the initial developmental stages of a young temple, more so than temporary leaders, a long term resident minister could better nurture the growth of a temple overseas. The frequent rotation of Shinnyoen ministers means that non-Japanese members are exposed to different emphases in and interpretations of doctrine and practice, adding more complexities to an already difficult area. For example, during a service on October 29, 1993, the then resident minister prefaced the video presentation by exclaiming to the 30 followers in attendance that, "there are many religions but only a few lead to salvation." This statement caught my attention as I was unclear about Shinnyoen's position towards other religions. When asked about it later, a member explained that sometimes they are told by ministers Shinnyoen is the only way to salvation and at other times they are told there are other possible means but Shinnyoen's way is the quickest and most efficient. If followers are given different interpretations of a particular teaching, why do they not approach the resident minister for clarification? It may be that the lack of a long term resident minister results in non-Japanese members having little opportunity to develop a comfortable relationship with their leader. This in turn renders it difficult to ask for help with issues concerning their belief and practice. It may also very well be, as the above example suggests, that the visiting minister himself is the source of confusion. It is perhaps worth noting that the most successful Shinnyoen mission overseas has been in Hawaii, which claims over 1000 members, and which was, for the first 17 years of its history, under the guidance of a single Shinnyoen minister which undoubtedly contributed to the eventual success of the temple.¹⁵ A long term minister coupled with the fact that Hawaii has an abundant Asian population in

¹⁵"Bishop" is the English language title Shinnyoen uses to address Kuriyama Jōshin, the high ranking priest who guided Shinnyoen Hawaii through its early stages of development.

general and a large Japanese-American community in particular accounts for the more vigorous growth than Shinnyoen has achieved elsewhere overseas.

Beliefs and Practices

Due to the strict organizational control exercised by the religion, beliefs and practices of Shinnyoen branch temples abroad are largely consistent with their counterparts in Japan. However the distance which separates the branch temples abroad may result in curious situations in which what is practiced in Japan may meet with different results when implemented overseas. This is especially so concerning sesshin training and otasuke.

Sesshin and the Revolving Reinôsha

During my visit to Shinnyoen UK in 1994 there were three levels of sesshin training available to followers. Members selected the appropriate level of sesshin depending upon their specific need and/or problem. Basic sesshin, which served the beginner and follower who required only "general" training, could be requested for £2.40.¹⁶ Members who had been in Shinnyoen for awhile and who had particular questions or a "special" problem could request "special sesshin" for £7.40. There was a third type of sesshin for those with a special question or problem which could prove to be life altering. This special consultation sesshin was performed by a high ranking Shinnyoen medium for £14.40. It should be noted here that not all types of sesshin were available to the UK followers on a regular basis. The availability of certain levels of sesshin was dependent upon the presence of a properly trained and ranked reinôsha.

As there were as yet no local reinôsha among the UK members, the spiritual mediums were imported from Japan or were present via the rotating minister system.¹⁷ As some of the followers in the UK saw it, this situation had both disadvantages and advantages for the

¹⁶1994 prices.

¹⁷While Shinnyoen ministers have the reinô faculty, it is not true that all reinôsha are ministers. In addition to the criteria required to reach reinôsha status, ministers have further training in doctrine and other matters.

overseas group. The constant shuffling of reinôsha, for example, did not allow for a consistent sesshin over a period of time (the reinôsha themselves have a ranking system which prohibits the lower ranked reinôsha from giving certain levels of sesshin. A member therefore may be frustrated in his/her attempt to receive consecutive special sesshin). Furthermore, the revolving reinôsha policy hindered members from asking follow-up questions to still unresolved issues raised in previous sesshin. This was especially important for local overseas followers who were new to the sesshin experience.

Having no local reinôsha, however, meant that the sesshin were less uninhibited or bound by convention. Moving reinôsha between temples at times resulted in having two or more mediums at a certain temple. Such a situation allowed members to inquire beforehand which reinôsha was performing which sesshin and thus enabled followers to "avoid the boring ones."¹⁸ Such forms of sesshin also meant the spiritual medium would be less likely to utilize his or her own personal knowledge of the follower. One UK member felt that in Japan her sesshin were at times biased due to the reinôsha being her personal friend who therefore was able to use information gained from their years of friendship. My own sesshin experiences at different branch temples abroad seemed to corroborate the UK member's assertion. My initial sesshin at a particular locale was often generalized but as the reinôsha learned more about me (through my questions and interviews) I noticed that subsequent sesshin with the same reinôsha became interestingly detailed. References to my studies, for example, would surface during subsequent sesshin.

Importing reinôsha and rotating ministers may allow followers to "avoid the boring ones" but in the end the disadvantages outweigh the conveniences. A sense of continuity in Shinnyoen's main pillar of practice, sesshin, could be a strong foundation on which to build an overseas temple. Though a reinôsha may be "boring", if he or she is stationed permanently or long-term, members may learn to feel comfortable with him or her and in turn

¹⁸Certain reinôsha are known for their animated and vivid sesshin while others are viewed as staid in their presentation.

begin to have confidence in their ordained official. Without a trusted leader to properly guide local followers through unfamiliar territory the chances of organizational expansion become slim.

Propagation

Consistent with Shinnyoen temples everywhere, the followers at Shinnyoen UK are encouraged to participate in the three practices of otasuke (propagation), gohōshi (volunteer work), and kangi (monetary offerings). Along with sesshin, the three practices hold the keys for spiritual advancement for the individual member. These practices, but especially otasuke, also provide the means for organizational expansion abroad.

Proselytization strategies are an important part of a religion's success. As such, during a visit to the London temple in 1994 I asked the then resident minister at Shinnyoen UK about otasuke. How did Shinnyoen UK expect to "reach" the local populace and expand on its small membership of roughly 50? First of all the minister informed me that there would be no use of the media, no door to door canvassing, no distribution of pamphlets, newsletters, and flyers announcing the religion's presence, and no participation in community activities to draw the public's attention. He then tried to convince me that co-workers, friends, neighbors, schoolmates, and acquaintances of Shinnyoen followers would notice how sincere and kindhearted members were and upon inquiry would learn that the Shinnyoen teaching is responsible for their character. In this manner Shinnyoen would spread across ethnic and cultural lines and become established in the community.¹⁹

One follower whom I interviewed at Shinnyoen UK in 1994 supported the efficacy of this method of proselytism. A Japanese opera student in her twenties and a member since 1983, "Maki" informed me that the reason she joined Shinnyoen was because she noticed

¹⁹The disregard for media advertising and other impersonal means of promoting the religion in favor of personal recruitment has been a successful proselytizing strategy for another Japanese new religion in Britain, Sōka Gakkai. Wilson and Dobbelaere found in their survey of Sōka Gakkai that 94 per cent had learned of the religion through social interaction. (p. 50)

how kindhearted and sincere its members were in contrast to her schoolmates in college. Since her words were strikingly similar to the minister's, it could be that members were told repeatedly that this is how they will win converts and thus their own reasons for joining Shinnyoen were influenced over time by this belief.

The Shinnyoen UK minister's answer was uniform with the response given to me by a former resident minister at Shinnyoen Hawaii, and with his assessment of how Shinnyoen Hawaii had and would continue to grow in terms of membership. Both believed potential members would be attracted to Shinnyoen by the genuine character of its followers in everyday situations and in this way salvation could be extended to all. This may be a tediously slow and unreliable way to proselytize but it is the method which has been most beneficial for the religion in Japan, where the religion insists that followers concentrate on family members and friends instead of trying to convert strangers.

Emphasizing the personal character of rank and file members to attract converts has also been a successful recruiting tool for the largest of the Japanese new religions, Sôka Gakkai. In their survey of Sôka Gakkai members in Britain, Bryan Wilson and Karel Dobbelaere found that members "often specifically mentioned the sincerity of those whom they had met, their honesty, friendliness, happiness, openness to others, and their informality" as reasons which had attracted them to the religion.²⁰ Though there are several factors which have contributed to the growth of Sôka Gakkai in Britain, Shinnyoen hopes to duplicate their rival's success by also utilizing their membership quality to attract potential followers.

Yet when compared with Sôka Gakkai, Shinnyoen has a narrower appeal in terms of attracting new members. This is partly the result of the fact that whereas the former utilizes a textual basis--the Lotus sutra--to support its proselytizing activities, the latter is dependent upon potential converts accepting the spiritual powers of a particular Japanese family.

²⁰Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 53. One should keep in mind that their answers may have changed over time to reflect the beliefs of the organization.

Shinnyoen's strong cultural ties, especially its focus on the Itô family and ancestor oriented practice limit its ability to successfully recruit followers outside the Japanese community. Sôka Gakkai on the other hand has a more universal appeal as a text is not as culture bound as the worship of a Japanese family is. Moreover the text in Sôka Gakkai's case is not an esoteric book but a sutra that is widely known in Buddhist circles. These cultural issues then place Shinnyoen at a disadvantage in non-Japanese communities, regardless of how sincere and kindhearted members are.

Shinnyoen's recruitment strategy is obviously not an aggressive one and this passive posture towards proselytism may in part explain why some scholars see Shinnyoen as experiencing relatively slow and moderate growth in the UK and in other areas outside Japan.²¹ It should be noted that Shinnyoen did engage in active door to door proselytism in the early days of its history but abandoned this method for various reasons. That Sôka Gakkai, well known for its aggressive proselytizing techniques, has been successful in establishing a strong foundation in the UK suggests that Shinnyoen, at least in its early stages of development there, may need to return to its earlier methods of proselytism in order to be successful with the local population. Once Shinnyoen gains the attention of the local populace then its rank and file members may proceed to impress them with their genuine character.

In Japan, Shinnyoen depends on its lineage system to recruit and instruct followers. This construct has proven to be an effective means for expanding the order. As lineage and teaching parents are charged with closely guiding their teaching children, regular lineage home meetings provide an effective atmosphere for carefully immersing Shinnyoen neophytes in the teaching. Lineage meetings also provide the necessary pressure and motive for increasing recruitment efforts as teaching parents constantly remind their children of the importance of otasuke. Through tales of successful otasuke, junior members learn from their

²¹ According to Shimazono Susumu (1993) p. 288, Shinnyoen has, for the most part, been unsuccessful in its overseas missions. Because Shimazono does not qualify his statement, however, we do not know what criteria he is utilizing to judge the success of a new religion's overseas mission.

seniors how to best introduce a newcomer into the Shinnyoen fold. The situation abroad, however, is quite different. Whether or not this strategy of utilizing the lineage system will be as successful in the UK and other lands overseas in terms of procuring non-Japanese members is debatable.

Many of the Japanese who journey abroad for work and study are young. That Shinnyoen is organized according to its lineage system and not regionally like Sôka Gakkai, for example, means that most overseas Shinnyoen followers are junior members beyond the contact of their teaching elders. Obviously this makes it very difficult to hold lineage meetings. These circumstances also have significant consequences for the growth of the local British membership. Unless they travel to Japan, British followers have little or no opportunity to meet their lineage parents. Hence British converts are left in the hands of junior Japanese members who occupy the lower rungs of the Shinnyoen ladder and who therefore are relatively new to the religion themselves. In addition, being ranked low on the Shinnyoen spiritual scale is an indication of inexperience in training and properly raising a teaching child.²² Therefore instead of having the opportunity to regularly meet and receive proper guidance from a veteran lineage parent, British converts are led by those who themselves may be unsure of the Shinnyoen teaching. Furthermore, because most of the young Japanese members are on two or three year work or study assignments, they will soon return to Japan leaving their British teaching children behind to fend for themselves. The combination of temporary ministers, junior Japanese members, and ill-trained British followers, does not bode well for a successful missionary campaign in the UK.

Shinnyoen UK Membership

²²Most of the Japanese UK members I met in 1993-1994 held beginner or daijô ranks with only a few at the kangî level.

The members of Shinnyoen UK can be roughly divided into three categories-- temporary Japanese expatriates, Japanese citizens who are permanent residents in the UK, and non-Japanese followers. As mentioned, according to Shinnyoen estimates there were over 100 members in the UK in 1994. However, through my own experiences at the various services and meetings, the actual number of followers seemed to hover somewhere between 45 to 50, with the overwhelming majority being Japanese expatriates. The membership was also a relatively young one with the average age in the late twenties or early thirties. Again this is understandable as overseas students and young workers sent abroad by their companies make up a large percentage of the Shinnyoen UK congregation. In Japan, Shinnyoen membership seems to reflect the age distribution of society in general with followers from all ages in attendance.

A common pattern among Japanese new religions is the predominance of women among its membership. My observations at services of Gedatsukai, Mahikari, Agonshû, and Sekai Kyûseikyô among others support this assertion. Shinnyoen is no exception. At a service on 29 October 1993 for example, of the 30 followers present 26 were Japanese females. Many of the Japanese women followers at Shinnyoen UK are housewives who have accompanied their husbands' business relocation. For these women, most of whom will only stay in the UK for a few years, the Shinnyoen temple provides a place to go on weekdays and a chance to meet with other Japanese women. There they can share their experiences in Shinnyoen, speak in their native tongue, and often have Japanese dishes for lunch. The Shinnyoen temple then provides a sense of community for expatriates and helps to alleviate feelings of homesickness.

Some Japanese female members attend Shinnyoen services in spite of objections from their husbands and families. One female follower whom I had only seen on weekdays told me in confidence that she must sneak in and out of her house in order to attend the various services. Because of her husband's opposition to the religion it is almost impossible to come to the temple on the weekends when her husband is home. From what I have been able to

gather, most of the objections raised by husbands and families stem from the perception of Shinnyoen as a strange religious cult. One of the women told me that when she and her husband were first assigned to work and live in the UK, he was happy that she would finally be separated from Shinnyoen. However, to his chagrin they moved to a place where his wife's devotion to Shinnyoen was even more necessary as she was needed to help establish and develop Shinnyoen in the UK. With a laugh she says this situation is the result of the mercy and will of the Buddha. This perception of Shinnyoen by its own members as a somewhat deviant religion may have some consequences in their proselytizing efforts as members may be less willing to speak about Shinnyoen to non-members and strangers.²³

1995 marked the tenth anniversary for Shinnyoen France. With the number of active members roughly at 35, Shinnyoen cannot be overly pleased with its development. Unless there is a marked emphasis on proselytism, Shinnyoen UK seems to be destined to a similar fate. As long as the majority of Shinnyoen members consist largely of Japanese expatriates who have been sent abroad from Japan on two or three year business assignments or who are exchange students the membership will be unstable and growth minimal. This is evidenced by the fact that at Shinnyoen UK there are very few followers among the congregation who have been with Shinnyoen UK from its earliest point. Many of the Japanese members have come and gone, staying for roughly two years in the UK after which their studies ended or their jobs required them to return to Japan or elsewhere where they will yet again join the existing Shinnyoen congregation or perhaps even begin a new one. However, due to Japan's economic slump in the 1990s there may be a reduction of Japanese sent abroad which could have serious consequences for a religion whose membership is heavily dependent on expatriates. These circumstances combined with the constant shuffling of Shinnyoen ministers among the branches means a lack of continuity for the temples abroad thus rendering stable growth difficult.

²³For example attempts at door to door canvassing in the past in Japan have met with embarrassing results for members as some were chased away from homes with salt, a traditional purifying agent, being tossed at them. Experiences such as this perhaps in part accounts for the passive posture taken by Shinnyoen and its members. *The Nirvana*, December 1992, no. 263, p.3.

British Profile

Every month at Shinnyoen UK there is a meeting for non-Japanese members. At these meetings one sees seated on the floor in a small circle the same number of faces. While there are about 20 Britons who have signed their names on the membership application forms during the course of Shinnyoen UK's history, there only seem to be about four or five consistent and active British Shinnyoen members with an occasional British visitor attending a service out of curiosity and not returning to the temple thereafter. Below is a brief description of the "regulars" who usually attended these meetings in 1994.

"Patrick" is a man in his sixties who became a Shinnyoen member due to the influence of his wife, a Japanese national. He is also the senior non-Japanese member in the UK and plays an important role in the development of Shinnyoen UK. Patrick spent ten years in Japan which he says helped him to get accustomed to and feel comfortable with the religious worldview prevalent in Shinnyoen. At first only a paper member, he increasingly became more devout through the years. Patrick comes from a Catholic background and says he originally had no difficulty belonging to both religions, especially since both have the common practice of praying for departed souls. However, as his Shinnyoen practice deepened, his faith in Christianity weakened causing him much personal turmoil. At a meeting in May 1994, he announced to the group that he had relinquished his faith in Catholicism.

In Patrick's view there are several reasons why Shinnyoen has thus far not been successful with the British. First of all he attributes the general irreligious climate of Britain to the slow development of Shinnyoen UK. According to Patrick, when not indifferent, the British have a disdain and distrust for religion. He says that this was especially evident during Shinnyoen's search for possible temple sites. Through his difficult experiences with planning programs Patrick believes it would have been much easier for the group to build a discotheque rather than a place of worship in many parts of the UK.

Secondly, Patrick feels that in contrast to the straightforward approach towards doctrine taken by the western religions, notably Christianity, the imprecise and vague religious teachings found in Shinnyoen make it difficult for the Westerner reared in the Judeo-Christian culture. Granted, there are also confusion and unclear positions concerning many Christian teachings but when compared with Shinnyoen and many other Japanese religions, the ambiguity which surrounds the teaching can be quite frustrating for the non-Japanese member who may be used to having religious beliefs and articles of faith outlined in a particular manner for him or her.

In addition to the above, Patrick sees the home meetings as a hindrance to British propagation. The home meetings, so important to the Shinnyoen effort in Japan, are not conducive for "connecting strangers" in Britain. In Patrick's view most British are uncomfortable with the idea of visiting a stranger's home to participate in a religious gathering.

"Andrew" is a man in his late twenties or early thirties who also became a member of Shinnyoen due to the influence of his Japanese wife. He is one of the more devout members of Shinnyoen. Andrew studies Shinnyoen written materials faithfully and he is the only Shinnyoen member in the UK from whom I have heard miracle stories concerning the founder and the daughter who now heads the order.²⁴ Unlike Patrick, he finds no complications in belonging both to the Catholic church and Shinnyoen. In fact, he says being a member of Shinnyoen has helped his Catholic practice. At one meeting Patrick and Andrew's views clashed as Patrick insisted that as one grows in Shinnyoen there is no longer a need for other religions. The issue went unresolved as the resident minister conducting the meeting was limited in his English language ability and therefore could not articulate the Shinnyoen position regarding this matter.

²⁴From Andrew, Shinnyoen members at a group meeting heard how the founder could float in the air and how unexplainable phenomena would occur in the sky and especially around the sun wherever Keishu-sama went.

"John" is a man in his mid-seventies who first became a follower of Shinnyoen three years ago after his Japanese neighbor introduced him to the religion. At that time he was experiencing serious eye problems to the extent that his doctor told him he would soon go blind in one eye. However, after joining Shinnyoen and performing memorial services to appease his ancestor spirits, his eyes miraculously improved. Because his doctor has no explanation for the cause of this fortunate turn of events, John believes it must have been the healing power of Shinnyoen. He has since tried to bring some of his friends to Shinnyoen services but without success. He says one reason for his friends reluctance to come to the temple is the anti-Japanese sentiment that his friends, who served in the Second World War, still harbor. That Shinnyoen is often perceived by the outsider as a religion which worships a Japanese man and his family will certainly hinder his proselytizing cause. John has no particular religious background but admits to always having an interest in "spiritual things."

"Richard" is a man in his sixties who was "connected" to Shinnyoen by his Japanese language instructor. He is by far the most skeptical of the British members, questioning the group's teachings and practice and even going so far as to suggest to one of the Shinnyoen ministers during a group meeting that sesshin was a waste of his time and money as it told him nothing new. Richard was told that if he joined Shinnyoen all his problems would be gone within two years. When I interviewed him it had already been over a year since Richard became a member and to his disappointment not much positive change had happened in his life.

Richard has been to Japan several times and is fond of the culture. He is involved in the fine arts and was even presented with an award in Tokyo by the Japanese for his work, which perhaps explains his sympathetic stance towards the country. It seems Richard's fondness for Japanese culture is what attracted him to Shinnyoen. One also senses that it could very well have been any other Japanese religion which Richard would have joined, had

he been exposed to it first, as Richard often confuses Shinnyoen teaching with other forms of Japanese religions to the dismay of Shinnyoen ministers and members.²⁵

Richard's blunt expression of disappointment and confusion with the Shinnyoen teaching can be traced to the breakdown of the lineage system in the UK. Not only has Richard never met his lineage parent, but in fact he does not even know who his lineage parent is. Richard's case may be a prime example of a British follower frustrated due to the lack of an experienced senior member to guide him, teach him, and interpret his growth in the religion. Until a stable lineage system is developed in the UK more Richards may be on the horizon.

"Paul", a man in his thirties, had only been a member of Shinnyoen since December, 1993 when I interviewed him and judging by his sporadic attendance, it did not seem likely that he would continue to be a member for long. He was connected to the religion by his female Japanese language instructor and he confessed to me that his initial reason for joining Shinnyoen was because, "the Japanese religions are good places to meet Japanese women."²⁶ Prior to joining Shinnyoen he attended Sôka Gakkai services but was put off by their beliefs and practices.²⁷ That he now has a Chinese girlfriend who is not a member of Shinnyoen may partly explain his subsequent absence at services.

Though I was in contact with Shinnyoen UK for only an eight month period in 1994, two things are strikingly noticeable concerning the British membership--gender and motive

²⁵In Richard's defense, someone unfamiliar with Shinnyoen could easily confuse the beliefs of the religion with other forms of Japanese religion as Shinnyoen (nor for that matter most other Japanese religions) does not clearly outline its beliefs and teachings in the way many Westerners are used to from Christianity and Judaism.

²⁶Some members believe that there is a matchmaking service provided by the religion for about £50 which will find suitable partners for members among the congregation both in and out of Japan. The Japanese caretaker in charge of Shinnyoen UK vehemently denies the existence of this service but a high ranking medium told me that she was the go-between for two members who eventually got married. I myself have seen (and completed) the application form for this matchmaking service at Shinnyoen Hawaii.

²⁷A common theme found in the background of many overseas western Shinnyoen followers include a Catholic upbringing and a prior experience in Sôka Gakkai. A possible reason for this could be the ease in transition between the Catholic practice of praying for the dead and the emphasis on ancestor veneration in Japanese religion. That many western followers have had prior experience in Sôka Gakkai may simply speak to the size of the Japanese religion and how well it has marketed itself abroad.

for joining. Firstly, all the British members are male.²⁸ This is in stark contrast to the Japanese membership profile which is mostly female. In general most non-Japanese members in Shinnyoen are men who are married to Japanese women and who have been subsequently converted to the religion by their wives. This is largely true not only in Shinnyoen UK but in Shinnyoen France and, as we shall see, to a lesser degree in Shinnyoen Hawaii and Singapore as well.

Secondly, for the British member who does not have a Japanese wife, just as important (if not more important) as the power of the Shinnyoen teaching is the appeal of the Japanese culture from which the religion comes. To some extent this is also true for many of the Japanese members. For some Japanese housewives, Shinnyoen represents a culture that is familiar and the religion is a place where they can comfortably belong. Indeed some Japanese females became members *after* moving to Britain. The longing for home played a major role in their decision to join Shinnyoen. At the London temple for example I met two expatriate women who in fact joined the religion not in Japan but in the UK largely as a result of initially wanting to maintain contact with their Japanese culture. For many of the British on the other hand, Shinnyoen represents a culture that is exotic and the temple and its organization is a place where they can break away from their own traditional culture.

During the lengthy non-Japanese meetings as much discussion centers around the mystery and allure of Japan as it does on the religion itself. Questions concerning music, language, and other aspects of Japanese culture are raised and discussed. However, Japanese music and language are not the only alluring things to some of the British members. The Japanese themselves, especially the women, have played a role in attracting at least one British male.

²⁸I have been told that there is at least one British female among the members but during my 8 months of contact with Shinnyoen UK I have not seen her at any of the services which leads me to believe that she may only be a paper member at best.

3. SHINNYOEN SINGAPORE

One may become discouraged should one decide to stroll down Grange Road (where the Shinnyoen Singapore temple is located) in search of Shinnyoen Singapore. The region's high humidity combined with the frustration arising from the inability to detect the branch temple amongst the residential neighborhood may cause one to flag down a taxicab and return to the air conditioned department stores. For one of the first things a visitor to Shinnyoen Singapore notices, or more accurately, does not notice about the branch temple there, are the signboards or markers indicating the existence of a Japanese religion. There are none. Due to strict religion laws of the Singaporean government, Shinnyoen is prohibited from exhibiting public displays and restricted in its religious activities.²⁹ Without an address in hand, it is therefore virtually impossible to distinguish the Shinnyoen temple from other neighboring homes as the trademark symbol and sign of the religion is conspicuously missing from public view. One could easily walk or drive past the temple without realizing the presence of its sacred space.

Inside the seemingly innocuous structure, however, lie all the usual religious accouterments of the new religion. Portraits of the holy Itô family, an assortment of gold plated bells and bowls, candles, flowers, and a molded copy of the sculptured image of the reclining Buddha adorn the altar. It is identical to other Shinnyoen altars in every respect save the offerings, which are mostly local sweets. Television screens, video cameras, and high-tech speakers monitor the small carpeted worship room while a single row of cushioned

²⁹The influence of the Singaporean government on religious matters reaches beyond the parameters of religious practice. In hopes of gaining a better understanding of the religious dynamics in Singapore, during a visit to the country I met with a professor who taught courses on Japanese religion at the National University of Singapore. This particular professor, while cordial and accommodating, did not seem comfortable discussing the new religions and the Singaporean government. Questions concerning the Singaporean government and its laws governing religion in general were politely refused an answer, the professor stating that it is easier for him to focus on the religious situation in pre-independence Singapore. Questions regarding the numerous Japanese new religions in Singapore in particular also got me nowhere as he claimed to have no information about such groups. I thought his answers were peculiar for a professor teaching a course on Japanese religion and who is also a contributor to a newsletter on Japanese religions which is published by a major university in Japan.

chairs are placed against the rear wall for those not comfortable with the Japanese style of sitting on the floor. The room where services are held is small, perhaps only large enough to comfortably seat 30 followers. The lights are soft and fluorescent, illuminating the solemn ambiance that fills the room. As if on cue, voices immediately become hushed once members cross the sacred threshold of the Itô sanctuary and quietly file in and take their places on the floor. They offer three bows to the altar in an act of obeisance to the founder and his family and then wait in meditation. After a few moments the founder's favorite music flows from the speaker system and another Shinnyoen Singapore service commences.

Much of the overseas propagation success of a Japanese new religion is dependent on the religion's organizational, beliefs, and practice characteristics. However, the land where the new religion is attempting to establish itself, the recipient culture, must also have present qualities conducive for such proselytizing. Singapore is a country where its history and cultural make-up provide fertile ground for certain proselytizing new religions and a barren desert for other Japanese religious groups.

Due to wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese military against the Chinese in Singapore, there are still pronounced anti-Japanese sentiments lingering among many of the Chinese population in the city. One Singaporean Chinese admitted to me that her mother told her that the Chinese are supposed to "hate" all Japanese. With feelings such as these among the native population, therefore, one of the primary tasks facing Japanese religions in Singapore is to address the Japaneseness of their movements. Some of the Japanese new religions have been able to adapt to their host culture more readily and shed certain aspects of their cultural baggage. Organizational structure and daily practice, at least on a superficial level, have taken on a number of Chinese characteristics. Other new religions, however, have resisted adapting to the Singaporean culture and as a consequence have struggled with their missionary activities. As we shall see, Sôka Gakkai and the Mahikari groups belong in the former category while Shinnyoen seems to fit the latter.

History of Shinnyoen Singapore

Shinnyoen officially opened its temple doors to the Singapore public in November 1994, 23 years after the founder first visited the island country in 1971. However it was not until 1985, when three Japanese expatriate women began making efforts to spread the Shinnyoen teaching, that the religion began to proselytize in Singapore in earnest. As of May 1995 two of the three women had returned to Japan leaving only Akiko Tan as the earliest Shinnyoen proselytizer in Singapore. Akiko Tan first came to the country in 1969 after having met her future husband (a Singaporean) in Japan while the two of them were attending school. In 1982 a visit by Akiko's sister, who was a devoted Shinnyoen believer, proved to be pivotal for the history of Shinnyoen Singapore as during her stay she was able to convince Akiko of Shinnyoen's wonderful practice. Akiko was connected by her sister and soon thereafter began otasuke practice in the city state. When I met Akiko in September 1996 she had just reached the rank of reinôsha.

As mentioned, due to war-time atrocities committed in Singapore there still linger some anti-Japanese sentiments, especially among the Chinese sector of the population. Attitudes such as this toward the Japanese may have hindered the proselytizing efforts of some of the Japanese new religions.³⁰ Nevertheless, Shinnyoen has made proselytizing inroads in Singapore over the course of its history. I learned from a visit to Shinnyoen Singapore in May 1995 that there were 200 "paper members" in the religion of which 50 could be counted as active followers. In September 1995, four months after my first visit, I was told that the religion had grown to over 1,000 members. One year later, September 1996, there were 1,300 registered members. In March 1997 I was told that there were "over 1,000 followers." While this figure is an overly optimistic one, the branch organizational structure and the numerous activities offered to believers suggests that there is a certain dynamism and continued growth in Shinnyoen Singapore.

³⁰Interview with Dr. Timothy Tsu, professor at National University of Singapore, on September 28, 1995.

Branch Organization

Working in Shinnyoen Singapore's favor is the recruitment of a local temple staff member, "Gilbert." Gilbert is a young Singapore Chinese man in his late twenties who is married to a woman of Chinese and Japanese descent. She is also a staff member at Shinnyoen Singapore (in fact they are the only two) and is the primary reason why Gilbert is a Shinnyoen follower. Gilbert had no choice but to become a Shinnyoen member if he was to marry his then fiancée. "Hiromi's" mother, a zealous Shinnyoen believer, would not permit her daughter to marry a non-member. Love perhaps being stronger than religious integrity, Gilbert converted to Shinnyoen and got a wife as his reward. Eventually he too became a believer and "gave up a house, a good job, and decent wages" at an insurance company to devote his full attention to Shinnyoen. The recruitment of a temple staff member from the local corps is a positive step for the proselytizing of fellow Singaporeans. A local staff member can often times be a mediator and help smooth the transitions for followers between the strict regimen of Shinnyoen's Japanese idiosyncrasies and the local diversions. Indeed, one of the complaints registered against Shinnyoen San Francisco at an International Meeting of Shinnyoen followers in Tokyo was that all the temple staff members were Japanese nationals which made it difficult for them to understand, much less address, American concerns. Having a local Chinese Singaporean on its payroll is already paying dividends for Shinnyoen as Gilbert has introduced some of his local friends to the Itô religion.

In 1996 Shinnyoen Singapore had two lineages. The Shinnyoen Singapore organizational structure follows the pattern of other temples and is thus based on a pyramid scheme akin to the multi-level marketing network described in Chapter Two. New members are placed under a *michibiki no oya* (guiding parent) and they in turn are encouraged to make converts of family, friends, co-workers, etc. who then become their *michibiki no kodomo* (guiding children). The member's own guiding parent then becomes a guiding grandparent and thus acquires a new status in the Shinnyoen hierarchy. The guiding parent on top of this

pyramid-like structure is called the suji oya (lineage parent), of which there were two in 1996.

Beliefs and Practice

Shinnyoen may face its stiffest challenge abroad expanding in Singapore. Unlike in the UK and Hawaii where the Japaneseness of the religion has worked in its favor in attracting followers, the same trait has caused Shinnyoen to struggle at times among the predominately Chinese population of Singapore. The peculiar qualities of sesshin and other Shinnyoen practices are anything but appealing to many Singaporeans and may thus hinder the religion's proselytizing efforts.

Shinnyoen, a controlled and conservative religion, insists on the host culture adapting to its terms and not vice versa. This insistence on "bringing the mountain to the prophet" manifests itself in numerous ways and may cause local members to be in conflict with their home culture. For example, at a lineage meeting a reinôsha admonished her teaching children to dress properly for Itô Tomoji's upcoming memorial service, as members' recent clothing attire at services seemed to suggest disrespect.³¹ Women were told not to wear pants and everyone was cautioned against wearing white, which Shinnyoen considers an inappropriate color for memorial services. One woman protested, arguing that it is the proper Chinese custom to wear white on such occasions (it is also the Hawaiian tradition as well). The reinôsha responded by launching into a lengthy lecture encouraging everyone to have the heart of Shôjuin when they do things, conveniently ignoring the cultural issue and leaving the woman to resolve the conflict on her own. As we shall see, the Shinnyoen policy of requiring followers to adapt to the Japanese manner of practice is a decision not easily made for the Chinese Singaporean.

³¹From combined lineage meeting (Tokunaga and Karimoto lines) held on August 2, 1996.

Sesshin

While sesshin is considered one of the pillars of Shinnyoen training, in Singapore this practice may actually be a hindrance to its proselytizing efforts. According to Gilbert, many Singaporeans, especially the young and educated who are enjoying a kind of material wealth their parents never had, are "put off" by mediums and perceive fortune tellers and other diviners in the country as fraudulent and out of date. This social group, the so-called modern "free thinkers", see mediums as engaging in bogus practices preying especially on the poor, naive, and those suffering misfortune.

On a hot and humid Singaporean night I stood in line with a number of people, all of whom were Chinese and most of whom had children with them, and waited to see one of the neighborhood's more popular mediums. While I could not guess their educational levels, their manners of dress suggested that the gathering was made up of those from lower income brackets. I witnessed a shirtless scrawny Chinese man go into an animated trance, screaming and flogging himself with lit joss sticks all the while entreating the monkey god to possess his body. Although it took awhile before the monkey god deemed the medium's body pure enough to enter, no one in the transfixed crowd dared to leave and miss out on the chance to receive divine help from this powerful medium. I was told by my friend and Chinese translator that scenarios like this one are played out all over the city, attracting those who still drink deeply from the wells of old Chinese folk belief.

In contrast to many of those who seek out neighborhood mediums, Shinnyoen members on the whole are financially well off.³² They dress in designer clothing and the makes of their cars include BMW, Mercedes Benz, and Lexus. The high socioeconomic status of members is not limited to Shinnyoen however, but is characteristic of many Japanese new religions, especially the so-called *new* new religions. Kôfuku no Kagaku for example, counts a large number of professionals, employees of top companies, and

³²See for example Kawabata (1995).

graduates from leading universities among its membership in Japan.³³ While Shinnyoen does not usually demand large single monetary contributions from its followers--another trait of several Japanese new religions³⁴--Shinnyoen members are required to make regular and repeated "offerings" if they are to remain in good standing with the religion and especially if they wish to seek spiritual promotion to the religion's higher ranks. Some of the regular expenses incurred are for sesshin, kangi, membership fees, and a host of special prayers and petitions designed to ease the suffering of ancestral spirits indicated during sesshin.³⁵ Shinnyoen followers therefore must have the financial means to support their religious practice.

There is, therefore, an income and class structure conflict in promoting sesshin in Singapore: first of all, locals who visit mediums are likely to be lower paid and mostly the type who cling strongly to Chinese folk religious customs. This group would tend to seek out mainly Taoist diviners. In fact, several local Chinese Singaporeans expressed surprise at learning that there were "Buddhist" mediums in the Japanese tradition. I was told that in Singapore at least, most, if not all mediums were Taoist. A number of Chinese Singaporeans who had visited diviners told me that they perceived Japanese Buddhism as an aberration of true Buddhism and thus they would be highly unlikely to visit a Japanese Buddhist medium. Secondly, Shinnyoen's main proselytizing focus--those in a higher income bracket and who are not so tightly bound to traditional Chinese beliefs, the so-called "free thinkers"--are the very ones who are inclined to look on practices such as sesshin and the desire to become a reinôsha with disdain.

Furthermore, in contrast to the neighborhood mediums who, due to intense competition, risk their reputations by meting out specific and concrete advice, local

³³ Astley (1995) p. 354.

³⁴ Shimazono (1995b) p. 384.

³⁵ According to data in the *Shinshûkyô Jiten*, Shinnyoen collected a total of 12 billion yen from its membership in 1985 from such fees and services. Inoue et al., eds. (1990) p. 449.

Shinnyoen sesshin takers may leave unsatisfied as reinôsha (especially those assigned to basic sesshin) can only offer vague *reigen* (spiritual words).³⁶ Indeed as Nagai Mikiko points out, the advice received during sesshin is often mundane in nature, "something anyone could think of."³⁷ My own experience with sesshin in Singapore on September 20, 1996 bears this out:

Reinôsha: You get frustrated when things don't work out for you, don't you?

Me: Yes.

Reinôsha: Hai, hai, ah, yes! You must learn to cultivate patience. Hai, hai.

Read *The Path of Oneness*³⁸ and follow Kyôshu-sama's example. Hai, hai.

Kyôshu-sama had lots of compassion and went through much suffering to save people. Hai, hai. You must learn from Kyôshu-sama, Shôjuin-sama, and Ryôdôji-sama and learn to have compassion and patience. Hai, hai.³⁹

In Shinnyoen's defense, members are repeatedly warned against equating sesshin with fortune telling. The reinôsha is a mirror reflecting one's spiritual self hence after sesshin one is better able to polish the heart and mind. However Shinnyoen members are also told that reinôsha are conduits with the Shinnyo spiritual world, transmitting *reigen* to help guide followers. I have heard members urge fellow believers to take sesshin immediately when confronted with numerous problems. Some members do, clearly, believe very strongly in sesshin. Yet how will sesshin help the local Singaporean with problems when the practice itself is a large part of the problem?

³⁶Members can receive sesshin at Shinnyoen Singapore for a minimum donation of S\$5 or more. Consistent with the other Shinnyoen temples, days when sesshin is offered draw the largest number of followers to the temple. During my visit in 1995 the resident reverend was a lower ranking reinôsha thus he could only perform basic sesshin.

³⁷Nagai (1995) p. 306.

³⁸The primary scripture of Shinnyoen.

³⁹Shinnyoen spiritual mediums will frequently utter the phrase "hai, hai" to indicate that messages from the Shinnyo spiritual world are being clearly and properly received.

Propagation

Despite its largely successful campaign within Japan Shinnyoen has, for the most part, been unsuccessful in its overseas missions. While the verdict is still out on the success of Shinnyoen in Singapore, the religion does face challenges there not encountered in the UK or other places. A look at some of the obstacles confronting Shinnyoen Singapore indicates that what may work in the religion's favor in one country may be the very thing working against it in another.

Consistent with other Shinnyoen temples, the Singapore branch has no clear concrete method of propagation. Instead, the religion hopes to expand by relying on personal contacts much in the same manner as all the other Shinnyoen temples. Because the religion lacks any clear proselytizing formula, not surprisingly Shinnyoen has been unable to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers in Singapore and therefore most of the followers are Japanese expatriates. At a service on May 19, 1995 for example, there were only 16 followers in attendance, 14 of whom were Japanese expatriates. A service on the following week saw 20 of the Shinnyoen faithful present, 16 of them Japanese. There are, nevertheless a few Chinese Singaporean members among the religion's fold and interviews with them have proven insightful. "Amy", a first year university student had never before heard of Buddhist mediums before she joined Shinnyoen. She was under the impression that all mediums are Taoists practitioners, therefore she was hesitant to receive sesshin. Amy is a "paper member", having first joined Shinnyoen in 1993 in Hawaii due to the prompting of her older sister. Although Amy did complete the Shinnyoen membership application and paid her annual dues, she never did set foot in the temple while in Hawaii. Her first visit to a Shinnyoen temple came when she returned to Singapore. She tells me she is slightly suspicious of sesshin largely because of the shabby and dubious reputation of the mediums in Singapore. Amy's next statement to me is important because it summarizes the chief obstacle Shinnyoen may face in its recruitment efforts in this South East Asian country: "My

parents would skin me alive if they found out I had joined a Japanese cult."⁴⁰ A follow-up interview in September 1996 found that Amy's parents were still kept in the dark about her and her sister's involvement with Shinnyoen.

Although my visits to Shinnyoen Singapore in 1995 and 1996 were brief, what became increasingly clear was the difficulty Shinnyoen would experience proselytizing the Chinese population. As I talked to Shinnyoen members and visited other Buddhist temples in town, it seemed that the difficulties would largely stem from two reasons: due to the perceived foreign qualities of the religion and also to the anti-Japanese sentiments that still linger among the Chinese sector, traits that are not necessarily related but when combined produce a formidable obstacle to growth. A significant cultural-religious contrast will become immediately evident should one visit a Chinese Buddhist temple in Singapore and then Shinnyoen. Chinese Buddhist temples, according to some Shinnyoen followers, are "dirty" and "loud" while Shinnyoen, in the view of Chinese Shinnyoen members, is "clean" and "quiet." A second-time Chinese visitor to Shinnyoen Singapore told me that the first thing he noticed about the branch temple was how quiet and orderly everything was compared to its Chinese counterpart, which was rather boisterous and filled with wafting incense smoke. For the Japanese, clean is a sign of purity. For this twenty-something Chinese visitor to Shinnyoen, clean is sterile. The Chinese, as well as many other Buddhist countries, believe that a "dirty" temple, perfumed with burning incense and strewn with paper and ashes on the floor, is an indication of the presence and potency of the Buddha. A clean, orderly, and quiet temple on the other hand is a sure sign that the temple has not won favor with the Buddha.⁴¹ In the Japanese view of what constitutes sacrality, the opposite is true. Interviews conducted by Ian Reader reveal that Japanese Buddhist priests who have visited other Buddhist

⁴⁰Taken from personal interview conducted on May 19, 1995.

⁴¹Similar observations were made by a local Chinese follower at Shinnyoen Hong Kong regarding the mood differences at Japanese and Chinese Buddhist temples in Hong Kong. (From interview on June 17, 1995 in Tokyo)

countries often remark that they found the temples there untidy, disorderly, and "dirty".

Consequently their notions of those temples being a spiritual center diminished.⁴²

Despite (or because of?) the large influx of Japanese tourists to the tiny country and the amount of money they spend there while visiting, there still lingers anti-Japanese sentiments among the Singaporean population, especially in the Chinese sector. As I have already mentioned, some in the Singaporean Chinese population are told by their parents that due to war time atrocities, the Chinese are supposed to "hate" the Japanese. This certainly is a reason for some of the anti-Japanese sentiments but it is not the sole cause. Some Singaporeans have told me that they resent the catering and pandering to the money rich Japanese tourists by businesses and hotels at the expense of the local people. This resentment resonates and surfaces in a variety of situations, even in such seemingly innocuous settings as a retail shop which was voted "Best Department Store" in Singapore in 1995. Because I am of Japanese descent, people are often puzzled by my speech and appearance when they first meet me; this was especially so at this particular department store. A store employee trying to make a sale was confused by my English response to his Japanese phrased question. After convincing the sales clerk that I am American, he remarked that I "should be proud" my family left Japan as the Japanese are "so stupid." As proof he cited how the Japanese always move in a group as if no one has a mind of his or her own. He then called over two other employees who were also ethnically Chinese and together they admitted that my shopping behavior was a curiosity to them. Perhaps relieved that I did not destroy their stereotype of the Japanese tourist, they proceeded to list all the odd and irritating mannerisms of Japanese tourists. As I left the shop they again told me that I should consider myself lucky I was not Japanese.

Attitudes such as these towards the Japanese and Japan will render propagation by Japanese new religions among the Chinese population a stiff challenge, if not an insurmountable obstacle. There are other ethnic groups in Singapore yet the Chinese, being

⁴²Reader (1995) p. 242.

the largest and of similar religious background as the Japanese, seem to be the most logical target group for recruitment. The Malay population is also well represented in Singapore but for the most part they are Muslim and therefore near impossible recruitment targets. The Indians are another significant group in Singapore yet some Japanese feel there is not much cultural and religious affinity between them to make propagation inroads likely. Ironically the Indian population may prove to be the most receptive to Japanese religions. The Japanese are viewed in a favorable light by the Indians due to the perception that Japan supported India's anti-colonial struggle. At least one Japanese new religion, Sûkyô Mahikari, has taken advantage of the favorable perception. Due to successful recruiting efforts Sûkyô Mahikari Singapore has a large Indian membership. It remains to be seen whether Shinnyoen will follow suit or continue to target the Chinese population.

Shinnyoen Singapore Membership

During my visit to Shinnyoen Singapore in September 1995 staff members claimed that the religion had made significant progress in growth from my earlier visit in May. In May the number of registered followers was 200 but it had increased to 1,000 in September according to Shinnyoen's records. A follow-up visit in 1996 found that the membership figure had grown by several hundreds but this again was according to staff members' claims and not by my own observation. Other sources painted a less optimistic picture of the Shinnyoen Singapore membership growth. A local Chinese follower, for example, told me during an interview in 1996 that the average number of members attending services hovered between 20 to 25. Whatever the actual number, and I would estimate about 100-150 active followers, the religion seems to be growing in Singapore. Evidence for this growth include: a men's choir, a drama club, youth activities, a speech contest, and a help group for senior citizens, all of which were not in existence in May 1995 when I first visited. Still, the membership is dominated by Japanese expatriates and consistent with other Shinnyoen temples, women make up the majority. Perhaps the most telling sign of growth, however, is

the increase in the number of local Chinese residents who have visited the temple. Although I only saw Japanese followers while I was there in September 1995, a quick look in the *Shinnyoen Guest Book* revealed that a large portion of visitors were Chinese whereas in May 1995 the overwhelming majority of names were Japanese. In September 1996 the names in the guest book seemed evenly split between Japanese and Chinese. Concrete proof for the growth of local members in Shinnyoen Singapore however, lies in the actual number of non-Japanese followers in attendance at the religion's usual services. On September 19, 1996 there were 22 followers at the service to honor the Shinnyoen founder. Of the 22, 18 were Japanese and 4 were women. At a service the following day there were only 20 believers at the temple, of whom five were local and 15 female. On March 15, 1997, a Saturday morning, there were 24 followers at the worship service. Of the 24 followers, 4 were local (all women). On a Sunday evening service on February 15, 1998 there were 22 followers present, 16 of whom were Japanese. These numbers were similar to the numbers I observed during my visit a year earlier in which there were never more than 20 members attending services at the temple. It is still too early to tell, though, whether Shinnyoen Singapore is experiencing sustained growth or merely the after effects of the boost it received from the grand opening.

4. SHINNYOEN HAWAII

After stepping through the glass doors and out of the hot sun, one of the first things a visitor to Shinnyoen Hawaii will notice (and appreciate) is the cool air flowing through the Hawaii branch temple. Characteristic of many Japanese new religion centres, a temperature controlled environment is also one of the trademarks of Shinnyoen. Of course Shinnyoen Hawaii offers more than respite from the Hawaiian sun. What follows is a brief sketch of the history, organizational structure, and beliefs and practices of Shinnyoen Hawaii.

History of Shinnyoen Hawaii

In June 1993 Shinnyoen Hawaii celebrated its twentieth anniversary at its present location on South Beretania Street in Honolulu.⁴³ However, Shinnyoen first began planting seeds of salvation in earnest in Hawaii in October 1970 when Itô visited the islands on his return from a propagation trip to the US. mainland. The events which led to Itô's visit however were largely the result of the efforts of one woman, Hiroko Raynor.

A devout and able Shinnyoen member in Japan, Hiroko married James Raynor, an American serviceman, and the two of them later moved to Hawaii. Hiroko was connected to Shinnyoen in October 1967 while in Japan but left for Hawaii in 1969. According to Shinnyoen Hawaii members, Hiroko and James' move to Hawaii was prompted by remarks Itô Tomoji made to Hiroko. Shortly before her death, Tomoji mentioned to Hiroko that it would be nice if Shinnyoen could go to Hawaii. Eager to carry out Tomoji's wishes, Hiroko was determined to move there and build up the religion in Hawaii.⁴⁴ Although far away from Japan, Hiroko not only maintained her beliefs and practice in the religion but shared the Shinnyoen faith with others as well and thus the religion began to grow. The first gathering of followers was held in February 1969 at a friend's home but later meetings were held at the Raynors' residence. Soon a small but devoted following emerged and when Itô, responding to the request of Hiroko and other Shinnyoen followers, visited Hawaii on his way back from a trip to the US mainland, he had a premonition that "the seeds planted in Hawaii would definitely bear fruit someday."

Prior to Itô's visit Shinnyoen dispatched Kuriyama Jôshin, a Shinnyoen medium and priest, to Hawaii to make ready for the founder's arrival. Kuriyama would later prove to be vital for the growth of Shinnyoen Hawaii. On October 14, 1970 Kuriyama landed at Honolulu International Airport and was greeted by ten believers. Five days later on October

⁴³The selection of the Moiliili site for the Hawaii temple and its subsequent construction was purchased and arranged for Shinnyoen by Ichinyosha, a business subsidiary of the religion.

⁴⁴Most of the information for the history of Shinnyoen in Hawaii comes from an interview with Mr. Edward Tokunaga, the first person to rise to the spiritual rank of reinôsha outside of Japan.

19, 1970 Itô arrived in Hawaii and from there went to Hiroko's house to conduct a worship service.

On November 21, 1970 two representatives of Ichinyosha, a subsidiary company of Shinnyoen, arrived in Hawaii to search for an adequate temple site. It should be noted here that the sites for the Hawaii temples, as with all Shinnyoen temples, are selected for Shinnyoen by Ichinyosha. Ichinyosha is the business arm of the religion and as such it is also tightly controlled by Shinnyoen. The president of the company, for example, is the husband of Itô Masako (Keishu-sama), the head of Shinnyoen. Besides dealing in real estate, Ichinyosha also runs restaurants and sells home altars and accessories, as well as other Buddhist paraphernalia to Shinnyoen members.⁴⁵

On March 2, 1971 a Shinnyoen temple was officially established in Mililani, a suburb located about 20 miles outside of Honolulu. The Mililani temple was a converted residential home and functioned well at first as a place for Shinnyoen members to gather and worship. However it soon become too small for the growing number of Hawaii followers. In addition, the Mililani site was too far removed from downtown Honolulu where many of the followers lived. Therefore a discussion was held in Japan concerning the possibility of building a temple in Honolulu. Ichinyosha representatives were once again dispatched to Hawaii and in 1973, after the selection of an appropriate site in Honolulu, a temple was built to replace the home in Mililani. On May 13, 1973 after ground breaking ceremonies were performed, the new Shinnyoen Hawaii temple was opened with the hopes of spreading its form of salvation to the Hawaii public.

At this point there were already three lineages in Hawaii, the first lineage parent being Hiroko Raynor. This was no small feat considering one needs a minimum of 20 teaching

⁴⁵Ichinyosha also sells cemetery plots to followers. In 1996 Shinnyoen members could purchase full-sized cemetery plots for \$2,100 or urn sized plots for \$575.

children before a separate lineage can be formed.⁴⁶ In 1996 the number of lineages had swelled to 23.

The rapid growth of Shinnyoen Hawaii is quite impressive, especially when compared to the long and trying struggle of other branch temples abroad. It took a mere two years for the Hawaii contingent to grow large enough to support a temple while the UK required 15 years and Singapore needed 23. There are several significant reasons why Hawaii's soil is more conducive for the growth of a religion like Shinnyoen and these are described below. What cannot be described in complete detail is the enthusiasm of the early followers to cultivate their faith in the islands. From a small contingent of six believers in a house in Mililani to its present membership claim of over 1,000 and an impressive temple and annex (built in 1983)⁴⁷ in Honolulu with Propagation Centres on the islands of Kauai, Maui, and Hawaii, Shinnyoen Hawaii has made steady progress and is indeed bearing the fruits from the seeds that were first planted in 1970.⁴⁸

Branch Organization

Most of the staff members at Shinnyoen Hawaii are Japanese American followers born and raised in the islands. They have a hand in the day to day operations of the temple and they provide the important links between the local followers and Japan. As we shall see in this section and the next, their presence accounts for much of the overall success of the branch temple.

Off and On the Minister Merry Go Round

⁴⁶In addition a number of the teaching children themselves must make successful recruitment attempts before their teaching parent can apply for lineage parent status.

⁴⁷A common feature of many of the Japanese new religions is their temple structure. According to Yanagawa (1992) p. 8, many of the larger new religions have employed well-known architects to design unique and eye-catching buildings. In this manner Shinnyoen Hawaii is no exception. While not as gaudy as some of the other gigantic temples of other new religions, the Shinnyoen Hawaii temple certainly exudes a contemporary feel.

⁴⁸Shinnyoen Hawaii is still expanding. In 1998 the religion was negotiating with neighboring residents about the construction of a large social hall. Shinnyoen Hawaii has purchased nearly an entire neighborhood block in a residential area and this has caused some concern among its neighbors.

Shinnyoen Hawaii is the oldest overseas branch temple and it is the most successful in terms of membership size and, more importantly, number of local followers. There are several telling reasons why this is so, one of which is the nurturing of the temple under the guidance of one Shinnyoen leader in its early years. Unlike other branch temples abroad under the policy of rotating ministers, Shinnyoen Hawaii had as its leader for 17 years Kuriyama Jôshin, the spiritual medium sent to Hawaii to prepare for Itô's first arrival there. Kuriyama was ranked high in the Shinnyoen hierarchy, in stark contrast to some of the current ministers assigned to overseas temples. The resident minister assigned to Shinnyoen Singapore in 1995, for example, was a minister who could only perform the lowest level of sesshin. Kuriyama, on the other hand, is a bishop. Kuriyama is further distinguished from other ministers abroad in that she was the first non-Itô family member to succeed to the spiritual faculty in the Uchida family tradition. In fact, Kuriyama received her spiritual powers directly from Tomoji, having done so on November 4, 1946. Therefore having someone as close to Shinjô and Tomoji as Kuriyama was, and having her guide the fledgling Hawaii temple for 17 years certainly helped the Hawaii temple get off to a solid start.

The Hawaii temple now submits to the religion's rotating minister policy as a new minister is imported from Japan roughly every six months. The minister's role in Hawaii, however, seems to be a cursory one at best. Unlike Kuriyama who was intimately involved with the care and growth of followers, subsequent resident ministers rarely interact with rank and file members. In fact, resident ministers are seldom seen at services and it is not uncommon for ministers to perform their duties in Hawaii and leave without members even knowing they were there in the first place. The responsibility for guiding the Hawaii contingent thus rests with the local staff members and lineage parents. In this regard the current Shinnyoen policy of circulating ministers has little effect on the growth of Shinnyoen Hawaii. The temple already had a number of well seasoned local leaders in place (most of whom trained by high ranking Shinnyoen heads including the president of Ichinyosha and husband of Itô Masako; and of course Kuriyama Jôshin) before the rotating minister system

was implemented. Followers therefore do not rely much on resident ministers for instruction and leadership. The role of the resident minister then, it seems to me, is to check and make sure the Hawaii temple is functioning in accordance with the main temple in Japan. For resident ministers seeking to do more, the opportunities to significantly contribute to the growth of the Hawaii congregation are rare and their impact will be slight.

Divinity School

Shinnyoen Hawaii, the religion's first and most successful overseas venture, is afforded a special status and therefore certain privileges not shared by many other overseas temples. One such privilege is the permission to conduct a "divinity school" on its property modeled after the one in Japan.⁴⁹ The Hawaii school opened in 1982 and in 1985 had its first graduates. The school is termed Chiryû Gakuin (Institute of Flowing Knowledge) and according to Shinnyoen publications, "is the divinity school at Shinnyoen where followers learn about religion, Shinnyo doctrine and various rituals in order to better practice, convey and pass on the Shinnyo teachings."⁵⁰ In addition, "The curriculum is designed to help students acquire the heart of Sôoya-sama (*Itô Shinjô and Tomoji*) and Ryôdôji-sama (*Itô Chibun and Yûichi*) so that they can pass it on to others."⁵¹

As detailed in a previous chapter, there are a number of requirements a follower must meet in order to climb the Shinnyoen spiritual ranks of Daijô, Kangi, Dai Kangi, and Reinôsha. Graduating from Chiryû Gakuin is one such requirement that must be fulfilled in order to reach the highest levels in the religion's spiritual hierarchy. Graduating from Chiryû Gakuin is also a prerequisite for lineage parent hopefuls.⁵² Besides having a minimum of 20 teaching children, a teaching parent in Hawaii wishing to form his or her own lineage must pass several interviews and be knowledgeable in the Shinnyoen practice and teaching as

⁴⁹In 1998 other Shinnyoen branch temples abroad began to receive permission to conduct preparatory Chiryû Gakuin classes, including the temples in New York and Singapore.

⁵⁰Shinnyoen (1993a) p. 209.

⁵¹Shinnyoen (1995) p. 155.

⁵²Information collected at lineage meeting in Hawaii on October 3, 1995.

taught in Chiryû Gakuin.⁵³ Only the most devoted and obedient of the Shinnyoen faithful will emerge from the four year school and it is only they who will be eligible to be entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing an entire lineage.

It should be mentioned here that not anyone is allowed admission into Chiryû Gakuin. Before followers can even enroll in the school they must satisfy certain prerequisites. Members must show evidence of performing the three practices of gohōshi, kangi, and otasuke in order to be considered for acceptance into Chiryû Gakuin. Especially important for admission is to have at least one successful recruitment attempt. In other words only teaching parents are allowed to attend Chiryû Gakuin.

Having made at least one convert is evidence that the Shinnyoen member is making concrete efforts in his or her practice and thereby assures the religion that he or she is open to the teaching. It is also an indication that the follower is ready to be drawn into the religion further. Chiryû Gakuin is thus another means through which Shinnyoen can exercise influence over its members, and is therefore deeply connected to the organizational solidarity of the group. I reached this conclusion based on my own experiences in the school in Hawaii.

Chiryû Gakuin is a four year school where "students" are inundated with long testimony and tales of the spiritual goodness of the founder and his family. Classes are two hours long, held twice a month, and attendance is mandatory. Attendance rules are strictly enforced in class and leaving early or arriving late for any reason induces a penalty against the offending follower. For example on August 3, 1996 a student was told that he would not receive credit for the day's class if he left early, even though his reason for leaving was to help serve lunch at the local homeless shelter. If enough penalties are accumulated the student is prohibited from advancing to the next class level.

⁵³Lineage parent hopefuls in Japan must meet a minimum of 100 teaching children before applying for a separate lineage.

One class consists of two hour-long video sermons by Shinnyoen ministers and covers such significant topics as the nature of the Shinnyoen founder (he is the Buddha), the history of the order, and the unique power of the Shinnyoen teaching including the role of sesshin. Most of the students sit attentively throughout the class (many sitting in the uncomfortable Japanese style known as *seiza*) and take copious notes in preparation for two examinations administered each school term. There are also interesting pieces of information to be learned such as the reason Itô Shinjô selected Paris as the site to build the first branch temple in Europe: The Shinnyoen founder felt that a temple was needed in Paris because by nature the French are cold and aloof.⁵⁴

I entered preparatory school in late 1995 (there are also primary, intermediate, and advanced levels) and took my first examination in December. The test on "Buddhism" consisted of roughly 30 questions all concerning the Itô religion. Members were examined on such important concepts as the date of Itô Shinjô and Tomoji's marriage, the birthdays of their two deceased sons, the dates of the two boys' deaths, the exact day Itô enshrined the Fudô Myôô image in his home, and the date the Itôs traveled to Europe. The knowledge required about the Itô family is not limited to the immediate family but extends to their relatives as well. For example students must learn the death dates of Shinjô's father, Tomoji's grandmother, and Tomoji's aunt, all relatives who played a role in forming Shinnyoen. Followers also had to write brief essays demonstrating how they are putting the teachings of Itô into practice. There were also occasions to repeat slogans and pledges created by the founder, his wife, and his daughters. The examinations then are basically opportunities the organization gives to followers to demonstrate their devotion to the Itô family religion. After graduating from the various grades members are awarded pins which they proudly wear on their Buddhist stoles during services. These pins are a recognition of their spiritual endeavor and serve as a symbol of their newly attained identity within the

⁵⁴From video sermon shown on November 18, 1995 at Chiryû Gakuin pre-school in Hawaii.

organization, an important acknowledgment especially when considering the rigid hierarchical structure of the group.

In Chiryû Gakuin we see another method of organizational control exercised by the religion. Chiryû Gakuin provides a systematic means through which Shinnyoen can monitor the progress of its followers as well as gauge the commitment level of the faithful. Those who have not devoted themselves to the religion for several years and made the Itô's lives a part of their own are not allowed to progress to the next grade. This is in stark contrast to other Japanese new religions, notably Mahikari, which offers weekend courses to any interested person. After completing the weekend course the Mahikari neophyte is awarded the spiritual tools to create his or her own miracles.⁵⁵ Chiryû Gakuin takes four years to complete and even then one is not granted spiritual powers. Tests are administered on a regular basis and serve as one criteria for Shinnyoen in determining the spiritual promotion of its followers. In concrete terms however, students are advanced to higher grades based as much on the number of converts one has made and the amount of monetary offerings submitted (as shown on their "achievement reports"), as they are based on test scores. Those who emerge from the Chiryû Gakuin system and attain the reinôsha rank or lineage parent status are those who have been carefully inundated with beliefs and therefore are the most loyal to the teaching. Not surprisingly then the chances of reinôsha and other high ranking officials leaving the religion are slim.

Beliefs and Practices

Every Shinnyoen service concludes with followers reciting in unison a number of pledges designated by the Shinnyoen heads. In 1995 one such pledge repeated by Shinnyoen members at all temples was the promise to "Work to save humankind, the earth, and the universe."⁵⁶ As noble a cause as this may be, at Shinnyoen Hawaii followers also work

⁵⁵Davis (1980) pp. 28-29. It should be noted that groups like Mahikari which are easy to join and offer short spiritual courses that do not require sustained commitment have high turnover rates and lose members quickly.

⁵⁶Taken from the *Items of Practice* for Shinnyoen followers during the 1995 Winter Training.

toward the more immediate goal of gaining enough spiritual merit to address the various ailments in their lives.

Volunteer Work

In the pre-dawn hours of most Saturday mornings, Shinnyoen followers gather at the temple to perform roughly 30 minutes of gohōshi (voluntary work). While gohōshi may manifest itself in various forms, in the early Saturday morning hours this Shinnyoen practice inevitably means sweeping the usually bustling but now quiet and vacant street which fronts the temple. Roughly 50 members divide themselves up into several groups and silently begin raking, sweeping, and picking up the inordinate amount of debris left irresponsibly by pedestrians, night club patrons, motor vehicles, and the whims of the wind. Beginning about 100 yards east and 100 yards west of the temple on Beretania Street, members slowly rake, sweep, and clean their way back to the holy structure which for all intents and purposes is the spiritual home for Shinnyoen believers in Hawaii.⁵⁷ In this small way Shinnyoen unselfishly contributes to the maintenance and care of its immediate surrounding and the Honolulu community. There is, however, more to cleaning the roadway than pure altruism. While picking up trash at 5:30 a.m. is not an enticing way to spend a weekend morning for most, Shinnyoen members believe that through such activities as sweeping the street one is simultaneously polishing the soul. Gohōshi provides opportunities for self cultivation which in turn facilitates spiritual change. Followers are thus taught that the discipline, determination, and devotion necessary to drag oneself out of bed and perform gohōshi builds character and refines the Buddha nature within.

Interestingly, it seems that any unattractive task which needs to be done is always referred to as gohōshi. Laboring under the intense Hawaiian sun as a temple car park attendant, cleaning temple toilets, and performing various forms of yard work around the

⁵⁷Members who enter the temple grounds are always warmly greeted with the phrase, "Okaerinasai" (Welcome Home!).

temple, are usually advertised as "a good chance to do gohōshi and gain merit." Committing oneself to a task which is punishing or at least unpleasant provides one with the opportunity to overcome attachment to the ego and selfish desires. Furthermore overcoming one's pride and ego allows for the maturation of the spirit and the deepening of compassion. Believers are therefore constantly encouraged to perform gohōshi with joy and gratitude.

Not only is gohōshi often unpleasant but it is almost always done in or around the Shinnyoen temple grounds and for the sake of the religion. Therefore volunteering one's time to work with disabled children at the local hospital is not considered gohōshi but helping a follower park his Mercedes Benz at a Shinnyoen service is. The idea that volunteer work must be tied to the benefit of the religion is one reason why one ex-member left Shinnyoen. This ex-follower, a retired Japanese American man in his seventies, told me that he left Shinnyoen because he finally got frustrated being asked to spend so much time working on the temple yard. He felt that certain leaders in the organization were using gohōshi as an excuse to gain free labor for the religion.⁵⁸ When asked to respond to such charges one follower told me that gohōshi is to be performed with joy and gratitude and by being Buddha centered, which leads to spiritual progress, not with doubt or self centeredness, which leads to selfish pride.

While refining one's character is an admirable goal in and of itself, there are other motivating factors for Shinnyoen followers to participate in volunteer service. Polishing the soul deepens one's understanding of the teaching but performing gohōshi is also a necessary prerequisite if one wishes to rise in the ranks of the religion. In addition, gohōshi and other Shinnyoen practices, members are told, enable one to gain spiritual merit which can then be transferred to the Shinnyo spiritual world thereby saving one's suffering ancestors.⁵⁹ The need to save the ancestors arises from the Shinnyoen teaching that an ancestor spirit in

⁵⁸ At a meeting in for international followers in Tokyo another follower, an American female from Philadelphia, also questioned why seemingly menial tasks such as passing out flyers to Shinnyoen members to upcoming events constituted gohōshi while other forms of volunteer work unrelated to Shinnyoen did not.

⁵⁹ From Chiryū Gakuin video sermon on July 5, 1996.

turmoil is often at the root of many problems in one's life. For example in 1996 when I had minor surgery to drain a painful abscess, my lineage parent suggested that my condition was due to an ancestral spirit who had suffered a similar fate. Shinnyoen offers a number of special rites for a slight charge which will appease such spirits. Furthermore, I was told, if I devoted myself to Kyôshu-sama and endeavored whole-heartedly in such practices as gohôshi, all of my ancestors would soon be saved and my life joyful. Gohôshi, then, is a practice which benefits first and foremost the religion and its followers before serving those outside the Shinnyoen circle.

Propagation

Several Japanese religions in Hawaii, both traditional and new, propagate their religions on the local Japanese language radio station every weekend morning, securing 10-15 minutes time slots to promulgate their beliefs and doctrines to the radio listening audience. Some of these groups also place advertisements in Hawaii's two major newspapers and post flyers around town on university campus boards, restaurant windows, and bus stops. Although Shinnyoen Hawaii did at one point consider utilizing such means to spread the religion, the idea was at length rejected. Consistent with other Shinnyoen temples both in Japan and abroad, Shinnyoen Hawaii has eschewed public efforts at proselytizing preferring instead to focus on personal contacts for its growth. When one considers the tight organizational control practiced by the religion their method of propagation makes eminent sense.

As we have seen, the lineage (suji) is the basic unit in the Shinnyoen organizational scheme. Lineage leaders (suji oya) are for the most part responsible for the religious growth and practice of senior members (michibiki no oya) who are, in turn, charged with guiding and teaching new converts (michibiki no kodomo). There is thus much emphasis on responsibility based on personal contact in this pyramid structure, a structure which may be jeopardized should an outsider penetrate the suji without having first been properly

connected. That Shinnyoen emphasizes personal contact in its recruitment efforts ensures that the recruits who are brought into the group have been screened to some extent by the recruiters thus rendering them more controllable i.e. more likely to accept the religion's teaching. Because Shinnyoen recruits are likely to have been personally introduced into the organization through the persuasion of friends or family, they are generally less likely to create disturbances and raise objections at lineage meetings since their behavior will reflect poorly upon the friend or family member who connected him or her. In addition, recruits connected to Shinnyoen by friends or family will have been "prepared" and given some background on the teaching before joining any sort of service or meeting. Most of the Shinnyoen Hawaii followers whom I have talked to were either born into the religion or connected by friends, relatives, and co-workers. During the course of my research of Shinnyoen I have never met nor heard of anyone connected to the religion by a non-acquaintance. Just to give one common example, "Russell," a third generation Japanese American man in his forties who is in my lineage, became a Shinnyoen member due to his wife's urging. She herself was connected by a friend at work.

If Shinnyoen were to advertise and proselytize in a public manner like some of the other new religions, it might attract skeptics and an assortment of people who could have fewer reservations about openly questioning and challenging the religion's beliefs and practice at lineage meetings. Without a *michibiki no oya* or someone personally in charge of guiding such newcomers, there would be no one for the lineage leaders to hold responsible for the visitor's behavior. This of course could threaten the chain of command and institutional soundness of the lineage system and leave the organization vulnerable to conflict and schism. Shinnyoen is therefore content to depend on the lineage system as its proselytizing engine.

That being said, however, Shinnyoen Hawaii is experimenting with attempts to actively recruit non-acquaintances. Believers are being encouraged to share their religion with

those outside of the family-friend-co-worker ring.⁶⁰ Although these efforts are in its rudimentary stages, they may indicate the future direction Shinnyoen will head with its proselytizing strategy.

During an otasuke (recruitment) training exercise for the Shinnyoen Hawaii Young Adult Division held in the summer of 1994 for example, members staged proselytizing scenarios to help junior members become comfortable with propagating their faith to non-acquaintances. Junior members, after having made initial contact with their proselytizing targets, were instructed to entice their listeners by listing the unique qualities of Shinnyoen, one of which was the Nirvana sutra as the foundation of the religion. Curiously enough, during the play acting none of the members in the potential convert role questioned what the Nirvana sutra was. After having been informed that Shinnyoen is based on the Nirvana sutra, the member in the potential convert role would feign excitement and almost always say something to the effect of, "The Nirvana sutra? That sounds like an interesting book, how can I learn more about it?" and proceed to be converted. There were no explanations offered as to what the Nirvana sutra is or why it is important to the religion. Also, there was no mention of reinôsha or sesshin. The focus instead was on the legitimation of Shinnyoen as an unique but traditional religion meeting the challenges of today's modern society.

One of the trends in the Japanese American community in contemporary society is the increasing number of Japanese Americans marrying outside their ethnic circle. In contrast to their first and second generation Japanese American parents who mostly married within the Japanese community, by the 1970s it was estimated that the out marriage rate of younger generations of Japanese Americans was nearly fifty percent.⁶¹ Clearly then, Shinnyoen, which is successful mainly with the Japanese American community, is faced with the task of attracting non-Japanese Americans as well if it is to maintain its success in Hawaii. Despite the proselytizing success enjoyed during the play acting exercise at the Shinnyoen youth

⁶⁰I have heard stories of young female followers utilizing the night club and bar scene to attract potential male converts.

⁶¹Kitano (1976) pp. 106-107.

training camp, it is still too early to tell whether Shinnyoen Hawaii is meeting the challenge of recruiting those outside of the Japanese community and beyond the followers' circle of friends and family. The tiny number of non-Japanese followers at Shinnyoen Hawaii services suggests that success, if indeed it is that, is minimal.

Shinnyoen Hawaii Membership⁶²

Shinnyoen Hawaii has produced the largest and most active membership among the branch temples abroad. Its size is the result of the Hawaii temple being the beneficiary of several key organizational decisions early in its history as well as circumstances unique to the Hawaiian Islands. In this section we look at some of these decisions and the circumstances responsible for the size and dynamism of Shinnyoen Hawaii.

Longer, larger, and livelier

How many followers are there at Shinnyoen's first overseas branch temple? Shinnyoen Hawaii claims to have over 1,000 members yet my observations of the religion during the years 1993-1998 suggest that the number of active followers is significantly less. Over the course of Shinnyoen's history in Hawaii, which spans more than twenty-five years, it could very well be that the number of people who have at one time or another completed the Shinnyoen application form has surpassed the one thousand mark. However a clearer indicator of the actual size of Shinnyoen Hawaii lies in the number of followers who actively attend temple services and receive sesshin.

⁶²Gathering information about Hawaii members was much more of a challenge than it was in the UK and Singapore. Hawaii is where I made my initial investigative foray into the religion, openly (and perhaps naively) letting everyone in the temple know that I was primarily interested in research and not in becoming a member. This turned out to be a mistake on my part as Shinnyoen is a closed and controlled religious system thus staff members and other higher ranking followers hampered my research by warning other followers to be cautious when in my presence. Reinôsha who agreed to answer my questions, for example, soon changed their attitude when informed of my purpose in the religion. Shinnyoen Hawaii also alerted other branch temples abroad of my intent thus when I introduced myself at Shinnyoen UK I was greeted with "Ah, you're the one." For further details see the chapter on methodology.

A typical Shinnyoen temple service lasts roughly one hour and consists of chanting, testimonials, and video sermons. The worship concludes with the recitation of creeds and vows and often sesshin training is offered immediately after. The number of followers attending such a service may vary but rarely exceeds 250. On February 28, 1996, for example, there were 189 believers at the seven o'clock temple service. Of this number, nearly sixty received some form of sesshin on this evening.⁶³

Festive occasions and other important events on the Shinnyoen calendar warrant special services to commemorate such affairs. As one might expect, these services draw a higher attendance than the usual ceremonial gathering. At the April 8, 1996 service for example, which celebrated both the Buddha's and Yûichi's birth,⁶⁴ approximately 250 of the Shinnyoen faithful donned their Buddhist stoles for the evening temple worship. Another important occasion in the Shinnyoen calendar is the observance of winter training, an intense period of religious practice lasting two weeks designed to help followers rededicate themselves to the teaching. The first phase of winter training begins with early morning services at 4:50 am and the last phase culminates with evening services and the celebration of *setsubun*, the spring festival that was observed in the old Japanese calendar and that remains an important point in the contemporary ritual calendar in Japan. According to one of the heads at Shinnyoen Hawaii, attendance over the course of the 1998 winter training period averaged between 250 to 300 followers.⁶⁵

The Hawaii temple has matured over the years not only financially (being largely supported by the donations of followers) but in other areas as well, encompassing an assortment of activities and opportunities for its growing membership.⁶⁶ The temple boasts a

⁶³In 1996 basic (kôjô) sesshin at Shinnyoen Hawaii cost \$4, basic consultation (kôjô sôdan) sesshin cost \$8, consultation (sôdan) sesshin cost \$15, special (tokubetsu) sesshin cost \$25, and followers seeking spiritual advice for special problems (kantei sesshin) were required to pay \$35.

⁶⁴Yûichi, posthumously known as Shindôin, was the second Itô son and believed by Shinnyoen followers to transmit spiritual words and salvation from the other world.

⁶⁵Winter 1998 training lasted from 20 January 1998 to 3 February 1998.

⁶⁶At the outset of Shinnyoen Hawaii more than 20 years ago, the branch temple was financially dependent upon the main Shinnyoen temple in Japan. However during the course of 20 years the Hawaii branch temple has emerged largely independent in terms of finances, if not in doctrine and practice. Financial support comes

wide variety of groups and functions which enable members to develop a closeness among themselves as well as to endear the religion to the community. Some of the groups which Shinnyoen members may participate in include a taiko drum group, softball team, chorus, and band. In addition to these groups there are divisions within the religion which cater to the special needs of Shinnyoen children, young adults, women, and senior citizens.⁶⁷ The annual Shinnyoen picnic, which began in Hawaii in 1975 and is open to both members and non-members, is held every autumn. The Shinnyoen Bazaar, which had its start in Hawaii in 1973, is held every August and is popular with the members and community alike, offering a variety of food, plants, and other goods for sale. Shinnyoen has also participated in community activities, volunteering its members in city and state beautification projects. In January 1994 Shinnyoen participated in a fair sponsored by the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii celebrating Japanese culture. This one day festive activity drew over 1,000 people and was successful in large part due to the participation of such groups as Shinnyoen. The size of the Shinnyoen Hawaii following and the number of activities they participate in are evidence of a dynamism not yet achieved by other Shinnyoen branch temples abroad.

Captive Audience

There are several important reasons why Shinnyoen Hawaii is the most successful Shinnyoen branch temple abroad, not the least of which is the population make-up of Hawaii. Hawaii has a large Japanese American community, nearly 25% of the entire population of the state. Hence Shinnyoen, a Japanese religion which attracts a largely Japanese following, had a readily available audience already acquainted with the culture and religiosity of Japan when it began its propagation efforts in 1969.

from the members themselves, mostly procured through kangi, membership and training fees, and also through the funds raised at the annual Shinnyoen bazaar and other activities.

⁶⁷ Other Japanese new religions have groups which bring together members who share common ethnic, cultural, and professional backgrounds. According to Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 14, Sôka Gakkai UK for example has distinct groups for lawyers, scientists, teachers, South Asians, East Europeans, and South Africans among others.

Characterizing the membership of Japanese new religions in Hawaii, the chief reference work on Japanese new religions, the *Shinshûkyô Jiten*, states that the new religions on the whole are almost entirely filled by those of Japanese descent, save Shinnyoen and Sôka Gakkai, which have procured for themselves a large proportion of Caucasian followers.⁶⁸ My years as participant observer at Shinnyoen Hawaii from 1993-98 do not support this claim, however. Instead, this chapter has shown that Shinnyoen, in Hawaii and elsewhere, has met with mixed results at best and disappointing results at worst in its effort to recruit non-Japanese members abroad. For instance, at the usual monthly services at Shinnyoen Hawaii one might count no more than four or five Caucasians and a handful of Chinese. The rest of the followers in attendance seem to be evenly divided between Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans. Consistent with Shinnyoen UK and most other Japanese new religions in Hawaii, women make up the majority of the Shinnyoen Hawaii membership. Followers enrolled in Chiryû Gakuin also reflect the general Shinnyoen membership pattern. There were nearly 30 students in Chiryû Gakuin during the 1996-1997 school year. On July 20, 1996 for example, a total of 26 students attended the combined four levels of the Shinnyoen school. Of the 26 students 21 were female and all except one male were Asian. On August 3, 1996 there were 27 students, 24 of which were female and all of whom were Asian. Shinnyoen Hawaii then probably has more members than any other branch temple abroad simply because there are more people of Japanese descent in Hawaii than anywhere else. It is thus tempting to suggest that without the large Japanese American population in Hawaii, Shinnyoen Hawaii would find itself in a similar situation as other branch temples abroad, struggling to cross the ethnic barrier and attract non-Japanese members.

⁶⁸Inoue et al., eds. (1990) p. 623.

Japanese Identities

Because Hawaii has such a large population of Japanese descendants there are certain issues which do not cause as much concern there as they do in the UK, Singapore, and elsewhere. What may be perceived as the worship of a Japanese family, for example, is simply not much of a problem in Hawaii. This perception however has been a concern in the UK as we have seen and is an even greater problem for Shinnyoen Singapore. In those countries Japanese new religions that do well, Sôka Gakkai and Mahikari for example, are not necessarily tied to a specific Japanese persona to the extent that Shinnyoen is. Moreover their chief mode of practice, chanting the daimoku in Sôka Gakkai and okiyome in Mahikari, is not completely dependent upon and centered around the worship of particular Japanese individuals in the manner that sesshin is in Shinnyoen.

Interestingly, Shinnyoen Hawaii members have little or no perception of Shinnyoen as a Japanese new religion. This is in contrast to the mood at Tachikawa, the Shinnyoen headquarters in Japan, where sensitivity surrounding Shinnyoen as a new religion and the negative connotation accompanying such a designation is still high. There followers are asked if it is alright, should the need arise, for the religion to place telephone calls to members' homes and state who is calling. Apparently there are quite a number of followers who, for various reasons (including open opposition from family members), choose to keep their membership in Shinnyoen private. This "quiet" policy also makes returning telephone calls difficult and at times embarrassing as Shinnyoen members often leave telephone messages consisting of their personal names but little else. A number of times I was left to guess (sometimes wrongly) the complete identity of the caller. The calling policy does not seem to extend to Hawaii however. There followers have little reservations about calling other members' homes at all hours and openly identifying themselves as Shinnyoen believers.

For most Hawaii members it is enough to know that Shinnyoen is a Japanese Buddhist religion, and thus many followers see Shinnyoen as part of the Japanese religious

landscape in Hawaii which includes the Shingon, Sôtô, and Jôdo sects of Buddhism as well. There is little or no distinction between new religion and traditional religion. This is also true among some of the other Japanese "new" religions in Hawaii. Third generation Japanese American members at MOA (formerly the Church of World Messianity [Sekai Kyûseikyô]) for example, were unaware of such a designation as "Japanese new religion."⁶⁹ Japanese Americans not belonging to any particular religion likewise expressed similar sentiments. People I have talked to in Hawaii--ranging from personal friends and family members to members of the public--made no connection between Shinnyoen and the new religions. Most in fact had never heard of Shinnyoen and many thought the term new religion referred to some of the controversial non-Japanese groups like the Mormons, Hare Krishnas (ISKCON), Jehovah's Witness, and the "Moonies" (Unification Church). The few who heard of Shinnyoen knew it because someone they know belongs to the religion. Therefore among members and non-members alike there is virtually no trace of suspicion of Shinnyoen as a deviant religion. Shinnyoen is considered a vessel of Buddhist truth by members, and a vestige of Japanese culture by non-members.

Hand Picked Followers

Besides the large Japanese American population, there are other factors which have contributed significantly to the success of the religion in Hawaii. Unlike the newer Shinnyoen temples abroad, the large Hawaii contingent has been the beneficiary of proselytizing efforts conducted by the founder himself and other high ranking officials. Itô Masako's husband, Isao, for example, made strong proselytizing efforts in Hawaii personally connecting at least one of the early Shinnyoen Hawaii leaders, Donald Matsumura, in 1970. There is also the influence of Kuriyama Jôshin, whom we have already mentioned, on the early Hawaii contingent. The decision to send high-ranking delegates to

⁶⁹ Although they had heard of Aum Shinrikyô they considered Aum an isolated incident involving a few "crazy guys." From interviews with MOA members on February 17 and July 12, 1996.

cultivate the rich Hawaiian soil bode well for the religion.⁷⁰ The beginnings of Shinnyoen Hawaii are thus in stark contrast to Shinnyoen UK and Singapore where propagation was largely the result of efforts made by rank and file followers. The size and growth of Shinnyoen Hawaii can therefore be in part traced to the attention it received from the Shinnyoen elites.

We also must not underestimate the influence the Shinnyoen founder had on his followers. While Shinnyoen UK and Singapore were born years after Itô died, Shinnyoen Hawaii received his personal attention for many years. Itô Shinjô made repeated and regular visits to Hawaii from 1970 to encourage and tend to his faithful. No doubt his periodic visits did much to boost the zeal of his experienced followers as well as make a lasting impression upon the newer members. Although Itô died in 1989 followers still fondly recall the precious and powerful effect seeing him had on their lives. Members in Hawaii and in Japan tell of wonderful sensations and strong emotions felt whenever in the presence of the charismatic Itô, as if he were communicating directly to their hearts. Certainly such experiences have garnered an enduring loyalty among the Hawaii followers fortunate enough to have "met" Itô on these occasions. On the other hand for followers in the UK and Singapore who have never seen Itô in person, it is impossible to fully experience the power and charisma of the Shinnyoen founder through video no matter how many times the tape is played.

5. SUMMARY

While a more detailed conclusion is presented in the final chapter, it would be well to make a few remarks summarizing the Shinnyoen branch temples in the UK, Hawaii, and Singapore. Our look at Shinnyoen in the above three locales clearly demonstrates that there is no single formula to ensure success of a branch temple abroad. Like chemistry equations,

⁷⁰Why the same or similar delegates were not sent to help establish other branch temples abroad is open to speculation. Reasons that I have been told include: the language barrier was less of a problem in Hawaii, the high-ranking officials were too old when other overseas branch temples were born, they were too busy with other more important internal affairs to make propagation trips; high-ranking officials are charged with caring for already existing followers while the responsibility to recruit rests with the rank and file members.

where altering one element changes the entire chemical compound, fusing the same religion with different host cultures yields variant results.

Shinnyoen UK

The transplantation of religions which have a specific cultural base to a different culture is often times problematic. However a few Japanese new religions have made this transition successfully. Sôka Gakkai, for instance, by the early 1990s had roughly 5,000 members in the UK.⁷¹ While Shinnyoen has yet to attain such figures, it is beginning to attract attention in the UK as well. One of the key issues that will likely determine the degree of success Shinnyoen will achieve in Britain is the extent to which it is equipped as a religion capable of spreading *beyond* the Japanese community. In my view several characteristics of Shinnyoen render its chances of duplicating the success of Sôka Gakkai slim.⁷²

First of all there is the cultural factor. In the UK, Shinnyoen as a receptacle and representative of Japanese culture and religion has a certain exotic appeal for those seeking a departure from their own cultural tradition. The rapid rise of Japan since World War II to a world economic power has also given the country a positive, successful impression in general that has added to this appeal. If the membership profile at Shinnyoen UK is any indication, the allure of Japanese culture and its favorable impression have attracted several Britons to the religion, causing a few to even become members. However the type of British member Shinnyoen attracts, those slightly outside the normal British parameters, suggests that the religion is destined to be a marginal religion. Unless Shinnyoen can soften its Japanese character and penetrate mainstream British culture it will continue to appeal to mostly outsiders, thereby limiting its chances for success in the UK.

⁷¹Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 38.

⁷²While membership numbers are not the sole means for which to judge the degree of success a religion achieves, a former resident minister at Shinnyoen UK told me that Shinnyoen can be considered successful in Britain if it can gain 100 active members.

Nowhere is the cultural influence on Shinnyoen more pronounced than in the religion's beliefs and practices. As we have seen, Shinnyoen's intense focus on the Itô family as central figures of worship and the emphasis on ancestral ties underscores its Japanese character. Sôka Gakkai on the other hand, due to its textual basis has the flexibility to get beyond the perception of being merely a Japanese religion. While Shinnyoen has also incorporated a traditional Buddhist text into its teachings the text plays a cursory role at best. The clear and continued emphasis at Shinnyoen UK is the veneration of the spiritual powers of a Japanese family. This narrows the religion's appeal considerably to those in mainstream British society.

Shinnyoen UK is also weak organizationally. As of 1997 Shinnyoen UK still had no permanent resident minister to guide the congregation in matters of belief and practice. The branch temple followed the Shinnyoen policy of rotating ministers every six months. This lack of consistency in the leadership role abroad renders the organization unstable and hinders its potential for significant growth. However, Shinnyoen UK had begun to produce a number of high ranking followers in 1997, albeit from among the Japanese expatriate ranks. If the branch temple can continue to produce high ranking followers, especially from among the local British membership, the religion may be able to alter its strong perception as a Japanese religion to some extent. Failing to do so however may destine Shinnyoen to play a minor role in the British religious landscape.

Shinnyoen Singapore

In Singapore the Japanese qualities of Shinnyoen also pose a major problem for many Chinese Singaporean followers. If Shinnyoen is perceived as exotic in the UK it is looked down upon as strange in Singapore. So alien is Shinnyoen Singapore to the Chinese Buddhist temples which dot the city that many in the Chinese community view Shinnyoen and other Japanese religions as a form of deviant religious practice. Local Chinese Singaporeans point to the strange Japanese Buddhist practice of worshipping the "black box"

as an example.⁷³ Many have heard stories while growing up that the black box contains remnants of dead people, magical potions, and other dubious articles of faith. The stigma of Japanese religion as a deviant practice is so pronounced in Singapore that local Shinnyoen followers feel compelled to keep their membership a secret from their families lest they suffer ridicule and rejection.

In Singapore, Shinnyoen may find its stiffest challenge for overseas expansion as our look at Shinnyoen Singapore suggests that there are more factors working against the religion there than in its favor. As mentioned, the lingering anti-Japanese sentiments are a major obstacle for the religion. This is true not only in the Shinnyoen case but for most Japanese religions wishing to establish overseas branches in the city. Rendering this obstacle even more formidable for Shinnyoen, however, is its veneration of and focus on the Itô family. Further complicating matters for Shinnyoen is the fact that not only is the founder Japanese but he is also dead. Other Japanese new religions, Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai for example, have the luxury of their founders visiting Singapore and energizing their followers. Shinnyoen Singapore followers on the other hand have no other recourse but to get excited over video memorials of their founder.

Another factor working against Shinnyoen is the practice of sesshin. While sesshin is the pillar of Shinnyoen practice and accounts in part for the success of Shinnyoen in Japan,⁷⁴ it is at odds with the religious milieu in the local Chinese community. Some locals even cite sesshin as proof of Shinnyoen's deviation from "true" Buddhism. Our study of Shinnyoen Singapore indicates that the target group for Shinnyoen are largely those in the higher income and education bracket, the so-called "free thinkers." However most in this group tend to look with disdain upon such religious practices as sesshin. Those in the Chinese community who are most likely to seek religious practices akin to sesshin tend to turn to spiritual mediums steeped in Taoist folk practices, not Buddhism. According to one Chinese Singaporean,

⁷³*Butsudan*, small Buddhist altar found in many Japanese homes containing ancestral tablets and/or principal object(s) of veneration.

⁷⁴Inoue et al., eds. (1990) p. 637.

"Mediums are Taoist, not Buddhist." That Shinnyoen offers Buddhist mediums only serve to underline its deviant nature in many Singaporean eyes.

In fall 1997 the Singapore government launched a "Speak Mandarin" campaign in an effort to persuade its younger Chinese citizens to maintain their cultural identity. The implicit message in this campaign (according to Chinese friends) was to encourage Chinese to behave more like Chinese, as there was a general lamentation that Chinese youngsters were abandoning the traditional ways for other cultural alternatives. Such an environment is not favorable for a religion that explicitly exudes a cultural identity different from the one promoted in society. In this scenario the chances for recruiting large portions of the population into its fold becomes remote.

In addition to the above obstacles facing the religion there is the lack of branch autonomy that characterizes Shinnyoen branch temples everywhere. Like Shinnyoen UK, Shinnyoen Singapore does not have a permanent resident minister. The Singapore branch temple does, however, have two dedicated staff members taken from the local population. This could bode well for the religion in the future. However the current cultural, religious, and social environment presents a serious resistance to the growth of Shinnyoen Singapore. At the end of every Shinnyoen service followers recite in unison various pledges. One such pledge is to "save humankind, the earth, and the universe." Considering the Shinnyoen situation in Singapore, the universe may be easier to save than the country.

Shinnyoen Hawaii

The same cultural traits that are viewed with fascination in one locale but have little appeal in another, may be seen as a matter of course in yet another land. In Hawaii, the numerous Japanese religions are considered by many in the Japanese American community as comfortable and familiar vestiges of their culture's mores. In such an environment there is little perception of Shinnyoen as a novel or exotic religion or as a strange and deviant form of religious practice. Many followers belong to Shinnyoen Hawaii simply because their family

and friends in the Japanese American community are also members. For many Japanese American followers then the cultural and social leap required to become a member of Shinnyoen Hawaii is not as wide as it is for their counterparts in the UK and Singapore.

That Shinnyoen UK and Shinnyoen Singapore do not enjoy the level of success that Shinnyoen Hawaii does can be largely attributed to the number of advantages the Hawaii branch temple holds over its counterparts. Our study of Shinnyoen Hawaii showed that the temple functions in a large Japanese community that is concentrated in a small area, was raised under the steady guidance of one high ranking minister during its formative years; and regularly received the personal attention and nurture of Itô when he was alive. Shinnyoen UK and Shinnyoen Singapore did not enjoy such favorable conditions at their outset. These factors have allowed Shinnyoen Hawaii to build a stable organization that can support the practice of a divinity school and successfully implement a number of temple regulations.

As mentioned, due to the large proportion of Japanese descendants in Hawaii many Japanese new religions which set up shop in the islands have a relatively high chance of success. Sôka Gakkai, Tenrikyô, Risshô Kôseikai, Shinrankai, and Sekai Kyûseikyô, for example, all have fairly successful campaigns. Although not as aggressive in terms of proselytizing as some of the above religions, we can also include Shinnyoen in this group. Its tightly controlled lineage system, propelled by the recruitment emphasis on personal contacts of its Japanese American followers, works well in a land with such a large and influential Japanese American population.⁷⁵ In Hawaii, there has been little impetus for the religion to make any cultural adjustments and even less of a need to recruit non-Japanese followers as the large Japanese American community provides an already rich arena in which to propagate. This contrasts sharply with the situation in the UK and Singapore where there is an urgent need for Shinnyoen to adapt to the host culture and spread beyond the Japanese community.

⁷⁵Japanese Americans in Hawaii have reached some of the state's highest political offices.

The social patterns of Japanese Americans in Hawaii are changing however and it remains to be seen whether Shinnyoen can adjust to these changes. One such change is the rate of marrying outside the Japanese American community. The percentage of out marriage among Japanese Americans has increased resulting in a Japanese community that is becoming ever more diverse in identity. It will be interesting to see if Shinnyoen is flexible enough to cater to such diversity, although the fact that the present membership is overwhelmingly Japanese indicates that the religion may not be.

Different Yet Similar

As this chapter has demonstrated, while the variables in the above locations have differed, resulting in different levels of success for Shinnyoen abroad, they all serve to underline a common theme: the inability of Shinnyoen to transcend cultural barriers. The inability of Shinnyoen to move beyond its cultural identity has important implications for overseas followers. When one joins Shinnyoen one must not only adopt a new religion but, at least in the case of Shinnyoen UK and Shinnyoen Singapore, a new ethnicity as well as there is implicit pressure to conform to set patterns of Japanese behavior. For example followers are required to remove their shoes but keep their socks on when inside the temple, sit on the floor in the uncomfortable Japanese manner during services and sesshin, and chant entirely in Japanese. Moreover Shinnyoen branch temples everywhere celebrate Japanese folk religious customs such as the spring festival, setsubun. The pressure to conform to a different ethnic behavioral pattern other than one's own, in addition to adopting a whole new set of beliefs and practices, is a hefty obstacle for recruiting new followers and may cause new converts to leave the religion. Indeed Rodney Stark interviewed an ex-Hare Krishna follower who quit the religion because, in her view, "I couldn't see myself trying to act like an Indian."⁷⁶ The issue of culture, race, and religion also arose at a meeting for international followers at the Shinnyoen Tokyo temple in March 1995. A long time Shinnyoen San

⁷⁶Stark (1987) p. 15.

Francisco follower who had been in the religion for 13 years complained about the religion's inability to separate itself from its culture, causing new non-Japanese followers to feel uncomfortable in the religion. He cited examples of language and custom (Shinnyoen only serves green tea after services and not coffee) and pointed to the fact that Shinnyoen San Francisco is 99% Japanese as proof that the religion is not adapting to American culture. While the relationship between culture and religion is complex, this suggests that as long as Shinnyoen insists on having its members adapt to its culture and not vice versa the religion will struggle in its attempt to win new followers abroad.

If Shinnyoen is to succeed in all three places it must be able to adapt to its host culture. However the strong organizational control exercised by the main temple in Japan does not seem to allow for such flexibility. There are signs, nonetheless, that on some occasions and regarding certain policies Shinnyoen branch temples have adjusted independently to their environment.

Due to Shinnyoen's relatively successful campaign in Hawaii, the branch temple can implement and adhere to a number of policies that may not be as closely followed elsewhere. For example according to Shinnyoen regulations, only members are technically allowed to observe and/or participate in any given service. The reason behind this lies in the belief that the esoteric nature of Shinnyoen is quite sacred and potent and if the wrong person or the uninitiated were to be exposed to its power detrimental effects could result. Non-members are allowed into the temple only during the designated "Open House" days where a quick tour of the temple is provided along with a brief history of the religion and a summary of its teachings. Time is allowed for questions and often refreshments are served at the conclusion of the tour. At this point visitors have the opportunity to be "connected" to the teaching and subsequently be allowed to participate in upcoming services.

Theoretically, the "Open House" regulation applies to all Shinnyoen branch temples yet certain temples circumvent or ignore the policy altogether. During my visits to Shinnyoen UK in 1993 and 1994 for example I observed first time visitors, both Japanese and non-

Japanese alike, attending temple services. Shinnyoen UK was able to circumvent this regulation because technically it was not yet an official branch temple. At the Paris temple however I was allowed, indeed encouraged to bring along my uninitiated friends to the services during which they participated in the esoteric chanting and were exposed to the sacred teachings. At Shinnyoen Singapore too, I was allowed to bring a non-member to a March 1997 service.

At Shinnyoen Hawaii, where the number of local members is relatively high and stable, the regulation regarding non-members is strictly enforced.⁷⁷ This was made evident in October 1997 when two college students of mine who were interested in learning more about Shinnyoen were turned away at the temple reception area and told to return the following week during Open House. Had they visited a branch temple at another locale the circumstances may have been different. If the Shinnyoen branch temples in France, the UK, and Singapore are any indication, the two students would have been allowed in as the rule against permitting non-members into the temple will continue to be ignored as long as the number of followers remains low.⁷⁸ The inconsistency in applying the "Open House" regulation at different locations suggests that there exists a degree of autonomy among the branch temples. This may be a positive sign for a religion that is as tightly controlled from its headquarters in Japan as Shinnyoen is.

While religions evolve in their attempt to adjust to the ever changing social, cultural, and religious environment they find themselves in, this is even more so regarding the new religions. Changes in the new religions may be more pronounced and rapid as many may still be in the process of clearly defining their own beliefs and practices. Hence what may be true

⁷⁷By 1997 Shinnyoen had reinstated the no visitor policy that was briefly set aside after the Aum affair.

⁷⁸More than the overall number of members, the native membership figure seems to be the determining factor in how closely membership regulations will be adhered to. At Shinnyoen Hawaii the majority of the members come from the local ranks with many already being second generation followers. At Shinnyoen San Francisco, where the "Open House" policy exists but is not strictly enforced, the membership is stable but the number of local followers is low.

of a new religion one year may be less so the following year. In short new religions are dynamic and not static entities.

Since I began my research of Shinnyoen abroad in 1993 several changes have occurred at the various overseas branch temples to warrant a number of caveats regarding the direction of Shinnyoen abroad. First of all the number of reinôsha at certain overseas branch temples changes almost yearly, significantly affecting the dynamics of the religion abroad. When I first visited Shinnyoen UK in 1993 and Shinnyoen Singapore in 1995 there were no permanent or local reinôsha present at either branch temple. By 1998 the situation had changed. While neither had a permanent minister, Shinnyoen UK had its first permanent reinôsha, a Japanese female expatriate who was one of the founding members of Shinnyoen UK, and Shinnyoen Singapore had three reinôsha, two from the local ranks. Secondly, the number of cultural courses and social groups offered at the branch temples have increased. I noticed this especially at Shinnyoen Singapore where followers could join a community volunteer group and a drama club. What these developments suggest about the direction of the Shinnyoen branch temples abroad is not yet clear. The promotion of overseas members to the reinôsha rank may indicate growth on the part of the branch temples or suggest a change in policy regarding the organization of foreign temples. Likewise the increased number of cultural courses and social clubs may indicate significant growth or a change in propagation strategy.

While the branch temples in the UK and Singapore seem to be headed in a positive direction, the same cannot be said of Shinnyoen's most successful branch temple abroad, Shinnyoen Hawaii. According to Shinnyoen Hawaii's own figures, the branch temple there is on the decline. In 1995 the total attendance for the year was 19,476. In 1996 this figure had dipped slightly to 19,417. In 1997 however the attendance figure had slipped noticeably to 16,470. Also on the decline were the number of followers promoted to higher spiritual ranks. When I first visited Shinnyoen Hawaii in 1993 the temple was full of people during services. At times followers had difficulty finding a place to sit in the temple and annex areas.

I noticed that the situation had changed by 1997 when empty chairs could be found, even during important occasions such as Yôshu-sama's visit to the temple to mark the 24th anniversary of Shinnyoen Hawaii.⁷⁹ The 1998 winter training period also saw an unusual amount of empty chairs, indicating that attendance levels had indeed slipped. When I spoke to one of the heads of Shinnyoen Hawaii about the temple's declining numbers he told me that Shinnyoen was more interested in producing a few sincere followers than a high volume of casual members. Though it is too early to guess whether the current decline in attendance figures is simply an aberration or indicative of a new pattern, if it is the latter, then it could be that Shinnyoen Hawaii is destined to decline, or to consist only of a small yet highly dedicated band of followers.

⁷⁹Followers have a choice during services of sitting on the floor in the Japanese manner or on a limited number of chairs. Since sitting in the Japanese manner for long periods is uncomfortable for many, chair seating is popular with local followers and are the first to be taken.

Chapter Five: Proselytizing Strategies

1. STRATEGIES AND MOTIFS

The diversity found among Japanese new religions extends to the array of proselytizing strategies and conversion motifs employed by groups to win new followers and bolster commitment levels of existing believers. New religions use diverse methods of proselytizing, from the practice of public proselytizing to the policy of selecting only a few chosen members; from the importance of healing to the emphasis on ethics; and from the primacy of experience to the importance of the intellect. Moreover new religions rarely limit themselves to a single method of recruitment, but often utilize a variety of proselytizing means under different circumstances to spread their messages. While there are a host of ways religious groups promulgate themselves in Japan and abroad, certain strategies and motifs emerge as especially prominent in recruitment efforts overseas and therefore require closer inspection.

This chapter looks at the proselytizing methods of Japanese new religions abroad, focusing particularly on Shinnyoen but with references made to other Japanese new religions for comparative purposes. Reflecting the eclectic nature and diversity characteristic of Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions, the variety of ways these groups promulgate their beliefs and practices seems to defy easy typological casting. Nevertheless, the assortment of recruitment methods engaged in by Japanese new religions abroad are rooted in a common goal--to procure committed believers.

Two themes emerge in the following pages central to viewing the spread of Shinnyoen abroad: proselytizing strategies and conversion motifs. The former takes into account the strategies Shinnyoen utilizes as an organization to send its messages out and the latter emphasizes how these messages are packaged to potential converts. I will use the theoretical framework developed by Rodney Stark (1987) to view the proselytizing strategies of Shinnyoen as an organization; and look at the recruitment processes of Shinnyoen

believers through the conversion motifs proposed by John Lofland and Norman Skonovd (1981). Regarding the theoretical model proposed by Lofland and Skonovd, I will take the angle of looking at conversion motifs as they come from the religion, and not at how they are received by believers. The reason behind this focus is that this thesis is about spreading the message rather than the process or experience of becoming a believer. Proselytizing strategies therefore include organizational characteristics that affect the religion's effort to promulgate its message successfully while conversion motifs emphasize the form these messages take.

2. PROSELYTIZING STRATEGIES

In his article "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," Stark proposes an eight point theoretical model designed to help gauge the religious success of a group or the likely chance of growth an organization will experience. Stark suggests that new religions are likely to succeed to the extent that they meet the following eight conditions:

1. Retain cultural continuity with the conventional faiths of the societies in which they appear or originate.
2. Maintain a medium level of tension with their surrounding environment.
3. Achieve effective mobilization: strong governance and a high level of individual commitment.
4. Can attract and maintain a normal age and sex structure.
5. Occur within a favorable ecology.
6. Maintain dense internal network relations without becoming isolated.
7. Resist secularization.
8. Provide adequate socialization of its young members.¹

¹Stark (1987) p. 13.

While failing to meet one or even several of the above criteria will not necessarily preclude a new religion from achieving success, Stark predicts that "the more fully a movement fulfills each of these conditions, the greater its success."² According to Stark, success means "the degree to which a religious movement is able to dominate one or more societies. Such domination could be the result of conversion of the masses, of elites, or both. By dominate I mean to influence behavior, culture, and public policy in a society."³

A Model for Success?

In this section we will view Shinnyoen through Stark's theoretical model to help us assess the growth of Shinnyoen abroad. It should be noted however that a number of adjustments to Stark's model are needed in order to better reflect and analyze the proselytizing strategies of Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions abroad. While in most cases the modifications are minor, in other instances the dynamics present in the spread of Shinnyoen abroad require significant changes to Stark's model in order to address the issues relevant to this study.

If measured by Stark's definition of success, Shinnyoen is not a successful religion. Shinnyoen has not dominated any society within or without Japan. That being said, however, Stark's theoretical framework for success can still be utilized to gauge the direction of growth Shinnyoen abroad is headed by examining how many of the eight conditions for success the religion fulfills. In this manner Stark's model will prove helpful in determining the degree of success Shinnyoen can expect abroad.

Cultural Continuity

The first point in Stark's model takes into account the extent to which a new religion can forge a degree of cultural continuity with its host society. While Stark focuses on

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 12

continuity in terms of religious motifs, in my view this should not be limited to religion but applied to other aspects of culture as well. We will therefore view Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions abroad in light of their efforts to initiate contact with their host society through a variety of cultural means.

Japanese new religions abroad use culture as a conduit to attract potential converts, with each religion employing a particular strategy to meet its own needs. Although they may be diverse in nature, the various means through which Japanese new religions utilize culture to advance their causes are largely subsumed under two approaches. On the one hand there are religions which promote Japanese cultural forms in order to attract and access people to the group's religious content. On the other hand there are groups which utilize local cultural forms to help spread their messages. For instance they may actively participate in local cultural events thereby drawing new members in this manner. Japanese new religions such as Shinnyoen are examples of groups that emphasize the former approach while organizations like Sôka Gakkai are religions that also utilize the latter. In both cases, Japanese new religions use the ambiguous line between religion and culture to their proselytizing advantage.

Japanese new religion members of non-Japanese descent are introduced to the religious organizations through various channels and circumstances. One of the more common means of introduction is through an initial interest in Japanese culture. A student of the martial arts, for example, may be introduced to a Japanese new religion by means of the judo class offered by the group. The judo class may not only teach the physical techniques necessary to be successful in the art, but exposes the student to the religious beliefs of the group as well. Japanese new religions are by definition vessels of Japanese culture. A number of these groups however are not only vessels but colporteurs of Japanese culture, actively propagating their religious beliefs by first disseminating the practice of Japanese arts, language, and other cultural accouterments. Tenrikyô was one of the first new religions to

utilize Japanese culture as a tool for proselytism, having opened overseas language schools as early as 1926. Since then Tenrikyô has continued to promulgate through Japanese culture, offering Japanese language, calligraphy, cooking, martial arts, and flower arrangement classes at its various branch temples abroad. At its Singapore branch there is also a library equipped with audio and visual aids, and various other literature designed to introduce prospective members to Japanese culture.⁴

While not as active in promoting Japanese culture as Tenrikyô, Shinnyoen has also adopted the strategy of utilizing Japanese culture to attract new followers. At the Singapore branch for example one can find Japanese cultural courses that teach cooking and flower arrangement. At Shinnyoen Hawaii the religion is a regular participant in Japanese cultural events such as the Japanese cultural festival that is held annually in Honolulu. The religion in Hawaii also promotes itself through its taiko drum team which performs publicly at various cultural events.

During the course of my research of Japanese new religions abroad, I found examples of non-Japanese followers who were first led to their religion through Japanese culture. According to an elderly Caucasian gentleman at Shinnyoen UK, his involvement with the religion ensued from his fondness for traditional Japanese music. He had visited Japan on several occasions, each time taking away a deeper appreciation for the culture. During the few months of our acquaintance, it became clear that his interest in the Japanese fine arts rivaled, if not surpassed, his interest in Shinnyoen. Shinnyoen, it seems, functioned as a conduit through which he could re-access the experience and culture he was fond of. There are similar type of members at other Japanese new religions abroad. A study done on the largest Japanese new religion in the UK, for example, found that 45 percent of its

⁴Whether or not Tenrikyô's strategy of promoting itself through Japanese culture is successful is debatable, however. An inquiry at Tenrikyô Singapore in May 1995 for example found that the religion has 500 members and 100 followers. According to Tenrikyô's method of categorization, "followers" are those who are believers and practice the religion's teachings, while "members" are those who are students of the cultural classes offered by the religion. It seems that many in the Singapore public have learned to take the cooking recipes and language skills offered by Tenrikyô without accepting its religious practice and teaching. This is also true in Paris where of the 3,000 French enrolled in the Tenrikyô Japanese Language School, only a few go on to become followers (*Aera*, July 17, 1995).

members had some interest in Japanese culture prior to joining.⁵ I also found similar circumstances in Singapore. A young Indian male in his mid-twenties at Sûkyô Mahikari Singapore explained to me that he was first drawn to Mahikari through his interest in Japanese martial arts. That Mahikari promised to cure him of his asthma problems was added incentive to join the religion. These examples suggest that culture, especially the arts, are spiritually or religiously inspiring for some; hence involvement in Japanese religions can be viewed as a logical progression from such sentiment. Culture, then, is a passageway to religion. A number of Japanese new religions understand this and utilize the arbitrary boundary between the two to win converts.

The promotion of the local culture which Japanese new religions find themselves in may also be a point of contact with potential converts. While groups such as Shinnyoen and Tenrikyô seem to rely primarily on the appeal of Japanese culture as a proselytizing tool, other religious movements such as Sôka Gakkai also utilize the local culture to their proselytizing advantage by actively participating in local cultural events in order to promote themselves publicly. In Singapore Sôka Gakkai has a large delegation which performs in the country's National Day celebrations and even has within the organization a sub-group for members interested in Chinese music. Since 76% of the Singapore population is Chinese, this is a clear attempt to forge ties with the local sentiments. In Hawaii, Sôka Gakkai is represented regularly in the Aloha Festival, Kamehameha Day, and various other commemorative day parades, boasting drum and fife bands which lend clear visibility to onlookers. In the UK such activities include the staging of musical performances which are produced, staged, and acted entirely by Sôka Gakkai members.

Concerning their proselytizing efforts abroad, the strategy utilized by Shinnyoen to promote itself through Japanese culture may limit its opportunity for growth as it serves to attract mostly those outside the normal parameters of their existing social structure. The strategy represented by Sôka Gakkai, on the other hand, utilizes the host society's own

⁵Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994 pp. 94-95.

culture to gain access to the public. If maintaining cultural continuity increases a new religion's chances of success abroad, the strategy employed by Sôka Gakkai is advantageous. The strategy employed by Sôka Gakkai promotes local culture and fosters national pride. This may partly explain why Sôka Gakkai is more readily accepted by the local government, being granted the status of a religious organization, while other new religions which are perceived to go against local culture--the Jehovah's Witness is a good example here--are banned in Singapore. The contrasting messages sent out by the two strategies adopted by Sôka Gakkai and Shinnyoen are clear: one gives the impression that it is a religion that can fit in with mainstream society while the other underlines the new religion's alien nature. Not surprisingly then that the cultural approach taken by Shinnyoen and Tenrikyô is less successful than the one utilized by Sôka Gakkai.

Medium Tension Level

Utilizing culture as a conduit for increased membership is a proselytizing strategy that is not always successful. The reaction of the local culture must be taken into consideration, especially when promoting Japanese culture, in order to gauge the success of such a recruitment strategy. According to Stark, a new religion must "maintain a delicate balance between conformity and deviance" in order to prosper in its host environment.⁶ In other words if Shinnyoen is to be successful abroad it must exhibit enough of a significant difference with the local practices abroad in order to distinguish itself, yet it must not be perceived as too deviant in order to avoid a high state of tension with its host community so that conversion will be all but impossible. The proselytizing strategy of promoting religion through culture has yielded different results for Shinnyoen in different locations.

Although I did my research on Shinnyoen UK before it became an official Shinnyoen branch temple in 1994, my small sample of interviews with local members and those in the surrounding community suggests that while Shinnyoen is viewed as deviant, its deviance is

⁶Stark (1987) p. 16.

perceived as benign. In other words the religion is significantly different but in a non-threatening way. The exotic qualities of Shinnyoen have served to attract, albeit a few, local members. This perception of Shinnyoen as a deviant but benign religion has been very different from that accorded to the previous tenant of the Manor House, a Muslim group, which was perceived by the rector of a neighboring church as a possible threat to his religion. After this group, Shinnyoen was viewed as a welcome change to the community.

At Shinnyoen Singapore the situation is significantly different. In Singapore, where there were still anti-Japanese sentiments lingering among certain sectors of the population when I conducted my research on Shinnyoen from 1995 to 1998, Japanese religions were not only largely perceived as deviant, but viewed with suspicion as well. In this environment the noticeable Japanese character of Shinnyoen--its worship of a Japanese man and the promotion of itself through Japanese culture classes--has not been advantageous for the group but instead has produced a religion in a relatively high state of tension with the local community. As we have seen in the previous chapter, as a result of this tension certain local Shinnyoen followers have felt compelled to keep their membership a secret from their families for fear of ridicule and rejection.

By contrast Shinnyoen Hawaii is located in a favorable environment. There exists a large Japanese community and a long and stable Buddhist tradition to encourage its growth, yet Shinnyoen differs significantly enough from other Buddhist groups and religions in its beliefs and practices to distinguish itself in the community. Shinnyoen is not part of the Hawaii Council of Buddhist Churches nor is it a member of the Hawaii chapter of the Association of New Religions. In fact Shinnyoen Hawaii's unwillingness to participate and cooperate with other religious groups in Hawaii has been criticized by ministers at nearby Honganji and Shingon temples. Shinnyoen Hawaii seems to be a good example then of a religion existing in a medium tension level with its surrounding community: it is part of a continuing religious tradition yet at the same time it is not engulfed by it. Not surprisingly Shinnyoen Hawaii enjoys the largest membership of the branch temples abroad.

Effective Mobilization and Network Ties

Here I have linked two of Stark's eight conditions together as effective mobilization and network ties are intricately related in Shinnyoen. In Shinnyoen it is clear that the religion's ability to effectively maneuver its corps of followers as a whole is due to the intimate bond believers feel with their religion and with other members. Certainly one of the strengths of Shinnyoen is its dense network of internal attachments among its followers. The lineage system is effective in that it promotes affection and self-esteem among followers, thereby building commitment and deepening the faith of its believers. As the Shinnyoen lineage system has already been described in a previous chapter and some comments are made on this organizational component in a section below, I will not delve into it here, suffice to say that the lineage system is one of the main vehicles through which the religion ties its members to the group and one another and hence advances the organization as a whole.

According to Stark, effective mobilization occurs when followers "are mobilized to act on behalf of the collective interests expressed in the organization and their activity is given coherence by leaders."⁷ An example of effective mobilization in Shinnyoen is the quest to build what the religion terms, the "Universal Training Ground." In concrete terms the Universal Training Ground (Sôgô Dôjô) will be a massive temple complex built on the former site of the Tachikawa aircraft company where Itô worked before he began his religious career. Over the course of many years the Universal Training Ground has taken on the notion of an utopia. It was a desire of Itô's during his lifetime but it has been transformed into an idealized goal for followers since his death.

The commitment to the idea of the construction of an utopia is often viewed as barometer of followers' faith in Shinnyoen. This gauge of faith is especially felt abroad, as overseas followers watch their concrete deeds transform their place of gathering from a small

⁷Ibid.

circle of followers through the various stages until finally reaching the status of a full fledged branch temple. This is viewed by followers as part of the process to build the Universal Training Ground. At the conclusion of Shinnyoen services followers recite a pledge to strive for the completion of the "Universal Training Ground" which, inevitably involves the commitment to actively proselytize and increase the membership of their religion. The motive to proselytize stems from several sources. First of all there is the genuine desire of those who have experienced the power of the teaching to share one's happiness with others. Secondly, making successful recruitment attempts for the sake of one's own salvation is a strong motivation. For members of a number of new religions, one's spiritual advancement is closely tied to the number of new converts one is able to produce. Recruitment exercises are understood as opportunities to undergo important spiritual training. Thirdly, the practice of proselytizing provides members with a keen sense of importance within the organization, especially when the religion is making an attempt to spread abroad. The construction of such an ideal world then is an extension of the worldview and web of relationships Shinnyoen provides for its followers. The member who has been successful in his or her recruitment attempts may feel that he or she is an essential part of the religion's overseas fortunes. I have met members at Shinnyoen UK and Singapore who have told me that their practice has become more vigorous abroad than it was in Japan. This is understandable. In the UK and Singapore, where Shinnyoen is young and membership small, their efforts in the religion have a more clear and immediate impact. Hence the responsibilities accorded them carries more significance in that they will have a greater influence in the development of the religion abroad.

Age and Sex Structure

Japanese new religions that appeal to a limited segment of a population will be less likely to succeed than those whose membership reflects the normal age and sex composition in a given society. New religions intent on focusing their proselytizing energies mostly on

one particular sector in society will be hard pressed to grow. Stark cites as examples the Shakers and Christian Science as new religions that rapidly declined due to their inability to attract young members from both sexes.⁸

Shinnyoen Hawaii is successful in maintaining a membership that reflects the normal age and sex structure in Hawaii. At any given service one can see members, both male and female, from every age group. More importantly, a number of its younger members have begun to pair off and produce offspring. Since 1993 when I first visited Shinnyoen Hawaii to 1998, I noticed that a number of young, local Shinnyoen members had gotten married and had children. Concrete proof of this is the baby and child care assistance for members during services. That Shinnyoen Hawaii utilizes a former residential home on the temple ground for baby-sitting purposes is evidence that its members are producing offspring at a rate that warrants child care services. Shinnyoen Hawaii appears to have the possibility of development through producing from within its ranks a next generation of members and thus is not wholly dependent on a flow of converts.

The situation at Shinnyoen UK and Shinnyoen Singapore, if the previous chapter is any indication, is not as promising. At both locations the membership composition is overwhelmingly female and Japanese. Hence the religion in both places must produce a high flow of converts in order to sustain itself if not grow. At a service at Shinnyoen Singapore on May 19, 1995 there were 16 members present, 13 of whom were female. Of the 13 women eight seemed to be 40 years old or older. On September 20, 1996 there were 20 followers at Shinnyoen Singapore, 17 of whom were female. On March 15, 1997 there were 24 members at the Saturday morning service, 18 of whom were female. At Shinnyoen Singapore on Sunday, February 15, 1998 there were 22 followers in attendance, 18 of whom were female. Interestingly, at Shinnyoen UK the few non-Japanese members the religion has been able to attract are male while at Shinnyoen Singapore they are mostly female. Shinnyoen does provide a matchmaking service, however, that may help to remedy the situation in the UK

⁸Ibid., p. 18.

and Singapore. For followers who are experiencing difficulty matching up with other Shinnyoen members the headquarters in Japan has a database from which to help marriage-minded members meet. The service can connect members from every branch temple in the world, provided that followers are willing to travel and possibly relocate. The matchmaking service has the goal of finding suitable marriage partners for followers but more importantly, it reduces the loneliness and alienation single Shinnyoen members may experience, especially non-Japanese followers who are often lone members among their friends and families. The matchmaking service not only encourages the growth of branch temples abroad but builds ties among followers both inside and outside the institutional framework. Again this may be especially important for non-Japanese members. Unless Shinnyoen UK and Singapore can duplicate their Hawaii counterpart they will be destined to remain a tiny band of followers struggling to avoid the fate of Christian Science and the Shakers.

Religious Ecology

The particular features of the host environment are important factors when considering the likely chances of success a new religion will experience. Stark suggests that there are three important environmental features to consider: "First is the degree to which the religious economy is regulated. Second is the condition of the conventional faith or faith against which the new movement must compete. Third is the size and structure of the environment as these place practical limits on first generation perceptions of success."⁹

Regarding the first point, it is enough to state that Shinnyoen has been largely unaffected by the various regulations governing religious activity in the UK, Singapore, and Hawaii. While in Singapore the government may regulate the activities of religious organizations more so than in the UK and US--in fact a number of new religions are banned in Singapore and open proselytizing is prohibited--as Shinnyoen does not engage in public recruitment but relies instead on connecting family and friends, its proselytizing strategy is

⁹Ibid., p. 19.

little affected. Hence religious policy in the UK, US, and Singapore has thus far neither helped nor hindered Shinnyoen's effort abroad.

Turning to Stark's second point, Eileen Barker states that while most people in Britain claim affiliation with the Church of England, for the vast majority this is little more than a cultural or national statement and not a religious one. Moreover despite the number of those who called themselves Christians, in 1979 only 18% were actual members of a church and only 11% were regular church goers.¹⁰ These figures, though slightly dated, suggest that the established Christian churches in Britain have been unsuccessful at holding the attention and support of people. In such an environment new religions such as Shinnyoen have a decent opportunity for growth. It is not surprising then that in the early 1990s there were about 600 new religious movements active in Britain.¹¹

By contrast, in Singapore the established religious traditions appear to still be flourishing. Chinese Buddhist temples in Singapore are on the whole vibrant places and they seem to enjoy a steady flow of worshippers on a regular basis. During festivals and particularly during auspicious times in the Buddhist calendar, however, major temples are packed with people of all ages. The popularity of Buddhist temples in Singapore then suggests that they are doing an adequate job of meeting the needs of the people. This dampens Shinnyoen's prospect for successful growth in Singapore.

While Buddhism as a whole in Hawaii has enjoyed a long and stable tradition, traditional Japanese Buddhism in Hawaii e.g. Shingon and Tendai, is on the decline. Indeed George Tanabe suggests that traditional Japanese Buddhism is not simply declining but dying due to its inability to adjust to contemporary society in Hawaii.¹² Japanese new religions thus have an opportunity to find a niche for themselves in Hawaii's religious landscape. In this environment the chances for growth and conversion are higher for Shinnyoen and others than they are in Singapore.

¹⁰Barker (1983) p. 35.

¹¹Barker (1995) p. 148.

¹²Tanabe (1985).

Finally, in order to dominate a society and thereby meet Stark's definition of success, a new religion must be able to count among its followers a significant portion of the population and/or exercise influence over those with considerable clout in the community. Stark suggests that achieving either criteria within the first generation of followers is important in bolstering the religion's perception of success. According to Stark, new religions that do not succeed in gaining a substantial number of followers within its first generation of leaders face a "crisis of confidence."¹³ This crisis of confidence may result in the religion adopting a different strategy, one that does not stress growth and proselytizing. Shinnyoen UK has yet to meet either criteria. A few hundred followers in a metropolis the size of London that boasts over seven million people as of 1997 surely cannot be considered impressive by any standard. Shinnyoen Singapore fares slightly better with several hundred followers in a country of roughly three million in 1997. As unimpressive as the above ratios are, they become even less so when one considers that the overwhelming majority of followers in both locations are not its native citizens but Japanese expatriates. Shinnyoen Hawaii has the most followers among branch temples abroad and it proselytizes in an area with the smallest population size of the three locations. That being said, however, the religion has only managed to harvest about 1,000 followers from a population of roughly 1,000,000. This figure amounts to only 0.1% of the total population. It is little wonder then that one of the staff leaders at Shinnyoen Hawaii told me regarding Shinnyoen's membership figures that the religion is interested in producing a few sincere followers rather than large membership figures.

Secularization

While it is to the advantage of a Japanese new religion abroad to develop a cordial relationship with its host culture, Stark maintains that in order to succeed new religions must also resist the tendency to completely accommodate themselves to the world. New religions

¹³Stark (1987) p. 21.

that have not resisted the secularization process to some degree have declined.¹⁴ Hence a new religion would do well not to "make its peace with this world too rapidly or too fully."¹⁵

If a major theme of Japanese new religions which appeared or experienced their most significant growth prior to the 1970s is the seeking of this-worldly benefits, as manifested in healings, improved relationships, and financial gains, another theme characterizing some of the so-called *new* new religions is the deep pessimism they share about the direction the world is heading, as evidence by their emphasis on messianism and the millennium;¹⁶ and their suspicion of the advances of science and technology. In Shinnyoen both themes are present to some degree.

The promise of this-worldly benefits is a significant side to Shinnyoen. This aspect of Shinnyoen is examined in detail in another section below and thus we will not explore this theme here. For now it is enough to state that evidence for the presence of this-worldly benefits in Shinnyoen can be readily found in personal testimonials or proofs that are shared in the religion.

Concerning the second theme found in Shinnyoen, one method religions employ to resist the secularization process and not accommodate themselves too fully to the world is to demonize the world to some extent. In other words religions may view certain aspects of contemporary society as dangerous and worthy of resistance. Mahikari, for example, frowns on members taking medicine and making visits to the doctor. Followers whom I have talked to in Singapore and Hawaii are convinced that modern medicine is often not the cure but the cause of many a disease. Thus many members are at the Mahikari dôjô giving and receiving okiyome in order to cleanse themselves of the medicinal toxins accumulated in their bodies over the years. MOA Hawaii too, is suspicious of the chemicals used to farm commercial fruits and vegetables and instead raises its own organically grown crops. For a number of

¹⁴Stark offers as an example Christian Science, which declined after its founder, Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), led the movement in the secularization process.

¹⁵Stark (1987) p. 23.

¹⁶Shimazono 1992a.

Japanese new religions the unbridled pursuit of science and industrialization is in large part responsible for leading contemporary society down a spiritual abyss that leaves many feeling lonely, alienated, and ill. In their view, the failure of morals and ethics to keep pace with an impersonal technology threatens the fabric and continuity of society. Such suspicion and distrust of science and modernization often result in members finding the world threatening. New religions offer their adherents social, psychological, and emotional protection from the perceived harshness of the world.

Shinnyoen Hawaii, for example, is located in the heart of a Honolulu community near the university, shopping centers, and within short walking distance to the hustle and bustle of Waikiki. Yet members come to the temple regularly to receive spiritual guidance in dealing with what is often a tumultuous world. Tagawa Haruko is a typical Shinnyoen Hawaii follower and explains the role of Shinnyoen in her life:

Shinnyoen has indeed given me a new outlook on life. In these times of violence and disaster on all sides, compounded by the daily tension and pressure of our way of life, I cannot think of anything more secure and gratifying as the teachings of Shinnyoen. It has brought for me an inner sense of comfort and security along with a diminishing fear of death and the unknown...Life has become more tolerable, and the world seems to be less cruel...¹⁷

Two things are clear from the above testimony: the world is perceived as threatening and Shinnyoen offers support to its members in dealing with such a world. An important point here is that while the world is perceived as threatening the Shinnyoen follower does not wish to withdraw from society or build a protective shell to shield her from the world. This contrasts with new religions such as the Unification Church, Jehovah's Witness, and

¹⁷*The Nirvanians*, February 1979, number 96.

ISKCON that have the tendency to lead followers away from mainstream society, encouraging the formation of a separate community in which devotees can be safe from the threatening outside. Such new religions have strong world-renouncing tendencies and as a result often erect strong barriers between themselves and the rest of society. Shinnyoen and most other Japanese new religions do not engage in this practice but instead encourage their followers to participate in society because it is through such means that they can spread their message. In this regard Shinnyoen has resisted accommodating itself to the world without building a wall to protect itself from it.

Socialization of Young

As mentioned, Shinnyoen Hawaii has already begun to produce second and third generation members. Second and third generation members provide a whole new set of challenges for the religion as "provision must be made for effective socialization of those born into the faith. Lacking this, a movement will develop powerful internal pressures toward secularization."¹⁸ Stark suggests that one of the ways a new religion can keep their younger members is to find important things for them to do on behalf of their faith. As mentioned in the section on cultural continuity, Shinnyoen provides opportunities for its members to participate in cultural events and show off their faith. More importantly, Shinnyoen provides a social group for its young adult members through which they may focus their energies and faith in various activities. The young adult group has been a significant division in Shinnyoen since 1954 when Itô's daughters headed the youth association. The youth association has local chapters at the various branch temples abroad, the Hawaii chapter being especially active. At Shinnyoen Singapore the religion sponsors various activities for its young followers such as sports day, which is held at the beach to promote fun and fellowship. At Shinnyoen Hawaii the young adult division meets on a regular basis to discuss issues of faith and practice as they pertain to contemporary society.

¹⁸Stark (1987) p. 24.

However the young adults also gather in more casual situations, holding picnics, participating in local sports leagues, and helping out in various community events. The Shinnyoen taiko drum group is gaining somewhat of a reputation for itself as a respected performing group but there are also chorus and band groups available for young members to join. Such social activities help young followers bond with one another and keep their ties to the organization as well as allow them to build pride in their faith.

Benefits of Control

To the above eight points in Stark's theoretical model of religious success, we might consider adding another condition that will help determine a new religion's success abroad: providing members with a clear and attainable set of benefits. Assuming that most new religion followers are not born into the religion, the religion must provide potential converts with clear reasons for joining (and staying). Shinnyoen offers its followers and potential followers the opportunity to make sense out of situations that are seemingly non-sense, to be healed of physical and spiritual illnesses, and the opportunity for self-transformation. In other words, Shinnyoen offers its followers the benefits of control.

The rapid changes in contemporary society, heralded by technological advances and the breakdown of traditional social structures, have left many feeling alienated and intimidated. The so-called "new age boom"--the surge in psychic hotlines in the United States, the rise in popularity of occult magazines in Japan, and the large crowds wishing to consult mediums in Singapore--can be viewed as a response (and promotion?) by popular culture to meet the need for respite from powerlessness, irritability, and isolation that have engulfed many in contemporary society. Not surprisingly followers of Japanese new religions also turn to their religions for help in addressing these issues.

Despite the diversity of teachings and practices of religious organizations abroad, one of the main draws of Japanese new religions is the opportunity they offer converts to gain

some sense of control over particular aspects of their lives, if not entire destinies. An American Shinnyoen follower at the dedication of the Shinnyoen USA temple in San Francisco, California, for example discovered that, "Because of Shinnyo-En, the burden of suffering, whose existence I wasn't even aware of before, has become lighter. The pain and craziness of life continue but I feel much calmer now, and can deal with life better..."¹⁹ Such sentiments are echoed by an American Sôka Gakkai member, who found that "In Nichiren Buddhism, I can apply and get benefit. I am in control of my own life and I find my own qualities."²⁰ In Europe too, Mahikari members utilize the magico-religious technique of okiyome to "complement the traditional limits of rationality and control, and to gain complete mastery over reality."²¹

Early studies of Japanese new religions focused on particular practices and emphases common to the new religions as a means to understanding the groups.²² Hardacre suggests, however, that isolated traits such as healing, chanting for practical benefits, spiritual counseling, and ethical teachings are not primarily what many new religions share, but a common worldview that underlies their belief structure.²³ An underlying construct is necessary to support the transformation from non-sense to sense, and the worldview espoused by Japanese new religions functions as this structural support. This worldview provides the adherents of many Japanese new religions with the means to comprehend and deal with extraordinary experiences and events, including illness and self-transformation. In short, the worldview espoused by many Japanese new religions allows believers the opportunities to be responsible for, and take control of, their personal lives. In this regard they differ from many of the established or traditional Japanese religions.²⁴ Abiding by the worldview of Japanese new religions, where very little is happenstance and most is under the

¹⁹*The Nirvana*, November 1992, no. 262, p. 3.

²⁰Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 82

²¹Cornille (1991) p. 274.

²²For example Thomsen (1963) and McFarland (1967).

²³Hardacre (1986) p. 8.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

control of one's faith, is comforting for many in modern society and, as will become clear in this section, is a feature important to new religion converts.

In an effort to exercise control over one's world, events are explained by the religion and understood by the convert in a particular manner, no matter how irrational they may sometimes seem to non-members. Such explanations may be based on an ideology that includes a hierarchy of deities who have responsibility for the various realms of existence, or a hermeneutic scheme where character problems are interpreted as dust particles on the soul, clouding the emergence of one's true nature. Whatever the explanation, the underlying worldview proffered by Japanese new religions has the aim of reining in experiences outside the believers' sphere of understanding, rendering them less traumatic and more palatable. In early spring 1996, for example, tragedy struck Shinnyoen Hawaii when a beloved staff member and taiko drum practitioner died during a Shinnyoen public performance in Honolulu. "Glen" was already suffering from asthma and a bout of pneumonia when he decided to go ahead and perform with the Shinnyoen taiko drum group on that particular day. His collapse in public was quite traumatic for those who witnessed the tragic incident and raised important issues that challenged the convictions of many Shinnyoen faithful. Had Glen been under the protection of the Shinnyoen spiritual world and if so, why did this tragedy occur? This led to a deeper question of whether or not the Shinnyoen faith is indeed effective in procuring "salvation" for its followers. In the days immediately following Glen's death, there was understandably some confusion among members concerning the validity of the Shinnyoen teaching. However, believers thrown into extreme anxiety ridden situations without readily available answers, are likely to accept (at least initially) the interpretations espoused by their religious leaders. In other words, followers "will reinterpret external realities to make them fit with the internal logic and ideology of their movement."²⁵ Therefore when I discussed the tragic incident with certain senior members and lineage parents in Shinnyoen, not surprisingly an interpretation of the affair was already taking

²⁵Reader (1996) p. 98.

shape. Instead of dying alone, without meaning, and uncared for like so many in the world, Glen had passed away doing something which he truly enjoyed and in the company of those who truly loved him. Moreover, he had died while serving his religion--surely a high honor that will gain him merit in the Shinnyoen spiritual world. This then was certainly an example of bakkudaiju (blessing) given by the Shinnyoen spiritual hierarchy, and evidence that Glen was always in the spiritual care of the holy Itô family. The manner of Glen's death was now seen as a blessing and something to be grateful for instead of a tragedy questioning the validity of the Shinnyoen faith. The Shinnyoen worldview had mitigated some of the terribleness of the incident for Glen's family and friends.

A personal testimonial given at Shinnyoen Hawaii (which was later edited for the group's publication) further illustrates the process of how the Shinnyoen worldview transforms non-sense into sense, tragedy into blessing. The blessing in turn facilitated the deepening of the commitment level of the affected believers.

Mr. and Mrs. Takaki were Shinnyoen members for over ten years when Mrs. Takaki was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time (the first motivated the Takakis to join Shinnyoen). Shortly before his wife died, Mr. Takaki had participated in the religion's special spiritual training in hopes of a miracle recovery, but this did not occur. After repeated bouts of hospitalization it became evident that Mrs. Takaki would not pull through. Whereas some might see this as the failure of Shinnyoen to protect its members, a sign of impotence and a lack of control by the religion, the Takakis interpreted this as otherwise:

Her time was approaching and we began calling the family together. Seeing everyone gather at the hospital, she asked me if she was going to die soon. I didn't know what to say until she told me she wasn't afraid anymore. One by one, she held everyone's hand and said, 'I love you, thank you for everything.' We all cried but she didn't shed a tear. About three a.m. on the

22nd of January, 1991, she told me she was ready to go. I told her she was in Kyodoin-sama's hands now. She nodded and went to sleep.

That day, she passed away peacefully. Her doctors praised her as a patient and human being and also said it was amazing she had lived this long. She had received one of the greatest of all things, life. The *bakku-daiju* extended to us had allowed my wife to live over five years longer than she would have otherwise...

This wonderful teaching of Kyoshu-sama continues on not only during life but also after death. It is eternal. I have often been comforted when I have sat and chanted in front of the altar whenever I needed to be with my wife. I feel so close to her and I don't think that would have been possible without the teachings we receive in Shinnyo-En.

Our family has become closer and the bonds have never been stronger. One of my daughters kept dreaming about my wife and we received Sesshin about it...Our children were told to follow the Seventeen Teachings of Shojuin.

Through the wondrous Shinnyo Teaching and Sesshin, we are blessed that we can somehow communicate with the spiritual world. I have dreamed of her and when I pray and offer incense to my wife, I know she is smiling. I have realized how important the spiritual world is for people, how it can help us, and how precious Sesshin really is...

I would like to sincerely thank Kyoshu-sama, Shojuin-sama, and Ryodoji-sama. Without the teachings of Shinnyo-En, what happened in our lives would not have been possible. Thank you all very much."²⁶

²⁶*The Nirvana*, July 1992, no. 258, pp. 4-5.

We can note several themes that emerge in the above testimonial or proof, as it is known in Shinnyoen. First, the worldview of Shinnyoen helped ease the loss of a loved one. A few may question why Mr. Takaki did not relinquish his Shinnyoen membership since the religion failed to save his wife, despite his devoted practice. Although his wife died, Mr. Takaki had until the end a worldview, a method for which to deal with such an infuriatingly incomprehensible disease as cancer. His alternative, the discarding of the Shinnyoen worldview, would have resulted in his being left alone to confront his tragic and confusing loss. Second, we can discern Shinnyoen deftly using the experience to strengthen the follower's and followers (both narrator and his audience) faith in the religion. Contact with Mr. Takaki's late wife became accessible and regulated through the Shinnyoen practice of sesshin. This virtually ensures Mr. Takaki of being a lifelong follower as intimate contact with his deceased wife can only be accomplished through Shinnyoen. Sesshin figures prominently in Shinnyoen for a number of reasons, not the least of which is spiritual guidance for followers seeking answers to troubling circumstances. Hence through sesshin, Shinnyoen was able to help Mr. Takaki form an interpretation of his wife's battle with cancer. Third, as a byproduct of this, the bonds among the Takaki family are much stronger. Though some may question the rationale behind the worldview proffered by new religions or the logic of followers' faith, it is clear from the above examples that the ability to explain the unexplainable, to make sense of the non-sense, then, is one of the most vital functions Japanese new religions play in the lives of their believers.

Although the above proof is an example of a follower not being healed of a life-ending illness, the promise of healing is a major reason why people join Japanese new religions. The promise of healing transforms the individual through the transformation of the illness itself (and vice versa). Illness and hardship in Japanese new religions are no longer perceived as merely problems to be rid of, but instead are transformed into opportunities to cultivate the self or polish the soul. Indeed, in an advertisement placed in one of Honolulu's daily newspapers on November 23, 1996, Seichô no Ie publicized a sermon with the theme,

"Difficulties Are the Grindstone to Polish Your Soul."²⁷ This theme, repeated in the teachings of a number of Japanese new religions, places the responsibility of changing one's circumstances in the lap of the believer. In short, followers are allowed to take control of their situations. By polishing the soul on the grindstone of difficulties, followers can take active measures to begin the healing process. This process may not always cure one of disease in the conventional sense, but it allows for a meaningful change of attitude towards the suffering entailed. According to the work of one scholar of Japanese new religions, "Because the cause of all diseases is in the *kokoro* (heart, mind), only treatment of that source can produce a real cure."²⁸ In other words, transformation of the self leads to healing i.e. the removal of suffering. However, the Seichô no Ie advertisement suggests the converse is also true: suffering leads to the transformation of self. For this opportunity members are grateful, as the following testimony by a Kurozumikyô adherent illustrates:

I realize that all the times I truly suffered have become like precious jewels to me. Now they are a source of joy...There were times when my trials were like storms and swords, when my suffering was more than I could endure, and at times my heart rose in anger and hatred. But all of this pain made my spirit stronger, more courageous and brave, more able to endure. Those who made me suffer trained my spirit in mercy and gratitude. To those who made me suffer I owe more than I can repay, and when I think of my debt to them, I am filled with the spirit of repentance and gratitude...²⁹

Members of Japanese new religions learn to trust their religion and its teachings during both times of uncertainty and prosperity. They may confer upon the religion the authority to guide and assist them in most matters and as a consequence lead happy, fulfilling lives. Followers

²⁷ *Honolulu Advertiser*, November 23, 1996.

²⁸ Hardacre (1986) p. 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 184.

are not easily shaken in their faith by unfortunate incidents. Though situations may be anxious and circumstances unfortunate, members generally do not consider leaving the organization but instead are grateful that matters are not worse. Indeed, such trying conditions are understood as opportunities to deepen their practice and faith in the religion. A Shinnyoen publication tells existing members that what "many followers often have trouble with is thinking that no misfortune will befall a person who practices the Shinnyo teaching. Rather, the point of religious practice is to have the kind of faith that becomes stronger even if one has to face sorrow. The teachings of Shinnyo-en are such that they can enable anyone to do so, no matter how painful the ache in one's heart."³⁰

It is clear the transformation of self and the transformation of illness and hardship are intricately related. More importantly to Japanese new religion followers however, are the practical benefits received as a result of both transformations. Every Japanese new religion I have visited has had miraculous stories to tell of believers cured of cancer, near blindness, etc. However for the most part the benefits received center around the more mundane, although just as important, aspects of daily living. In a group discussion at Shinnyoen UK in October 1993, for example, testimonies by members who had experienced the efficacy of the Shinnyoen teachings were miracles of a different sort. One woman told of her being able to change her husband's nasty temper by being more patient and serving towards him. A young man told of how he is no longer as quick to criticize others while another young man told of how he now helps his mother around the house.

Japanese new religions may utilize the link between hardship and self-transformation, illness and healing, to their proselytizing advantage. The idea of undergoing hardship for the sake of self-improvement fits nicely into the religion's recruitment strategy, as the religion often ties an individual's healing i.e. self-transformation with successful proselytism i.e. spiritual training. To effect a complete reorientation of the self in Japanese new religions involves dedicated training. In many cases training to polish one's soul or accumulate

³⁰*The Nirvana* , June 1995, no. 293, p. 1.

spiritual merit comes in the form of proselytism. At Shinnyoen, followers are taught that their own salvation rests on successful proselytizing.³¹ The onus therefore is placed on the believer to make successful proselytizing efforts in order to procure the desired healing. Having placed the responsibility for successful healing on the believers' shoulders and linking proselytizing as a form of training designed to bring about transformation, Japanese new religions may deftly lead followers to deeper stages of commitment and growth abroad.

3. CONVERSION MOTIFS

While Stark's theoretical model of religious success focuses mainly on the organizational aspects of a new religion, Lofland and Skonovd (1981) emphasize the individual follower's conversion experience in examining how religions successfully procure new members. Lofland and Skonovd distinguish six motifs of conversion to help account for the personal transformation process individuals experience when joining a new religion. The six motifs of conversion are identified as the intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and the coercive. The last motif, also referred to as "brainwashing," has been criticized by scholars and rejected as a thesis to explain why some people join new religions.³² The arguments against coercion are convincing and moreover I have not witnessed any evidence of coercion as a means to gain followers in Shinnyoen.³³ This chapter therefore will not deal with coercion as a conversion motif. Also, as was done with Stark's theoretical framework, significant adjustments to Lofland and Skonovd's model are made to better view and analyze the transmission of Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions abroad. In particular we will look at conversion motifs as they are generated from the organization instead of how they are received by followers. In other words we will focus

³¹Shinnyoen (1992b) p. 81.

³²See for example Barker (1995) and Hexham and Poewe (1997).

³³While coercion may not be a likely means of converting someone, it has been alleged by former members of different new religious groups that coercion was used to cause people to stay in the group or to do more training.

on the fashion in which Japanese new religions package their messages to attract potential converts.

Intellectual

Lofland and Skonovd state that "The 'intellectual' mode of conversion commences with individual, private investigation of possible 'new grounds of being,' alternate theodicies, personal fulfillment, etc. by reading books, watching television, attending lectures, and other impersonal or 'disembodied' ways in which it is increasingly possible sans social involvement to become acquainted with alternative ideologies and ways of life."³⁴ In Hawaii a number of Japanese new religions are quite active in sending their messages across to individuals via the print and radio media. In fact one of the traits oft repeated regarding Japanese new religions is their adept use of media advertising and utilization of modern technology to their benefit.³⁵ Book publishing, radio spots, and newspaper advertisements are some of the more popular ways Japanese new religions reach out to the general public, but special seminars and video presentations are other means the groups appeal to the individual's intellect. In Hawaii, groups such as Honbushin, Shinrankai, and Konkôkyô secure 15-30 minute time slots on local radio stations to deliver sermons and pass along other bits of information while other Japanese new religions, namely Seichô no Ie and Tenrikyô, post advertisements in the local papers on a regular basis hoping to stimulate and attract local interest in this way.³⁶ Still other Japanese new religions, Kôfuku no Kagaku and Agonshû for example, have set up their own publishing firms to promote themselves through the numerous books their founders have written. One can find their books on the shelves of several book shops in Singapore and Hawaii. Many other groups publish magazines and other reading materials to entice interested parties to learn more about the religion and these

³⁴Lofland and Skonovd (1981) p. 376.

³⁵See for example Reader (1991), Astley (1995), and Shimazono (1995).

³⁶In Hawaii in 1996 a 15 minute time slot cost \$150 while 30 minutes cost \$250. Posting advertisements in the local newspapers started at \$50.

can often be had for free when visiting the religions. Literature ranging from monographs to journals to magazines can also be found in college and university libraries. Other less formal means of stimulating one's intellectual interest include posting flyers and posters in restaurants, on university and college campuses, and even on bus stop benches in an effort to attract potential followers. One particular flyer announced the presentation of "special seminars" by a Kôfuku no Kagaku lecturer, focusing on such topics as "The Secret Meaning of Spiritual Perspective" and "The Way of Obtaining the True Wealth." The aggressive proselytizing efforts of this religion even extends to the group reserving an entire movie theater for its video presentations.

Not all Japanese new religions engage in active advertising, however. Shinnyoen is one such religion that does not utilize the conventional radio and print media to promote itself to the public. In a previous chapter I have suggested that Shinnyoen does not engage in media advertising due to its organizational structure. The organizational composition of Shinnyoen, consisting of multiplying cell groups based on personal contact, is in large part responsible for the effective expansion of its membership base in Japan. Outsiders joining the religion without having first been screened and "connected" by already existing members are therefore considered a threat to the lineage system and a danger to the institutional solidarity of the religion. This does not mean, however, that Shinnyoen does not utilize modern technology and print media to advance its message. At its branch temples abroad, Shinnyoen has set up a complex audio and video system that allows the overseas, non-Japanese contingent to view live performances of certain special Shinnyoen events in Japan. Through the use of such technological advances non-Japanese speaking members in Shinnyoen can simultaneously participate in a number of services with their counterparts in Japan. The capacity to view live the Shinnyoen leaders and listen to moralizing sermons as if actually being there, helps to deepen the commitment level of followers abroad.

Although Shinnyoen does not publish books and magazines for public consumption, the religion does have its own publishing department which produces reading material for

distribution among its legion of followers. Brochures, pamphlets, and newsletter are often free while monographs and translations of Itô's works can be purchased at the temples' reception area. Books and other reading material allow individual followers on their own time to further acquaint themselves with the religion and explore its teachings deeper.

Shinnyoen considers itself to be an esoteric Buddhist religion. The religion claims to possess powerful, esoteric knowledge and chants available only to certain high-ranking followers and spiritual counseling, which taps such knowledge through the religion's mediums, is only accessible to the practicing Shinnyoen faithful. As mentioned, non-members are refused permission to enter the temple proper and except for tales designed to pique the intellectual curiosity of outsiders, very little of the Shinnyoen teaching is explained. This form of public relations, often employed by groups with esoteric leanings in their teachings, unintentionally or otherwise has the result of titillating the intellect and interest of non-members thereby drawing potential converts to the group. Oda Susumu, in a psychological study of Japanese new religions, comments that many of the young in Japan consider joining lesser known groups fashionably attractive.³⁷ By shunning the public at large therefore, the esoteric groups have the converse effect of attracting a sizable number of interested people, especially the young. Ironically, groups which rely on their esoteric character to attract converts also run the risk of becoming too popular thereby forfeiting their esoteric claim.³⁸

Other efforts undertaken by Japanese new religions to appeal to the public's intellect include sponsoring seminars and academic programs. Sôka Gakkai, Kôfuku no Kagaku, and Risshô Kôseikai, are some of the more prominent groups that have ventured into this area. Sponsoring seminars and other academic activities has the favorable effect of linking the group with an elite segment of society, thereby bestowing on the religion a certain status of

³⁷ Oda (1992) p. 35.

³⁸ This seems to have been the case with the "spoon-bending" phenomenon of Uri Geller in Japan. The interest of the country's many young people in Geller's esoteric display of magical powers reached such a level that most of Japan's young had attempted to mimic his telekinetic ability at one time or another. This led to a backlash and a loss of interest in the phenomenon (Inoue 1994, p. 4).

legitimacy. This point is especially important for some of the newer groups and for those held in questionable light by the general populace. Hence winning the support or allegiance of academics does much in their campaign efforts towards societal legitimacy. Kôfuku no Kagaku for example, takes pride in naming certain professors and scholars among its membership while Mahikari flaunts a particular Ph.D. authored book praising the group's virtues. The parading of academic names is designed to impress both those within the organization and those without, and is clearly then to be counted among the tools of propagation utilized by a number of Japanese new religions.

Shinnyoen also engages in activities that appeal directly to the academic community. According to *In Unison*, a newsletter of the Shinnyoen Foundation, "The Foundation has been researching and supporting various programs and approaches to engaging youth in meaningful acts of service within the contexts of school and community."³⁹ In concrete terms support from the Foundation includes providing scholarships and financial assistance to not only colleges and universities but elementary, middle, and high schools as well.

Mystical

Another common theme among many Japanese new religions is the emphasis given to the experience of mysticism and miracles, or more precisely, to the power which produces such miracles. The emphasis on the experience of the mystical seems to be particularly attractive to the young in society. Ashida Tetsurô posits this correlation between the emphasis on experiencing the mysterious and the large proportion of the young among the "new" new religions:

All people long to validate their existence as significant, whether that be in the sense of their individual existence itself, or in the relationships they have with others and the world. But the self-validation based on money and possessions

³⁹Fall 1997, vol. 2, no. 2, p.1.

within the modern "affluent society" is of its very nature indirect, and an ephemeral thing. In particular, for younger generations, to whom "affluence" has become a matter of course, the *spiritual* deficiency and insecurity resulting from a lack of confidence in one's existence is frequently the more serious issue. As a result, it is not difficult to understand why moderns--and youngsters in particular--who think they want to directly experience the real sense of living, go to (new new-) religious groups.⁴⁰

Scholars also trace the appeal of mysticism in contemporary society to its rapidly changing and isolating nature. Shimazono Susumu writes that many people are:

increasingly placing their hopes in spirituality, some turning to tradition...that emphasize morality and religious ethics, and others trying a more Buddhistic approach that recognizes mysticism, shamanistic meditation, extrasensory experiences, and other techniques for psychological control. Although these approaches are quite different, they share a common foundation in a dissatisfaction with the rationalism and consumerism of modern life.⁴¹

New religions have also taken advantage of the dissatisfaction with rationalism and the yearning for things mystical and spiritual. Aum Shinrikyô, for example, grabbed attention with its claims of supernatural abilities, including the capacity to resist gravity and hold one's breath for long periods underwater. While perhaps not as dramatic, Shinnyoen also offers its followers the opportunity to experience the mysterious and achieve spiritual powers.

As we have seen in a previous chapter, one of the main pillars of practice in Shinnyoen is the training whereby followers consult the religion's spiritual mediums. The

⁴⁰ Ashida (1994) p. 192.

⁴¹ Shimazono (1995) pp. 411-412.

mediums themselves begin as ordinary members but reach their spiritual level through certain prescribed practices of the religion. In the mid-1990s the religion had over 1,200 spiritual mediums in its ranks, with the promise of developing more. The possibility of becoming a spiritual medium therefore is a very realistic goal for many Shinnyoen followers and is encouraged by the religion. However, the attainment of the spiritual rank is no easy task. Despite Mullins' suggestion that in Shinnyoen "One can become a spiritual 'superman' with only a modest amount of effort and training" in my study of the religion I have found that reinôsha have on the average reached their spiritual level by devoting an immense amount of time, money, and effort to their practice.⁴² While Shinnyoen followers are encouraged, through faithful devotion to its practices, to strive for the level of reinôsha, most believers do not succeed to this spiritual rank. In my view it is a difficult task to attain the reinôsha level, and the fact that the average Shinnyoen medium has devoted ten or more years of intense commitment to reach this spiritual rank supports this conclusion.

Shinnyoen members I have talked to tell me their wish to reach the level of reinôsha is based on their desire to help people. While I do not doubt such sentiments, that Shinnyoen mediums are equipped with extraordinary abilities can also certainly be considered part of its appeal. According to the group's publications, reaching the level of reinôsha allows followers to acquire the following six *divine faculties* : 1) the ability to go anywhere or transform oneself/objects at will, 2) the ability to see anything at any distance, 3) the ability to hear any sound at any distance, 4) the ability to know other people's thoughts, 5) the ability to know the former lives of oneself and others; and 6) the ability to destroy all impurities and unwholesome passions.⁴³

For Shinnyoen members who have not reached the reinôsha rank, however, experiencing the mysterious is still available to them through the practice of sesshin. These followers have the opportunity to contact the spiritual world through fellow believers who

⁴² Mullins (1992) p. 345.

⁴³ *The Nirvana*, May 1992, no. 256, p. 2.

have acquired the ability to function as conduits. That the possibility of contacting and experiencing the mysterious is a strong attraction in Shinnyoen, is evidenced by the increased number of followers on days when sesshin is offered, be it in Hawaii, the UK, Singapore, or Japan.

Experimental

Previous studies of Japanese new religious groups have demonstrated that a strong motive for joining is the crisis of illness and the promise of healing the religions provide.⁴⁴ The promise of healing, be it social, emotional, psychological, or physiological, has long been a point of attraction for religions and is an appeal rendered more acute during times of crisis. During the second world war, for example, many first generation Japanese in Hawaii flocked to healing groups which promised health, salvation, and safe return for their heroic sons.⁴⁵ The promise of healing continues today to be a powerful attraction for Japanese new religions and hence is part of many proselytizing campaigns abroad. MOA Hawaii regularly advertises its method of healing, *jôrei*, over the radio while Tenrikyô, one of the oldest of the Japanese new religions, utilizes the print media to advertise *sazuke*, or the transference of divine healing energies, at its Hawaii headquarters.

Those who are attracted by such campaigns and turn to Japanese new religions for healing are not mainly the naive or those on the fringes of society, but are often ordinary individuals who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances. At Shinnyoen UK, for example, are a number of college students who joined the religion for help in dealing with a series of misfortune. "Akiko" had experienced a succession of critical conditions--a frightening bout of botulism, a severe leg infection which resulted in near amputation, and most terrifying of all, a diagnosis of AIDS (the diagnosis was later changed)--which convinced her that her physical problems were manifestations of something deeper, more

⁴⁴See for example Davis (1980) and Hardacre (1984).

⁴⁵Hunter (1971) p. 186.

spiritual. Akiko's belief that her series of close encounters with tragedy was more than mere coincidence made her more receptive to religious persuasion and soon she was connected to Shinnyoen through a friend. Once in the religion she promptly began receiving spiritual guidance from consultations with Shinnyoen mediums and soon became relatively free of physical problems. At the Mahikari branches in Singapore and Hawaii too I met average working people seeking solutions to life's ills and crises. There were those suffering from depression, difficult relationships, and a host of physical ailments. Many whom I talked to had come to the dōjō seeking relief after exhausting the more traditional means of medical help. Of such Mahikari practitioners Davis writes that "okiyome...is a technique for dealing with what cannot be dealt with by science, technology, legislation, hard work, or other human means."⁴⁶

People often turn to the new religions after exhausting more conventional means of finding a cure.⁴⁷ In such cases the new religions are perceived as offering a last hope and hence people are willing to experiment with them. Indeed, one woman I met in Singapore was a young mother whose daughter's face was grossly scarred as the result of a terrible car accident. She had brought her daughter to a Mahikari off-shoot group in hopes of restoring her daughter's beauty since medical surgery had failed to repair her daughter's face. As mentioned in an earlier section, those who turn to the new religions for healing are provided a worldview to interpret and deal with their crisis. The opportunity to make sense out of what was until then non-sense and the ability to gain some degree of control over one's situation is a powerful motive for staying with a religion.

That people turn to religious explanations for crises is not surprising. The more interesting question is why do they turn to the particular religion that they do when faced with illness, misfortune, and the like. In the case of Shinnyoen, the answer is often simple: many followers were directed to the religion through the influence and recommendation of family,

⁴⁶Davis (1980) p. 110.

⁴⁷Catherine Cornille's study of Mahikari in Europe showed that Mahikari became the last hope of people wishing to be cured (1991, p. 273).

friends, and co-workers. However several members I talked to in Singapore, the UK, and Hawaii told me that they tried other forms of religious practices before coming across Shinnyoen. A local Chinese Singaporean woman in her twenties, for example, told me that before joining Shinnyoen she had sought the help of Chinese mediums to help her address various problems. I have met Shinnyoen members in the UK and Hawaii who have also tried other religions before turning to Shinnyoen. It is probably safe to say that if Shinnyoen is unable to help her and others like her with their particular problems they may turn to another religion for assistance. If Japanese new religions abroad attract followers on an experimental, "try it and see" basis, it becomes particularly important for Shinnyoen and others to be effective in helping followers overcome problems.

Sometimes Japanese new religions seem to propose an illness or problem for which they already have the cure. At a Shinnyoen Hawaii home meeting in March 1998, for example, members sat in a circle and each person shared how the teaching had saved him or her from potential tragedy. Of the nine followers seated on the floor, seven tales of "near tragedy" were merely simple stories of how automobile accidents were avoided at the last second or car "crashes" turned out to be only slight bumps. Two followers did not have such harrowing tales to tell but this was interpreted as proof of the spiritual protection they were under.

Shinnyoen is a religion specializing in esoteric rituals designed to appease suffering ancestral spirits. Hence it is not surprising to find that the religion should trace the source of many of its devotees' problems to such ancestral spirits. On October 29, 1993 I received sesshin for the first time at Shinnyoen UK and indeed my ancestral spirits played a prominent role in my spiritual guidance.

After performing the necessary hand gestures that allowed the Shinnyoen medium to enter into communication with the Shinnyo divine world, the reinôsha soon began relaying to me spiritual words of guidance. The reinôsha grunted a few more times (evidence, perhaps, that my spiritual guide's words were involuntary and not of his own) then suggested I was

depressed. When I disagreed with his evaluation he justified himself by claiming that while I may not have realized I was suffering from depression, messages from the Shinnyo world indicated that an ancestral spirit on my father's side was in despair. This unappeased ancestral spirit was preventing me from being as happy as I could be. For the sake of my ancestor I was encouraged to have a special ritual performed. Not doing so would allow the ancestral spirit to continue its suffering and reap havoc in my life.

Why would ordinary people be inclined to believe the extraordinary claims of sesshin? As mentioned for those who seek the new religions for healing, the religions provide a means through which they can maintain a degree of control over their own lives and not surrender their well-being to the unnerving consequences of fate. Also, if the new religions are perceived to be one's last chance to be healed, there is a natural tendency to accept and believe the worldview and practice promulgated by the religions. Although those seeking the new religions may not be able to ultimately affect the outcome of their ailments they at least are afforded the opportunity to actively participate in their lot. From this they may gain some understanding of the spiritual causes behind their predicament. This understanding, whether real or imagined, temporary or otherwise, offers comfort and sympathy to the individual which may be of therapeutic benefit.

Affectional

Lofland and Skonovd state that "personal attachments or strong liking for practicing believers is central to the conversion process."⁴⁸ This theme plays a central role in Shinnyoen. Members are constantly encouraged to be compassionate and sincere when dealing with others in order to expand what Shinnyoen leaders and followers refer to as "the circle of joy." As mentioned in a previous chapter, the kindheartedness and sincerity of followers is what the religion hopes will attract converts. However part of the function of the organization abroad also addresses Lofland and Skonovd's affectional motif.

⁴⁸Lofland and Skonovd (1981) p. 380.

Japanese religions abroad have often times functioned as community centers, providing not only places to socialize but sanctuaries for the ethnic and cultural identity of Japanese expatriates. The role of community center is an especially important one for Japanese nationals struggling with the necessary adjustments required for living abroad. Hoshino Eiki, for example, looked at Japanese Buddhist temples in California and found that "What Japanese immigrants desire from Buddhist temples in America is a place where they can be relieved of their daily sufferings resulting from being in a foreign country, even if only temporarily, and a place which represents and symbolizes Japanese culture."⁴⁹ What Hoshino writes of Buddhist temples in America in particular is true to a large extent of the function of many Japanese new religions abroad in general. As I indicated in a previous chapter, during my study of Shinnyoen UK I found that for a number of followers, the religion offered an abode where they could speak in their mother tongue, enjoy Japanese meals, share the latest news and gossip of friends and family back home; and feel the security of being surrounded by like-minded people. Several Japanese women I met in London explained to me that these qualities indeed were what initially attracted them to Shinnyoen UK. This was also true to some extent of Japanese expatriate followers at Shinnyoen Singapore. Clearly then an important role Shinnyoen abroad plays is the mitigating of culture shock for Japanese expatriates while simultaneously helping to preserve their ethnic identity.

The deep ties Japanese religions abroad have with Japanese culture may later work to their disadvantage, however. Buddhist temples in Hawaii, for example, are so strongly perceived as vestiges of ethnic culture and as a consequence many are in decline. Buddhism in Hawaii is divided by ethnicity more than sect, hence Japanese attend Japanese Buddhist temples, Chinese pray at Chinese Buddhist temples, and Vietnamese at Vietnamese temples. Because of this tendency, as a particular group acclimatizes to the American way of life there is less need to seek out its cultural heritage. Such is the case with younger generations of Japanese Americans, who are no longer compelled to look to religion for their cultural

⁴⁹Hoshino (1983) p. 34.

identity. As a consequence Japanese Buddhist temples in Hawaii that have not been able to adjust to contemporary society have seen a significant and steady decline in membership over the years. Moreover, when a Japanese new religion abroad functions mostly as a community center, efforts to proselytize non-Japanese are impeded. The case of Konkôkyô in North America clearly illustrates this problem. The Konkôkyô church in Fresno, California was so identified as a Japanese community center that some members were possessive of the church to the extent that they guarded it from all outside influences. Inoue cites the case of a person of Hispanic background who left the church after being made to feel unwelcome by the Japanese American members.⁵⁰

The appeal of Japanese new religions abroad lies not only in their role as places that preserve culture, however, but also in their organizational structure which fosters closer human ties. At Gedatsukai Hawaii, after every service the small circle of followers stay for an hour or so (twice as long as the service itself) sharing tea, sweets, and each other's company. That the post-service gathering is an attractive aspect of the religion is attested to by the fact that several members come to the church near or at the conclusion of the service, just in time for dessert. At Shinnyoen, home meetings, picnics, youth activities, and the various clubs serve a similar function of allowing members to enjoy each others company in a relaxed and casual atmosphere.

Winston Davis found in his study of Mahikari that the most important way members learned of the religion was through the influence of family and friends, which accounted for 61 percent of Mahikari's recruitment success.⁵¹ Shinnyoen has adopted this proselytizing recipe for success and has within its organization a structure that support this emphasis. As is clear by now Shinnyoen is highly centralized in its organizational structure, utilizing cell groups within the religion to sustain members' interest, encourage response, and stimulate performance. Cell groups are formed after a member has successfully recruited a number of

⁵⁰Inoue (1991b) p. 149.

⁵¹Davis (1980) p. 100.

converts--Shinnyoen branches abroad set the number at 20--and relies on the sempai-kôhai system (elder-junior) to effectively deepen the commitment level of followers. Not only do cell groups serve to instruct and mold members into faithful believers but they also provide followers with a sense of belonging, stable relationships, and responsibility as well. This combination can be viewed by both Japanese and non-Japanese alike as an attractive remedy for the weakening of traditional human ties facilitated by the rapid modernization and urbanization of contemporary society. Perhaps this explains why Hardacre found that for many members of Japanese new religions, the main purpose for attending services was not to hear a sermon but to meet other members.⁵² Likewise, in the words of one female new religion member in Britain, "I think that when I first started I was very lonely, and by being a part of NSUK I was kept out and about. I felt I had a lot of friends and acquaintances."⁵³

Revivalist

Strictly speaking, Shinnyoen does not emphasize the phenomenon known as revivalist conversion, whose central feature consists of "profound experiences which occur within the context of an emotionally aroused crowd."⁵⁴ There are occasions however when Shinnyoen and other Japanese new religions intend to have a transforming affect on a group of followers through emotionally driven experiences. One way this is done is by the sharing of testimonials or proofs as it is known in Shinnyoen.

Sharing personal experiences with members and non-members alike is a major form of proselytism common to many Japanese new religions. The telling of extraordinary events in order to convince others of benefits accrued as a member of a religion differs slightly, in terms of its hoped for consequences, according to the storyteller's audience. Personal narratives delivered outside religious settings that target non-members largely have the aim of impressing listeners with the wonder and power of the teaching thereby producing potential

⁵² Hardacre (1994) p. 112.

⁵³ Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 72.

⁵⁴ Lofland and Skonovd (1981) p. 380.

converts for the religion. For those who are already rank and file members however, didactic and passionate monologues that occur within the institutional framework serve a slightly different function. In Reiyūkai and Zenrinkai, for example, testimonials are utilized to bind members and deepen their commitment to the religion.⁵⁵ In Shinnyoen too, testimonials serve the dual purpose of spreading the Shinnyoen belief in the hopes of attracting new members (otasuke) while strengthening the faith of existing members (proofs). The latter is accomplished by simultaneously guiding fellow believers in an informal manner to a proper understanding of the practice as well as enforcing and affirming their decision to join the group. As Richard Anderson suggests, testimonials help followers to hear about the possible, see or experience the possible, and vow to seek the possible.⁵⁶

During temple or church services, for example, members may hear emotional stories by their leaders and fellow believers of personal triumph and transformation, underlining the spiritual powers of the religion that have made such changes possible. Often testimonials are highly emotional in nature and it is difficult not to be moved. This becomes especially so when others in the listening audience react emotionally to the given proof. Soon most, if not all, followers present are affected by the intense feelings generated and a revivalist atmosphere takes shape.

Not surprisingly testimonials vary in style among religious groups. Certain Japanese new religions, Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō for example, have largely unstructured presentations that allow personal testimonies to have a relaxed and spontaneous feel. Those presented in groups such as Shinnyoen and Mahikari, on the other hand, are "carefully orchestrated didactic performances encouraged and monitored by those in positions of power in the organizations (they are submitted to those in authority before publication or public presentation for revision) that strategically employ sentiment," thereby leaving little room for misunderstanding and mistake.⁵⁷ In my view both types are effective in moving followers to

⁵⁵See for example Anderson (1992) and Hardacre (1984).

⁵⁶Anderson (1992) p. 322.

⁵⁷McVeigh (1995) p. 67.

deeper levels of commitment. To help us get a better understanding of testimonials in Japanese new religions, we turn to examples from Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō and Shinnyoen.

Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō. At the Hawaii headquarters of Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō, a typical service is divided into four parts: opening, testimonials, sermon by the foundress, and closing. During the presentation of testimonials, which may last up to 45 minutes, anyone with a personal experience to share may address the group. Usually the first person to give a testimony is the elected leader for that day's service. He or she, with no proper script to follow, will speak into a microphone and share for a few minutes how the religion's teaching is affecting or helping his or her life. The leader will then lay down the microphone and open the floor to the rest of the members, who have been seated on the floor quietly listening. Without much hesitation, a fellow member will clap twice, signaling that he or she has something to share with the rest of the group. The member is then passed the microphone and begins to relay an uncensored and unmonitored personal account of the teaching. Like the leader, members follow no script and some of the testimonies may last 10 to 15 minutes. Sometimes there is much rambling as speakers seem to be forming ideas in their heads as they speak. This can sometimes lead to a confusing but nevertheless entertaining witness. Once a man in his mid-forties broke into uncontrollable laughter during his testimony when recalling a particular incident. Laughter being contagious, soon all members were laughing though no one knew quite exactly why. The laughing lasted for a good five minutes before the follower finally regained his composure. While members' presentations may be unstructured and at times chaotic, the spontaneity and emotion involved in a Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō testimony often times more than make up for the lack of precision and formality found in the testimonials of other religious groups.⁵⁸

A wide range of topics, from the mundane to the serious, is covered by Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō followers but the underlying theme is consistent: membership in Tenshō Kōtai

⁵⁸This manner of spontaneous witnessing reflects Kitamura Sayo's (the founder of Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō) own candid and unpretentious style of witnessing, as she would often launch into song in the midst of her sermons.

Jingukyô has its privileges and this is something to be grateful for. Thus one woman told of how the power of the religion caused an unruly and cantankerous motorcyclist, who had been intimidating the neighborhood children by racing up and down the street without regard for their safety, to fall from his bike just when she had wished for it. Another woman shared an amusing anecdote, claiming that as a member of Tenshō Kôtai Jingukyô, she no longer has trouble grocery shopping but can find her items as soon as she enters the store; while yet another member presented a more somber testimony of overcoming critical illness with the help of her Tenshō Kôtai Jingukyô faith. Gratitude towards the foundress (Kitamura Sayo) was expressed in each testimonial and while the personal narratives could have easily been used to impress non-members, on this occasion they clearly had the function of reinforcing the belief system of existing members and deepening their commitment to the religion. In and of themselves the tales shared at the Tenshō Kôtai Jingukyô meeting were little more than followers reshaping external realities to match the worldview proffered by the religion. However when presented in a highly charged group atmosphere these accounts become powerful tools to motivate and energize followers.

Shinnyoen. In contrast to the spontaneity of a Tenshō Kôtai Jingukyô testimony, proofs (the Shinnyoen term for testimonials directed at existing members) in Shinnyoen are highly structured, modified, edited, re-edited, and rehearsed by individual members in order to present a clear and coherent account of their experiences in the religion.⁵⁹ This was made especially clear during a Shinnyoen Hawaii Young Adult event which I attended, held on the grounds of a beautiful botanical garden on September 3, 1994. During such events, members are taught by senior members how to construct positive and effective proofs for possible future use in services. In contrast to Tenshō Kôtai Jingukyô, where any member may get up in front of the group and begin sharing testimonies, followers in Shinnyoen may only present proofs at services if they are selected well ahead of time by the leaders of the religion.

⁵⁹In Shinnyoen, *proofs* are well structured, edited, rehearsed testimonials to be presented to other Shinnyoen followers while *otasuke*, are unrehearsed testimonials to be told to non-members.

Moreover there are certain criteria which must be met and each proof must follow an approved format. Thus at the Young Adult event Shinnyoen neophytes learned how to transform their personal experiences into well organized and effective proselytizing tools. According to an outline passed along to followers at this event, proofs offered by Shinnyoen members will generally contain the following five components: 1) an opening expression of gratitude, 2) an introductory statement concerning the subject of the proof, 3) the core of the proof, 4) the member's vow, and 5) a closing expression of gratitude. The core of the proof itself is further composed of five elements which address the following five questions: 1) what was your life like when you were "connected?" (Shinnyoen term meaning joined to the religion) 2) When you were connected did you obediently follow your guiding parent? What were you like? 3) What kind of experiences did you have after you started to follow the teaching? Which of the three practices did you do the most? (volunteer work, monetary offering, proselytizing) 4) How do you feel now? What is your life like now? 5) What do you plan to do? What is your vow for the future?

The following excerpts from an overseas follower's proof highlights some of the basic testimonial components:

Thanks to the special mercy shown to me by the spiritual world, I have been guided to this teaching and been able to elevate myself. I have also had the assistance of so many followers in the Teaching that if you learn nothing else from my experience, please understand that Shinnyo-en is a family ready to guide anyone to enlightenment. Shinnyo-en provides numerous paths to pursue help and enlightenment. Don't be too proud to seek assistance in pursuing a Buddha-centered life. That's how I was and I have learned to regret it.

I was connected to this teaching on December 28, 1986. In my case I wanted to marry my wife and could not get her parent's permission unless I

joined Shinnyo-en. So, after my first visit to the Osaka temple, I joined, figuring that I would never see Shinnyo-en or the Osaka temple ever again. I had been raised Catholic and had lost my belief in that faith and all organized religions for a variety of reasons. I had a simple belief in God and Christ and had little time for church or praying.

What I did have deep belief in was my superiority to just about everyone and everything. By the age of 32 I was the youngest vice president of a Fortune 500 company, had a luxury apartment in New York, and a house in Vermont. I was sure of everything I did and refused to listen to others. However, my outward success hid a very unhappy life: my parents both had died by this point, I had to raise three younger brothers and sisters, and my first marriage had ended in divorce. Even in caring for my siblings, I spent little time with them, feeling my only duty was to send them money. I felt my only obligation in life was to make money and to ignore the consequences of anything that interfered with my goals. When I met my wife, I was personally miserable and had allowed my weight to balloon from two hundred to three hundred pounds...

In October 1993 I went to San Francisco totally determined to elevate myself to *Daijo*.⁶⁰ For the second anniversary, I had been asked to do a special *gohoshi*⁶¹ for the Youth Association. After the request had originally come, my wife wrote me a note. In it she said simply, "Kyoshu-sama has given us so many children to guide. We have to become a foundation for young people in the USA since we don't have babies of our own. The young people are babies given to us by Sooya-sama. We have to help them. Please do this if you love me."

⁶⁰The first Shinnyoen spiritual rank above the beginner's level.

⁶¹Volunteer work in and around Shinnyoen temples.

Not only did I do *gohoshi* with great joy but I carried the note with me until I sat for *eza*,⁶² reading it right before the *eza* began. You can imagine my joy when I was elevated to *Daijo* and my wife was elevated to *Kangi* on the same day. It was the happiest day of our lives since we had gotten married.

Over the next few months, I became even more serious about this teaching. In my everyday life I tried to face problems with the faith that Kyoshu-sama had faced his problems with...When my spiritual words stated that I should do *gohoshi* at the Seattle and New York temple openings, I did so with great joy and without question...

Afterwards, I thought of everything this teaching has given me. My marriage has faced many trials, but become stronger due to my wife's unshakable faith. I have seen how being Buddha-centered has helped me overcome many difficult times without letting anger or fear dominate my heart. I have seen this faith grow in many followers from around the world. My life is not easier today, but I am in more control of it as I trust the Buddha to guide me.

I mentioned earlier that I had let my weight increase to almost 300 pounds. The followers who knew me from those days know that I have lost over 90 pounds due to the mercy of Sooya-sama and Ryodoji-sama. I wish to show others how being Buddha-centered can help one gain control of their life and karma. I vow to spend the rest of my life trying to spread this teaching and to constantly improve myself as a human being so that I may become an example to others and let my life become a way of saying thanks to Kyoshu-sama, Shojuin-sama, Ryodoji-sama, and Keishu-sama.⁶³

⁶²Interview for spiritual promotion.

⁶³*The Nirvana*, November 1994, no. 286, pp. 6-7.

The above excerpt by an American Shinnyoen follower, though somewhat lengthy, demonstrates clear support of Anderson's suggestion that testimonials and such help followers to hear about the possible, see or experience the possible, and vow to seek the possible. It is also the product of careful redaction.

A Shinnyoen follower's account of an experience will pass through several stages before it becomes a proof. During the process of transformation, input from senior members, staff aide, and other leaders in the organization will help the follower shape his or her proof. By consulting with other followers, the believer will also be better able to define his or her experience. At the Shinnyoen Young Adults training seminar, members were first instructed to break into small groups of three and each follower was to write on a piece of paper any significant experience that he or she may have had in the religion. After this exercise, adherents then shared with other members in their group their personal accounts. Followers were next instructed to offer suggestions and/or advice to other members on how to improve and better define their written accounts. One proof was then selected from each group and was read aloud by its author. This exercise was designed to give followers, especially the junior ones, a taste of what it is like to prepare a proof. By no means was this exercise meant to be exhaustive in terms of producing an official proof. The goal was to merely provide members only with an outline that they can follow which will help them construct effective proofs. Members were encouraged to take the necessary steps that were taught in the training session, such as seeking the advice of superiors i.e. teaching parents and lineage parents, in order to be able to produce a quality proof.

That proofs are an important aspect of proselytizing in Shinnyoen is evidenced by the fact that the religion holds an annual competition for the best proofs. Every member is strongly encouraged to write a proof and enter this competition. Winning proofs, which are read to the congregation, fulfill two functions: They give evidence of the strength and validity

of the teaching, and they implicitly instruct followers on how to construct and interpret their own experiences. Both functions serve to deepen members' commitment to the religion.

Proofs therefore are anything but an individual undertaking. The construction of a proof is also the reinforcing of a particular worldview. A junior Shinnyoen member may bring up an unexplainable or confusing incident at a lineage meeting where the lineage parent and other senior members will offer suggestions and possible "reasons" for the occurrence to the junior member. The junior member will then continue the mental process of selecting an interpretation for his or her experience, only now one that is also in accord with the worldview promulgated in the religion. Perhaps there is nothing more threatening to an ideology than an experience which cannot be accounted for. The making of a proof, then, is the Shinnyoen hermeneutical method of explaining the unexplainable.⁶⁴ This was particularly useful in summer 1994 when Hawaii members of Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō and Shinnyoen required testimonials to help them deal with a bizarre event.

Two tales, an elephant, and salvation . The above testimonial examples indicate that while the form and content of personal experiences may vary according to group, they nevertheless perform the same function of deepening the commitment of followers through emotionally driven tales. Curiously enough, at both a Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō and a Shinnyoen meeting a follower from each religion gave the same account of a frightening experience to validate their religions. On August 20, 1994 a circus elephant trampled and killed its trainer during a stage performance, broke loose from the circus arena, and rampaged through the streets of Honolulu, before it was gunned down by police in front of a stunned crowd of children and adults alike. This traumatic episode left many people injured both physically and emotionally and courses were offered to aid those who were affected by the incident, especially the children who attended the circus. Health professionals appeared both on television and in print offering advice and help to parents with traumatized children. The

⁶⁴Shinnyoen of course is not the only Japanese new religion which guards against new and unfamiliar experiences. Sūkyō Mahikari, for example, also has a similar hermeneutical process which is utilized to deal with evil spirits. (Davis 1980, p. 93-93)

aftershock of this bizarre event, which made international news, lasted for days and raised many issues and debates in and around the city. It seemed that everyone was affected by the tragedy, including many in the new religions.

Proofs and testimonies can center on any topic, and that the circus news found its way into both a Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō and Shinnyoen service was not surprising. During a Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō service, a member clapped twice, received the microphone, and proceeded to give a personal testimony thanking the power of her religion for keeping her and her family away from the circus during that tragic day. She spoke of how she had planned to take her children to the circus that very day but was forced to change her plans due to what she at that time perceived to be unfortunate and inexplicable events. She thanked Ogamisama (the title of respect given to Kitamura Sayo) for watching over her and her family. The lesson conveyed to the other members: a believer in Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō is always protected from harm by Ogamisama.

Shinnyoen holds its annual bazaar every August providing fun and games, in addition to the food and other sale items, to the surrounding community. In 1994 the Shinnyoen bazaar was held on the very day of the circus tragedy. At the Young Adult training session, one of the proofs selected was an account centering on the circus. A woman in her twenties relayed how thankful she was to the Shinnyoen parents for protecting her and her family from the circus tragedy. Like the Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō follower, the Shinnyoen member had made plans to attend the circus the very day of the elephant tragedy. According to her proof, she had intended to visit the bazaar for only a short while before going to the circus but as she was enjoying herself so much at the bazaar, there was soon not enough time to go to the circus. At the time she wondered how she could have let her family miss the circus but her wondering was soon answered. At this point in her proof, interestingly, her testimonial took on a tone of caution. Instead of simply ending her proof with an expression of gratitude toward the religion and its founder as the Tenshō Kōtai Jingukyō follower did, the Shinnyoen follower took this opportunity to also use her testimonial as a cautionary counsel

for other believers. She explained that had there not been the Shinnyoen bazaar that very day, she and her family would have gone to the circus and who knows what might have happened to them, leaving the listening audience to fill in their own conclusions. She exclaimed that this certainly was proof of the power of "saishô", the Shinnyoen term for salvation. Again the circus was used to validate a believer's membership in a religion, albeit a different one.

Such high drama and emotion are common occurrence at Shinnyoen when proofs are delivered. On another occasion at Shinnyoen Hawaii in February 1998 a follower who had been a member of the religion for over 20 years presented a proof that had nearly everyone in the listening audience teary-eyed. Although the storyline was a familiar one--a follower is saved from a life threatening illness--the follower's shy demeanor and her simple manner of speech and dress made it clear to everyone listening that she was not interested in impressing anyone with her story but that she only wanted to express her gratitude for being alive. The follower told her story of how in 1997 a lump in her breast and the following mammogram proved her worst fear to be true--cancer. During the course of her emotional story she broke down and cried when telling how grateful she was to her husband for always being by her side and to the religion for giving them the strength to face her ordeal. A number of followers listening to her story also began wiping their eyes. At the conclusion of her proof followers vigorously applauded her tale of courage and one could clearly sense the energy and enthusiasm generated among the listeners. This atmosphere was certainly revivalist in nature.

There are instances when proofs not only serve to move a listening audience to emotional highs but are used to deliver messages that are more subtle and sobering nature. Cautionary tales are examples of such proofs that move a listening audience with a different set of emotions. Usually such stories are circulated among the rank and file members without official sanction by the religious organization. There are, however, instances where tales of deterrence are preached from the pulpit. Such stories introduce the listening audience to examples of misfortune and disasters that have befallen ex-members and have the powerful effect of warning existing believers of similar consequences should they terminate their

membership. The message delivered in these types of proof suggest that when one is within the spiritual parameters of the religion, one is protected from harm; those outside the religion's protective sphere, however, are subject to unexplained misfortune and a lack of control over their lives. In a video presentation at the Shinnyoen Hawaii Chiryû Gakuin school on April 6, 1996, for example, followers were warned of the dreadful consequences of leaving the safety of Shinnyoen. The video contained stories of ex-members who suddenly and mysteriously died upon leaving the religion. There were other tales of people inexplicably developing liver problems or cancer once leaving the protective realm of Shinnyoen. Whether the video may be an example of fear mongering in order for the religion to keep its members or a testament to the protective powers of Shinnyoen is debatable. What is clear is that cautionary tales are designed to move a listening audience to make more of a commitment to their faith and practice.⁶⁵

Sometimes the cautionary tale and the emotionally driven personal narrative are combined in order to deliver a powerful message to fellow believers. A proof presented at Shinnyoen Hawaii in February 1998 told the moving story of a follower who had received all kinds of benefit and fortune as the result of his 12 years of practice in the religion. After some time, however, he began to relax in his endeavor and take the religion for granted. In fact he eventually stopped practicing. At this point his daughter was discovered to have a type of spinal tumor. He blamed himself for his daughter's tragic condition and vowed to do all he could to help her. He turned to Shinnyoen and devoted himself to practicing sincerely. Through a series of sesshin, doctor consultations, prayers, surgery, and nearly losing his

⁶⁵Cautionary tales are not only found in Shinnyoen. During a visit to the Tokyo headquarters of Agonshû, I learned that only Agonshû is effective in cutting one's evil karma and thereby protecting its followers from misfortune. As an example, an Agonshû follower cited the devastating earthquake that reduced the industrial city of Kobe to shambles on the morning of January 17, 1995. While other Japanese religions suffered from the calamity--500 Sôka Gakkai members were killed and a Shinnyoen temple was severely damaged by the Kobe earthquake, according to the follower--all Agonshû believers and property escaped even the slightest injury. Here the Agonshû follower's informal testimony served several functions. Foremost was his earnest intention to propagate his belief and religion to a potential convert. Secondly, and certainly just as important, the testimony was used to further support and strengthen his own convictions of the efficacy of the religion. Namely the example cited is evidence that may convince him that as long as he is a member of the religion he will be safe in a world which is unpredictable and often times intimidating.

daughter, his daughter was saved and the tumor finally removed. This proof riveted the Shinnyoen Hawaii listening audience and again many were moved to tears.

4. SUMMARY

The theoretical models proposed by Stark and Lofland and Skonovd provide a mixed message when charting the success and potential for growth of Shinnyoen abroad. In particular Stark's model suggests that Shinnyoen will experience different levels of growth at different locations. The chances of Shinnyoen succeeding in the UK, for example, seem to be higher than they are in Singapore as the religion meets more of Stark's eight conditions in the UK than the group does in Singapore. Membership figures at both locations, however, have yet to bear out such a difference, although it could still be too early in the development of both branches to discern any noticeable distinction between their growth patterns.

Shinnyoen has its most successful branch temple abroad in Hawaii. More so than any other condition in Stark's list, it seems that the strong presence of Japanese culture and community have been the most conducive factors for encouraging the religion's growth there. Due to these favorable circumstances in Hawaii we can see the conversion motifs proposed by Lofland and Skonovd and how they function in Shinnyoen most clearly. Were it not for the large Japanese American community present in the islands, however, it is questionable how successful Shinnyoen would be in Hawaii. In my view, minus the Japanese American contingent from its membership and the difference between Shinnyoen Hawaii and its branches in the UK and Singapore are almost negligible. This suggests that there are other components in the proselytizing equation that affect the spread of Shinnyoen abroad and especially among non-Japanese populations. It is these other factors that influence the direction of growth of Shinnyoen abroad that we consider next.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the diversity among Japanese new religions presents a challenge to those seeking to understand the spread of such groups into lands beyond the Japanese archipelago. Proselytizing motives, tactics, and organizational structures differ widely among the groups yet they are important considerations when analyzing the attempts of the new religions to establish themselves abroad. Moreover, other factors which are largely beyond the control of the new religions, the ethos of the host cultures and their perception of Japan, for example, add to the complexity of the proselytizing equation. Which circumstances then, provide Japanese new religions abroad with the best chance for laying down strong roots in foreign soil? While no single variable alone determines the degree of success a proselytizing new religion will garner, a specific combination of components will differentiate a successful missionary campaign from a struggling one.

In examining Shinnyoen abroad, our topic of research has focused on the ways and the extent to which Japanese new religions that seek to attain an international presence, adapt and alter their strategies of proselytism in moving from one culture to another, and the ways in which their development varies between Japan and non-Japanese cultures. Towards this end proselytizing methods are instrumental in establishing Japanese new religions abroad. The dissemination strategies promote an ongoing dialogue between guest religion and host culture. In turn, the quality of this exchange often determines whether the proselytizing orientation of the religion will be on the Japanese population (immigrants and their descendants) or on the indigenous one.¹ Religions that focus on the former often struggle with their growth abroad while groups that make inroads with the latter succeed. This is understandable as groups that concentrate on Japanese communities abroad will inevitably

¹Carpenter and Roof (1995, p. 49) label the former "centripetal orientation" and the latter "centrifugal orientation."

face decline as third, fourth, and fifth generations of Japanese immigrant descendants become more indigenized and their ties with their Japanese roots weaken. It is to the religion's best interest then to attract members from the local population.

While proselytizing strategies are an important aspect of the spread of Japanese new religions among non-Japanese communities, there are other elements in the equation which dictate the religions' speed and direction in the dissemination process. For want of better terms, I label these components intervening and facilitating factors and pressures. Intervening pressures impede or prevent a religion from advancing in its dissemination efforts, perhaps even causing the religion to stagnate abroad, while facilitating pressures ease and encourage the transition of the foreign religion into the local patterns of religious life. Adding to the complexity of these pressures, however, are the interchangeable roles they play under different circumstances. The distinct Japanese character of Shinnyoen, for example, may be regarded as a facilitating factor in one arena and a intervening factor in another. In other words, the religion's Japanese qualities may be viewed as exotic and enticing in one society, familiar and comfortable in another, and yet be viewed as an obstacle to successful recruitment in still another cultural setting.

Shinnyoen, the primary focus of this study, first initiated its propagation efforts abroad in the late sixties and several variables continue to influence its overseas proselytizing campaign. Our examination of Shinnyoen in Japan and abroad has brought to the fore some conclusions concerning this important and interesting area of new religion research. The following index of propagation factors emerged from my study of Shinnyoen abroad and while it would go far beyond the purpose of this chapter to translate these factors and experiences into rigid prescriptions for other groups, they serve as a hermeneutical window through which to view the struggles of Shinnyoen abroad in particular, as well as a means to illuminate the challenges facing Japanese new religions campaigning overseas in general.

FACTORS AND PRESSURES THAT INFLUENCE THE SPREAD OF SHINNYOEN ABROAD

The theoretical models proposed by Rodney Stark and John Lofland and Norman Skonovd which were discussed in chapter five are certainly not the only theories or frameworks available that examine the spread of new religions. Other models exist including the one proposed by Mark Mullins, which suggests that there are three factors to consider when analyzing the introduction of one religious tradition into a culture other than its own: the organizational structure of the religion, its ideology, and the religious, political, and social environment of the host culture.² For the most part this chapter will utilize this model to frame the prospects of Shinnyoen establishing itself abroad. Mullins' model is not merely a repetition of the two models discussed in chapter five but complements them by taking into account the ideology of a new religion, a theme that was neglected to some extent in the other frameworks. Mullins' model thus allows for a closer examination of the beliefs and practices of Shinnyoen that affect its overseas development and in this way provides a fitting conclusion for the study of Shinnyoen abroad.

In the last chapter we looked at a number of proselytizing strategies and conversion motifs Japanese new religions abroad utilize in order to secure and encourage growth. However these proselytizing strategies must be employed in the religions' organizational structure. I use organizational structure here to refer to the level of autonomy allocated by the headquarters of new religions in Japan to their branch temples abroad, as well as to their hierarchical setup that includes the raising of non-Japanese leaders in the organization. The section on ideology examines the focus of beliefs for new religion followers--the objects of veneration-- and their influence on procuring non-Japanese members. This section also takes into account the impact the death of Japanese new religion founders have had on the teachings of an organization, especially as it concerns overseas dissemination. Finally, a look at the magical and ethical elements in Shinnyoen challenges the notions of diversity as a

²Mullins (1990).

proselytizing advantage. When placed in this analytical framework the transmission of Shinnyoen abroad emerges as an imposing undertaking.

While Japanese new religions largely shape and direct the ideological and organizational components of their movements, the social environment of their host cultures is beyond their control. While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the cultural makeup of each host country that Shinnyoen has spread to, we may note here that factors influencing its acceptance include the dominant religion in the host country, the degree of reception of Japanese culture, and the economic status of the host country. As these issues have been commented on in chapter five, I have included information on these areas in the relevant host cultures only when applicable.

Prefacing the remarks about Shinnyoen in each section is a brief look at other Japanese new religions in similar circumstances. Though there is the risk of detracting from the focus of our study, such comparisons will prevent a finding that may be only applicable to Shinnyoen from being characterized of the new religions as a whole. It is hoped that this will lead to a clearer understanding of Shinnyoen and the transmission of Japanese new religions abroad as a result.

Organization

Shinnyoen's organizational structure is one reason why Shinnyoen is one of the largest new religions in Japan. The tight organizational control administered by Shinnyoen over its branch temples abroad has allowed the religion to preserve the esoteric tradition that it has developed over the years and has prevented Shinnyoen from going the way of many Japanese new religions that have been plagued with secession. However the organizational control administered by the main temple in Japan has hampered the growth of Shinnyoen abroad. Whether or not a balance can be struck between the freedom of branches to develop their own character and the necessity of the religion to maintain consistency among its temples will prove to be crucial to the growth of Shinnyoen abroad.

Branch Autonomy

In *Shinshûkyô no Kaidoku* Inoue Nobutaka points out that among the several means of classifying Japanese new religions, a typology based on the division of authority and autonomy distributed between head and branch temples is possible.³ On the one hand there are a number of new religions that grant to regional branch temples a fair amount of organizational independence and authority. These new religions have implemented policies that allow branch temples abroad the freedom to make necessary adjustments in rituals and teachings, thereby rendering successful propagation more likely. A case in point is Sôka Gakkai in Mexico, which has enough flexibility and autonomy to be able to adapt to its host culture. The Buddhist rites for obon for example, which are normally held in the summer in Japan, are instead performed in November to coincide with the Catholic "days for the dead."⁴ This subtle shift in Sôka Gakkai's ritual calendar renders the religion less alien to the local population. Other Japanese new religions have gone a step further in their attempts at acculturation, grafting local beliefs and customs onto their own religious practices. The Hawaii branch of the Okinawan new religion, Ijun, for example, is permitted enough autonomy to incorporate two of the more well-known Hawaiian deities, Pele and Lono, into its belief system.⁵ Also in Hawaii the head of the Tenshindô branch, a female reinôsha, utilizes local deities and traditional Hawaiian foods in her practices, rendering her religion more palatable to local followers. While adapting to the host culture and incorporating local beliefs and practices to the extent of Ijun and Tenshindô are not prerequisites for successful overseas propagation, a certain degree of branch autonomy is necessary to facilitate the religion's acculturation process in foreign soil. The above examples then are of new religious movements that possess characteristics which allow them to be more accommodating to non-

³Inoue (1992) pp. 241-242.

⁴Ôkubo (1991) p. 207.

⁵Reichl (1993) p. 314.

Japanese cultures, thereby increasing their chances of successful proselytizing campaigns among the local population.

Courting the host culture to the extent that some Japanese new religions do may unwittingly affect the Japanese membership, however. The PL Kyôdan church in Brazil for example, changed its ritual offerings from sake, kelp, and dried cuttlefish, to wine and cakes in order to accommodate the local taste. These and other such compromises with the local culture were met with disdain by certain Japanese members who subsequently left the religion.⁶ The PL Kyôdan church conflict in Brazil is interesting because it raises a number of key issues that organizational heads of Japanese new religions wishing to expand overseas must address: namely what roles do Japanese new religions abroad play (purveyor of Japanese culture or international facilitator),⁷ to what extent can a Japanese new religion alter its beliefs and practices before its identity as a Japanese entity is threatened, and how do existing Japanese members at branch temples abroad (Japanese nationals and descendants of Japanese emigrants alike) influence the proselytizing direction?

Our look at Shinnyoen abroad suggests that the proselytizing inroads the religion has carved for itself is at a minimum. Hence the issues raised in the PL Kyôdan conflict in Brazil are important windows through which to view and understand the struggles of Shinnyoen abroad, as they highlight the authority structure between the headquarters in Tachikawa and its overseas branch temples.

Regarding the issue of the role Shinnyoen abroad plays, several slogans often repeated at the conclusion of Shinnyoen temple services suggest that the religion is intent on becoming an international movement. The pledge recited in unison by followers to build a universal training ground (*sôgô dôjô*) and the promise to "save humankind, the earth, and the universe" may be interpreted as evidence of this intention. However, a closer look at how

⁶Nakamaki (1991) p. 234.

⁷That PL Kyôdan is a Japanese new religion that carries a non-Japanese name suggests that the group in Brazil does not see itself as simply a transplanted cultural vestige nor as a community center for Japanese expatriates, but as a movement with international significance.

the slogans are put into practice indicates a Japanese religion not yet ready to avail itself to a wider audience. For example non-Japanese followers are encouraged to adopt Japanese patterns of dress and behavior. Before entering a Shinnyoen temple, followers must don socks on their feet as the feet are especially regarded as a source of pollution in Japanese social practices. This socio-religious custom is considered strange for Chinese Buddhists in Singapore who are accustomed to making temple oblations barefoot or with shoes on. Also, during Shinnyoen temple services women must spread handkerchiefs over their laps to cover their knees when sitting if they are wearing dresses or skirts where the length is deemed inappropriate, and there is implicit pressure on all to sit on the floor in the uncomfortable Japanese manner. Hence the above pledges, while sounding international if not universal in scope, simply translate into the aim of converting outsiders to a Japanese religion. This inconsistency in theory and practice in part accounts for the slow growth of Shinnyoen abroad. Humankind, the earth, and the universe can be saved so long as they adopt Japanese dress and behavior first. In other words those in foreign cultures are expected to adapt to Shinnyoen and not vice versa.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the tight organizational control exercised in Shinnyoen renders overseas development difficult. That most of the power in the Shinnyoen organization is centrally controlled by the main temple in Tachikawa suggests that the religion is reluctant to alter its beliefs and practices at branch temples abroad and risk the loss of its Japanese identity. Branch temples are allocated little flexibility in their daily operations and must strictly adhere to directives issued by its headquarters. The almost exclusive reliance on video recordings of sermons and services conducted in Japan at its branch temples abroad, for example, indicates the intent of Shinnyoen to carefully regulate and monitor operations of its overseas missions. This strategy almost guarantees that what is taught and practiced abroad is consistent with the beliefs and practices in Japan. That overseas temples are so tightly controlled by Japan inevitably results in their being closely bound to their Japanese character, however. In such an organizational arrangement there is little chance that the

religion will alter its beliefs and practices to accommodate the ethos of the local culture. Besides reading aloud set announcements issued from Japan at the end of worship services, local followers have few opportunities to regularly play an active part in devotional meetings. In fact at certain branch temples, Shinnyoen San Francisco for example, English language services were only offered once a month. Such situations leave little opportunity for branches abroad to acculturate themselves and develop their own character, thus rendering it less suitable for non-Japanese members. Moreover, the fact that Shinnyoen's branch temples abroad are heavily dependent on Tachikawa for financial assistance renders a plea for a degree of organizational independence by branch temples highly unlikely. As long as branch temples abroad are dependent upon its headquarters in Japan for finances and direction, they will continue to exude a distinctive Japanese character. In turn the host culture will continue to perceive the religion as something alien, even to the extent where, as in Singapore, several of the locals view Shinnyoen as a "Japanese cult." Shinnyoen's insistence on preserving its Japanese character in a non-Japanese environment, then, in part explains why Shinnyoen in France, Britain, and Singapore have disappointingly few members and why the Shinnyoen temples in the US. have mostly failed to attract non-Japanese followers.

Not surprisingly Shinnyoen, with its strong *honbu* (main temple) controlled organizational structure, is less successful in places where the overall cultural and ethnic makeup is not Asian in general and Japanese in particular, than it is where there is a strong Asian or Japanese presence. Due to the amount of control imposed by its headquarters in Japan, a *honbu* oriented religion such as Shinnyoen is less able to adapt and interact with its non-Japanese environment and therefore as a consequence is hindered in its growth. A lack of local leaders at branch temples abroad exacerbates this problem. A *shibu* (branch temple) oriented religion, on the other hand, due to the greater amount of autonomy it allows its temples to enjoy, lends itself more readily to the diverse social milieu of the people and cultures in which it finds itself. Sôka Gakkai branch temples abroad, for example, have in many instances adapted to their host culture, incorporating certain characteristic themes

readily identifiable by the local population. Most notably the religion has raised local followers to high levels of leadership positions. Shinnyoen, on the other hand, is slow, even reluctant to assimilate the cultural qualities of its overseas surroundings. Little wonder then, that Shinnyoen is only able to attract a mostly Japanese membership while Sôka Gakkai's membership reaches scores of 50% or higher of non-Japanese followers abroad.

As our study of Shinnyoen abroad demonstrates, the fact that every Shinnyoen overseas temple is dominated by Japanese nationals or Japanese descendants is evidence that the religion is not yet equipped with the faculty to adapt and interact with its host culture. The membership makeup is overwhelmingly Japanese and more importantly, reinôsha and temple leadership positions are filled almost exclusively with Japanese members. As long as this situation remains it is likely that the religion will continue to ignore local customs but will instead continue to worship Japanese gods and figures (Inari, Kôbô Daishi) and celebrate Japanese folk festivals. At Shinnyoen Singapore, for example, the Japanese folk festival of *setsubun*, which under the old Japanese calendar marked the beginning of spring, is still ritually observed each February while *Vesak day*, the festival that marks the Buddha's birthday and during which banks and shops are closed in observance, is celebrated by the local Buddhist temples in Singapore save that of Shinnyoen. Keeping in line with practices determined by its headquarters in Japan, Shinnyoen Singapore observes the Buddha's birthday during *Hanamatsuri*, which occurs more than a month before *Vesak day*. Due to the overwhelming amount of Japanese followers at Shinnyoen temples abroad, it is likely that the religion will maintain its Japanese customs and celebrations. With the increase of local followers at branch temples abroad, however, there may be tacit pressure on the religion to accommodate local customs and traditions. But until there is such an increase in local followers abroad, Shinnyoen will continue to be out of step with local practices.

While the tight organizational control administered by its headquarters in Japan may be viewed as a handicap to its proselytizing efforts abroad, the Shinnyoen authority structure is responsible for its organizational solidarity at home. High levels of branch autonomy and

strong branch leaders, be they overseas or in Japan, may threaten the solidarity of an entire organization. In her study of Reiyûkai for example, Helen Hardacre found that the independence of branch temples produced strong leaders which in turn led to them leaving the religion to form separate groups.⁸ At the time of her study 14 groups had seceded from Reiyûkai to form independent religious bodies.⁹ In Hardacre's study, the branch temples that seceded from Reiyûkai were all in Japan and therefore shared with the main temple relatively close proximity and a similar social and cultural environment. The threat of secession is heightened when dealing with branch temples abroad. The Shinnyoen organizational composition is designed to combat such threats that have befallen Reiyûkai and other Japanese new religions. Shinnyoen has maintained its organizational solidarity by limiting the level of independence branch temples may enjoy and curtailing the amount of power and charisma transferred to overseas branch leaders. This strategy has helped keep the religion structurally sound, albeit at the expense of expansion abroad.

Shinnyoen guards against strong individuals breaking away from its organization by stripping ministers and *reinôsha* of all their spiritual powers once outside its temples. Hence *sesshin* can only occur on temple precincts. This restriction differs markedly with the practices of other new religions, notably the *Sekai Kyûseikyô* offshoots, whose members can perform *jôrei* (spirit cleansing) and other acts of spiritual powers in such public places as parks and train stations. Shinnyoen successfully ties charisma and spiritual power to location and not to people. What began as a small group focusing on sacred personas is now, especially since the passing of its founder, in the process of being transformed into a religion centering on sacred space, as Shinnyoen followers and *reinôsha* can only access the spiritual faculty within the temple. Even members of the Itô family are not exempt from this law. When the two Itô daughters, Eiko and Atsuko, defected from their parents' religion, they

⁸Hardacre (1984) p. 51.

⁹At least one group, *Risshô Kôseikai*, has gone on to surpass Reiyûkai in terms of membership size.

were unable to take with them any spiritual power. Shinnyoen declared them stripped of their status as reinôsha once they left the religion.

According to Shimazono Susumu, independent branch temples or communities tend to check and mitigate the power and authority of religious founders therefore "it is not uncommon in the more successful New New Religions for local leaders to lack power and for branch communities to show a certain incohesiveness."¹⁰ Not surprisingly then branch temples of a religion which focuses heavily on its founder in the manner of Shinnyoen, lack local leadership and independence. In the Shinnyoen organizational scheme, the lack of local leadership and independence is even more pronounced at branch temples abroad, where the necessity to administer tight control is even more crucial to maintaining organizational solidarity. Hence non-Japanese reinôsha and other local leaders are rare at overseas Shinnyoen temples, and this lack of local leadership does little to alleviate the foreign quality of the religion outside Japan. In previous chapters, we have looked at some of the problems surrounding the issue of raising local leaders and the consequences for overseas expansion. We can now summarize some of the essential points especially as they contribute to the slow growth of Shinnyoen abroad.

Raising Local Leaders

A significant consequence of the tight organizational control exercised by the Shinnyoen headquarters in Japan over its branch temples abroad, is the lack of non-Japanese ordained officials in the religion's ranks. As of 1997 for example, there were no non-Japanese ministers in Shinnyoen. There are several key reasons to account for the lack of non-Japanese believers at the ministerial level, not the least of which is the time required for rank and file members to reach minister status. Even before one can be considered for the minister rank, however, one must have first attained the spiritual rank of reinôsha. As has

¹⁰Shimazono (1995) p. 407.

been mentioned before, while it is true that Shinnyoen ministers are reinôsha, it is not true that all Shinnyoen reinôsha are ministers.

The Shinnyoen reinôsha carries much authority within the organization and is therefore an integral part of the religion's hierarchical structure. However, it requires fifteen years or more for the average follower to reach the lowest reinôsha status.¹¹ Not surprisingly then, non-Japanese reinôsha abroad are almost nonexistent as most overseas branch temples are less than fifteen years old. In all of Europe as of 1995, for example, there was only one non-Japanese reinôsha--a German woman--the rest (six) were Japanese. In 1996 Shinnyoen UK saw the birth of its first reinôsha, but she too, was a Japanese emigrant. There have been Shinnyoen followers in Singapore since the early eighties but as of 1997 there were still no local members in the reinôsha ranks.¹² For sesshin purposes in Singapore and until recently in the UK, Japanese reinôsha were imported from Taiwan and Japan. Only Shinnyoen Hawaii has more local than Japanese national reinôsha at its Honolulu temple. In 1997 there were 14 reinôsha at Shinnyoen Hawaii. That being said, nearly all the local reinôsha were of Japanese descent, and none of whom had been granted the title of minister.

One should not assume that all those who attain or seek to attain the rank of reinôsha also have the goal of continuing on to become Shinnyoen ministers. Most followers (Japanese and non-Japanese alike) do not have such lofty aspirations but are instead concerned with more modest and mundane aims. An elderly British male follower for example had joined Shinnyoen UK for help with an eye problem, a Hawaii man in his fifties had wanted to improve his relationship with his family, and a Chinese female follower in her forties joined Shinnyoen Singapore "just out of curiosity." None expressed the desire to attain reinôsha and minister status, in any event not to me. More significantly, a number of reinôsha in Hawaii I interviewed on separate occasions also did not list attaining minister

¹¹See for example Akiba (1992) p. 75 and Kawabata (1995) p. 144. Kawabata notes that the time required to reach reinôsha status steadily increased over the years from just over one year in 1946 to on the average of nearly 20 years in 1995.

¹²In 1998 Shinnyoen Singapore saw the appearance of its first local reinôsha.

status as a goal.¹³ Even if there were overseas non-Japanese believers in the religion long enough and wishing to achieve the status of minister, however, there are certain rules and regulations that would render such an achievement extremely difficult to attain. While learning to speak Japanese is not a prerequisite for reaching reinôsha status, needless to say not knowing the language presents a host of challenges for the non-Japanese speaking follower. The tight watch the religion places over its ordained officials as manifested in its policy of rotating ministers is another such reason that accounts for the lack of non-Japanese ministers in the Shinnyoen ranks.

This policy of shuffling ministers between branch temples abroad after six month assignments is especially difficult on overseas followers wishing to become ministers. The ordination of an overseas non-Japanese minister would entail that person to be away from his/her home country for terribly long stretches, as ministers and temple leaders are required to undergo periodic training in Japan. The aim of the training is threefold: to refocus the leaders on their tasks abroad, to check external influences, and to ensure that what is taught abroad is identical to what is taught in Japan. As the policy stands, Japanese ministers in Shinnyoen return home to Japan every six months. This period in Japan allows them to bolster their spiritual level as well as spend time with their families before shuttling off to another Shinnyoen branch temple. Non-Japanese ministers, on the other hand, would face a much more trying situation. Because as a general rule Shinnyoen does not return a minister to the same branch temple from which (s)he came, lest the minister acquire too strong a foothold on the followers there, a non-Japanese minister would be required to spend a considerable amount of time away from his or her home country before a return assignment.

As we have seen in the chapter on Shinnyoen branch temples abroad, the strong foundation Shinnyoen Hawaii set for itself was in large measure due to it being under the steady guidance of a high ranking Shinnyoen minister for 17 years. Moreover, for branch

¹³One local reinôsha in Hawaii was reportedly being groomed to assume minister responsibilities. However modesty may have prevented the reinôsha from revealing this to me.

temples abroad in places where there is not a large Japanese community or Buddhist environment like the one found in Hawaii, it is especially important for the local population to have a minister in whom they feel comfortable enough to turn to for help and advice, preferably a compatriot raised up from within their own ranks. Therefore even if a non-Japanese Shinnyoen follower living in Japan were to rise to the rank of minister, due to the current policy of rotating ministers, this would do little to alleviate the problems surrounding the lack of non-Japanese ministers abroad.

It must be pointed out, however, that the above is mostly speculation as there is yet no non-Japanese minister in the Shinnyoen ranks. However with the growing number of reinôsha produced by the organization the appearance of a non-Japanese minister may soon be on the horizon. The organization may then revise its policy and in the end prove flexible enough to accommodate the pressing needs of non-Japanese ministers once one is so ordained.

While Shinnyoen may yet lack non-Japanese ministers, the religion has begun to place local followers in important staff positions abroad. The majority of staff help at Shinnyoen Hawaii for example consists of local Japanese members, some of whom are quite young (in their twenties). These younger staff members head the Youth Division and render the religion more accessible to followers their age by assisting and encouraging them in their practice. At Shinnyoen Singapore one of the two staff members there is a local Chinese Singaporean. The other staff help is his Japanese wife. The situation is similar at Shinnyoen UK where an elderly British man and his Japanese wife staff the branch temple there. These staff members play important roles in the transmission of Shinnyoen abroad. Local followers in key staff positions help bridge many of the cultural gaps and religious differences between Shinnyoen and its host country.

The cautious approach taken by Shinnyoen towards raising temple leaders and other organizational heads, stems from its concern of guarding against splinter groups and other internal rifts. Although Shinnyoen has not been beset by secession to the extent that other

groups have--notably Reiyūkai, Sekai Kyūseikyō, and Mahikari--it has nonetheless suffered through periods of internal strife. One will note that the policy of rotating ministers was implemented at Shinnyoen Hawaii in the 1980s, after Itō Atsuko (the founder's second born daughter) quit her parent's religion in 1977. By this time all four of Itō's daughters had left Shinnyoen at one point or another, even taking loyal followers with them. Moreover there were other incidents where high ranking officials (they too were related to the Itō family) left the religion causing embarrassment, pain, and perhaps more importantly, confusion to the extent where the Shinnyoen organizational structure was threatened. Not surprisingly then, the policy of rotating ministers and the requirement of organizational heads to make periodic reports to the group's headquarters in Tachikawa were attempts by the religion to minimize internal strife and lessen the chances of leaders from gaining too much power and going astray. The strategies employed have for the most part been highly effective as Shinnyoen has remained structurally sound, not suffering any major or public split since such organizational policies were implemented. This is no small achievement considering the continual expansion of overseas branch temples and the number of reinōsha abroad, each armed with the spiritual faculty to direct and influence the lives of overseas followers.

The threat of local officials abroad acquiring too much authority and eventually seceding from the parent organization in Japan is very real. In her study of Mahikari in Europe for example, Catherine Cornille found that the religion underwent much turmoil when local leaders gained too much independence and began to take initiatives in matters of organization, teaching, and missionary strategies without first consulting its headquarters in Japan. The matters were only resolved when the local leaders were removed and eventually replaced with Japanese nationals. Utilizing strategies similar to Shinnyoen, Mahikari branch temple leaders are now regularly rotated in order to prevent the accumulation of too much power. According to Cornille, however, this policy of rotating leaders renders long-term strategy of inculturation difficult to implement.¹⁴

¹⁴Cornille (1991) pp. 270-272.

Obviously striking a balance between the needs of the organization and those of the local followers is imperative. The organization must maintain a sense of cohesiveness among its numerous temples to remain structurally sound, and in order to accomplish this the main temple in Japan must exercise some control over its branch temples both abroad and in Japan. That being said, however, branch temples abroad must have a degree of autonomy to be flexible enough to adapt to their host cultures if they intend to attract and hold local overseas followers. Part of the solution may in the end lie in the direction groups such as Shinnyoen and Mahikari have taken--namely to install Japanese nationals at the high ranking positions in order to maintain uniformity with the headquarters in Japan, and employ local believers as staff help, keeping them in the lower organizational ranks in order to maintain contact with local followers and ease the communication between foreign religion and host culture. In a previous chapter we have seen that this strategy has been adopted by Shinnyoen but Mahikari too has utilized this scheme to its advantage. As Cornille points out, local leaders in lower levels of the Mahikari Europe hierarchy help bridge the gap between local social, political, and cultural traditions and the Japanese counterparts. Japanese leaders in Mahikari Europe, on the other hand, are effective in maintaining the religion's orthodoxy while generating respect and obedience.¹⁵

Other Japanese new religions, however, have raised local leaders to minister to their folds abroad and have reaped the benefits from such a strategy. A majority of PL Kyôdan instructors in Brazil, for example, are of non-Japanese descent.¹⁶ Yamada Yutaka, in his study of Sekai Kyûseikyô in California, found that the successful recruitment of occidental members was connected to the ordination of its first non-Japanese minister in the church.¹⁷ In fact, with the additional ordination of non-Japanese ministers in Sekai Kyûseikyô in California, "a sharp increase in occidental membership can be observed."¹⁸ Sôka Gakkai

¹⁵Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁶Nakamaki (1991) pp. 231-232.

¹⁷Yamada (1983) p. 202.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 203.

too, has in place local leaders to head its branches in the UK and Singapore while in the United States and France, Japanese heads have acquired citizenship of their adopted countries.¹⁹

Shinnyoen has yet to match the overseas growth of other Japanese new religions in terms of the sheer number of followers and more importantly the number of non-Japanese adherents. Mahikari in France for example is reported to have an estimated 10,000 followers, an overwhelming number of whom are non-Japanese while Sôka Gakkai International claims that 80% of its overseas followers are non-Japanese. There are other factors, however, besides the issue of raising local leaders which have facilitated the growth of Mahikari and Sôka Gakkai abroad which are lacking in Shinnyoen. The object of worship in Shinnyoen for example clearly underlies the group's Japanese character.²⁰ Objects of veneration in other Japanese new religions, however, are not as closely tied (at least not at first glance) to the groups' Japanese nature, rendering the objects of veneration more easily palatable for non-Japanese followers. We now turn our attention to the objects of veneration in Shinnyoen to help us better understand another factor in the transmission of Japanese new religions abroad.

Ideology

The Shinnyoen ideology is intricately tied to the worship of a Japanese family. In this section we look at the implications this has for the chances of Shinnyoen finding acceptance among non-Japanese communities. We also consider how the death of the Shinnyoen founder has impacted upon its proselytizing direction.

¹⁹The fact that its leaders are local is made quite clear at Sôka Gakkai Singapore. Large portraits of the president and his wife, both of Chinese descent, adorn the wall in the main entrance of the building.

²⁰This is not necessarily a disadvantage in some countries.

Objects of Veneration

Part of the Shinnyoen struggle abroad is intricately bound to its inability to maneuver away from its close association with its Japanese religious and cultural heritage. While the organizational constraints imposed on Shinnyoen branch temples abroad can be pinpointed for this lack of maneuvering space, there are other factors limiting the religion's capacity to interact meaningfully with the local population. The demand on the Shinnyoen faithful to deify and place unwavering belief in a Japanese family, for example, is one such consideration. As we have seen in the section on Shinnyoen in Singapore, the constant focus on the Itô family as objects of veneration, although a key element in the Shinnyoen belief system, is an obstacle in the religion's struggle for acceptance and growth in non-Japanese communities.

Objects of worship or veneration, be they persons, texts, or deities, play a role in the overseas proselytizing success of a Japanese new religion. Besides functioning to legitimate the claims of a religious group and justifying the faith of its followers, objects of veneration have a part in determining its membership composition. The veneration of an ancient sacred text, for example, may be more acceptable to non-Japanese followers than the worship of a still living Japanese man. Owing to its malleable nature, scripture can be interpreted and molded to fit various cultural contexts, and hence can be more readily acclimated by non-Japanese members than the face of a Japanese man, who is intrinsically culture bound.²¹ In short, the thought is easier to manipulate to transcend cultural and religious boundaries than the thinker.

The proselytizing efforts of Japanese new religions in Brazil provide a good illustration for the impact objects of veneration have on their recruitment success. In Brazil, where the Roman Catholic stronghold on society accounts for nearly 90% of the entire population, guest religions in the region may encounter much difficulty procuring new

²¹ It seems to matter little whether the text is written in the native language. In fact, scripture may be deemed more sacred *because* it is written in a script other than one's own.

members. Indeed Shinnyoen has undertaken recruitment efforts in the country since the seventies, but has yet failed to build a following substantial enough to warrant the construction of a temple there. In a June 1995 interview with a second generation Japanese couple from Brazil, I was told that there were "much less than 50 members" there. The fact that the religion is intensely centered around the spiritual powers of a Japanese man and his family, and hence runs counter to the teachings of the Catholic church, must be taken into account when considering Shinnyoen's slow growth. Seichô no Ie in Brazil, on the other hand, has for the most part circumvented a potential clash with the Catholic church by disclaiming to be a religious entity. Instead, Seichô no Ie has been able to successfully establish itself among the local non-Japanese population by advertising itself as a philosophy.²² Seichô no Ie has made inroads with the local Brazilian population despite the strong presence of the Catholic church, by emphasizing the teachings of the founder and not the founder himself as an object of veneration. Owing to this strategy, the religion has muddled the lines of demarcation between itself and the Catholic church, and as a result has drawn members from the local population into its fold.²³

Sôka Gakkai, the largest and most successful Japanese new religion abroad especially in terms of procuring non-Japanese followers, shares with Seichô no Ie the emphasis on scripture as a means for spiritual transformation. While there are a host of factors that contribute to the success of Sôka Gakkai abroad, that it venerates a text instead of a deity (at least from members' perspective), must be considered when analyzing its acceptance by non-Japanese followers. Indeed a number of British Sôka Gakkai members in a survey conducted by Bryan Wilson and Karel Dobbelaere answered that one of the things that had appealed to them when they first joined the religion was the lack of a god figure.²⁴

Japanese new religions abroad that worship a specific deity have also achieved a measure of success among local non-Japanese populations, however. A case in point is

²²Carpenter and Roof (1995) p. 41.

²³Ibid., p. 50.

²⁴Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 59.

Sûkyô Mahikari Singapore, which boasted a membership of more than one thousand followers in 1996 and of which a sizable portion was drawn from the local Indian and Chinese populations.²⁵ Casual discussions with several followers and staff members in charge of the daily operations of the dôjô pinpointed a characteristic of Mahikari working in the religion's proselytizing favor: the veneration of a deity not intricately bound to Japan.

Although the proper name of the Mahikari deity is Mioyamosu Mahikari Ômikami-sama (Revered Parent Origin Lord True Light Great God),²⁶ members know the deity under the personal name Sû-God instead. In fact most followers simply use the term God, emphasizing its universal nature while simultaneously shedding its Japanese identity. Moreover, that the deity is not depicted anywhere in the training hall allows non-Japanese followers to interpret Sû-God in a manner comfortable with their own religious background. At Mahikari Singapore, for example, several followers interpreted the deity as the absolute source of reality, echoing qualities recognizable to those familiar with Hindu tenets. At Mahikari Hawaii however, members interviewed spoke of God in personal and passionate terms in a manner similar to Christians.²⁷ However Sû-God is acknowledged or understood in Singapore and Hawaii, it is clear (at least according to the beliefs of its followers) that the devotional axis on which the Mahikari faithful revolves is not explicitly Japanese and as a consequence the religion is rendered less inhibiting to those of non-Japanese descent.²⁸ Lacking the emphasis on the worship of a Japanese entity, at least overseas, can be viewed as a plus for the religion.

²⁵Indeed the religion claims that the majority of its followers are non-Japanese. A weekday visit to the Mahikari dôjô in September 1996 found that of the 22 practitioners engaged in okiyome (a purification exercise central to the religion) at the time, only four were Japanese. The dôjô is open daily from 7:30 to 21:00 yet by 11:00 on this particular day already 63 members had signed their names on the dôjô attendance sheet. A look at the names listed found that only eight were Japanese. More importantly, my visit to Sûkyô Mahikari Singapore in September 1996 found that the majority of its branch leaders were drawn from the local population, indicating the earmarks of a successful overseas campaign.

²⁶Davis 1980: 5.

²⁷In my view, the fact that Sû God lacks concrete form renders the deity more acceptable to those hailing from a Judeo-Christian background, who as a result of the deity's non-depiction have one less unfamiliarity to deal with.

²⁸In the Mahikari belief system, Sû-God heads an elaborate and fanciful spiritual construct in which Japan is believed to be the spiritual center of the world and the Japanese are understood as the dominant race. Not surprisingly this aspect of Mahikari is not emphasized overseas.

Objects of veneration in Shinnyoen

In contrast to the Japanese new religions discussed above, the object of worship in Shinnyoen is weighed down heavily by its cultural baggage, limiting the religion's ability to attract non-Japanese followers. While Shinnyoen claims in publications and brochures that its *gohonzon* (primary image of veneration) is the Nirvana image (the image of the Buddha just before his passing), it becomes quite clear to anyone visiting a Shinnyoen temple that a particular Japanese man and his family are the group's central figures of worship. Pictures of the Itô family adorn the walls of the temple and busts of the founders are positioned in the altar area.²⁹ Prayers are directed to members of the Itô family and followers are constantly encouraged to focus on the lives of Itô Shinjô and his family for spiritual nourishment. In fact, the faith of Shinnyoen followers is so entwined with the lives of the Itô family that the exact time of each family member's death is observed in a moment of reverence by followers on a daily basis. Of course all miracles and benefits that members receive are interpreted as the result of the spiritual powers of the Itô family. The sculpture of the Nirvana image, on the other hand, lays impotent and secluded for the most part in the back of the altar behind closed curtains. Indeed Nagai Mikiko, in her study of Shinnyoen, found that while the religion professes to be based on the universal presence of the Buddha and directed toward all of humanity, "In actual practice, however, the concrete figures of the founders and their children assume a far greater importance than the Buddha, and one's family and fellow believers are far more often the focus of religious activity than anyone outside this circle."³⁰

The tendency to view leaders and founders as enlightened teachers and holy figures is a theme common among Japanese religions (both "old" and "new") and Shinnyoen is not an exception. Nevertheless the worship of a dead Japanese family does not sit comfortably

²⁹ An interesting comparison can be drawn with Mahikari, where photographs or other images of the Mahikari founder are absent from the dôjô. In fact, a number of Mahikari members, both in Singapore and Hawaii, did not know the name of the founder (Okada Kôtama [1901-1974]) of their religion.

³⁰ Nagai (1995) p. 317.

with non-Japanese audiences and at times outright hampers the religion's recruitment efforts. This is especially so in cases where the host country has remnants of anti-Japanese sentiments lingering among certain sectors of the local population. As we have seen in a previous chapter, the Japanese-ness of Shinnyoen does not bode well for recruitment activities in certain Asian countries such as Singapore and, according to a British follower at Shinnyoen UK, also with certain portions of the British population. Moreover, even in countries where on the whole there is a positive stance towards Japan, the strong presence of a Japanese man as a figure of worship and the degree of reverence that Shinnyoen followers bestow on him produce an uncomfortable feeling among non-Japanese members. Two American followers from Philadelphia, for example, told me that the idea of worshipping a Japanese man and his family, especially the deceased two year old son, was an obstacle to them when they first joined the religion. Raised Catholic, the requirement of Shinnyoen followers to prostrate themselves before the images of the Shinnyoen founders and other explicit acts of obeisance to the Itô family clashed with their religious background. Moreover, the implicit pressure to adopt Japanese customs fostered in the religion raised questions in their minds concerning their allegiance to their own country.³¹ According to the two American followers, they have since learned to separate "the true religion from the cultural trappings." Other potential non-Japanese members, however, may not have the patience nor luxury to do the same.

Different from certain Japanese new religions that emphasize the transforming power of a set of teachings or words, and unlike others that emphasize the universal nature of an amorphous deity, the Shinnyoen devotional axis centers on the spiritual powers of an historical Japanese figure. Charged with the Itô family as their focus, Shinnyoen followers have a specifically clear, concrete, and culture bound object of worship that leaves little room for hermeneutical maneuvering. Moreover, that the Itô family were recent historical figures

³¹ Again an interesting comparison with Mahikari can be drawn. A chat with a man in his forties at Mahikari Hawaii found that belonging to a Japanese religion was never an issue with him (so he says) as he did not view Sû God as a Japanese entity but as a universal deity.

means that interpretive freedom is kept in check until the collective memory of the organization softens. As a consequence non-Japanese members especially are restricted in their attempts to interpret the Shinnyoen founders in a manner that is comfortable with and accommodating to their religious and cultural background, as relations to their object of worship are only allowed through the medium of the organization (ministers, reinôsha, lineage parents, etc.), itself a cultural filter.

As the spiritual powers of Itô Shinjô, a Japanese Buddhist historical figure, can only be accessed through Shinnyoen, a Japanese religious structure, non-Japanese followers are further removed from the religion's devotional axis. With an object of veneration that is as foreign to their own cultural and religious experience as the Itô family are, it is little wonder that Shinnyoen struggles in its attempt to procure non-Japanese members. As mentioned in a previous chapter, an employee in the translation section of the Shinnyoen publication department estimated that non-Japanese followers of the religion accounted for less than one percent of the total Shinnyoen faithful. Indeed the small handful of non-Japanese followers that I have observed at Shinnyoen services at Hawaii, London, and Singapore supports this figure. Unless the religion can render its object of worship more universal, the number of non-Japanese followers will continue to be less than impressive.

Kôfuku no Kagaku is another Japanese new religion whose devotional axis centers around its founder, Ôkawa Ryûhō.³² Because Kôfuku no Kagaku has been in existence for only a short period (founded in 1986) it is still unclear how well it is faring in its overseas mission. If the Hawaii branch is any indication, however, the religion is struggling. Although Kôfuku no Kagaku has launched an aggressive proselytizing campaign on the island of Oahu where it carries advertisements in the local newspapers, posts flyers at restaurants, and conducts an aggressive telephone campaign, the religion has thus far failed to attract many members who are not Japanese expatriates. Whether Kôfuku no Kagaku's insistence on worshipping a Japanese man is hindering its proselytizing campaign is yet

³²Astley (1995).

unclear, however the example of Shinnyoen leads us to believe that this could very well be the case.

In review, objects of veneration play an important role in the acceptance or rejection of a Japanese new religion abroad, as they influence the religion's ability to procure non-Japanese members. In short, it is to the advantage of new religions seeking to become universal movements to possess objects of veneration with universal qualities. The Itô family as the central figures of worship in Shinnyoen appear to lack these qualities and as a result the religion's effort to recruit non-Japanese followers has gone largely unsuccessful.

In what ways is a religion that centers on the worship of its founder the way Shinnyoen does affected by the death of its founder? What are the implications for its proselytizing activities overseas? Our next section examines such issues as these.

When Founders Die

Japanese new religions generally reach their peak during the lives of their founders or shortly thereafter.³³ It is during this juncture that religious groups tend to exhibit their greatest dynamism and experience their most significant growth. The passing of a Japanese new religion founder, then, often portends a deep change in the dynamics of the religion. Many lose their vigor, some slow down or stagnate in their growth, while other new religions experience a decline. A clear example is the case of Seichô no Ie, which at its peak in 1980 claimed 3,500,000 members but after the death of its founder, Taniguchi Masaharu (1893-1985), saw its membership figures sharply drop to 600,000.³⁴ Moreover it is not uncommon for Japanese new religions to lose their proselytizing steam and be beset by internal rifts after the death of its founder, spawning offshoots as a result.³⁵ During the course of my research on Japanese new religions abroad, I have come across examples signifying the effect the presence of a founder has on the dynamism of his or her religion.

³³Inoue (1991) p. 23.

³⁴Hardacre (1997) p. 76.

³⁵Sharf (1995) and Nishiyama (1988).

Walk into the Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai dôjô in Singapore on any given day and chances are that one will be struck by the vitality of the religion. Here one will find between fifty to one hundred followers purifying themselves from various spiritual toxins through jôrei, the practice of raising one's palm over another person's body in order to emit a purifying ray that cleans and heals. Though the practice is deeply spiritual and significant for the religion, the atmosphere here is quite casual, almost jovial at times as members, who are overwhelmingly of Chinese descent, chatter amongst themselves in Mandarin or some other prefectural dialect. It is quite a lively scene. Yet in the front of the dôjô and before the altar one will also find certain members in quiet and earnest prayer. A study of the people in the room, some with faces terribly scarred and others with bodies grossly deformed, remind one that though the voices may be cheerful, the business at hand--spiritual and physical healing--is a matter to be taken quite seriously.

A few train stops away lies the Singaporean headquarters of another Japanese religion, the Tenrikyô faith. Here the scene provides a stark contrast with the Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai dôjô. A visit in May 1995 found a quiet, sterile, and desolate place. A lone Tenrikyô minister, and later an assistant and two other members were the only people I met whose voices would disrupt the constant hum of the air conditioners. Despite its presence in Singapore since 1972, Tenrikyô has only been able to muster about 100 followers. Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai, on the other hand, has been able to harvest nearly 700 members in significantly less time.³⁶ Although both religions offer healing as part of their proselytizing campaigns, the contrast in dynamism between the two is striking.

There are numerous factors which may account for the differences between these two religions in terms of successful membership recruiting and no single determinant by itself can fully explain their discrepancies. Nevertheless the fact that the founder of Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai (Tanaka Kiyohide) is still alive and can therefore pay periodic visits to his overseas followers while Tenrikyô's counterpart has been dead for more than one hundred years and

³⁶Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai first opened its dôjô doors in Singapore in 1982.

can thus only make spiritual calls, certainly influences the vitality of the respective religions and hence their overseas missions. The charismatic nature of one can be readily accessed while the nature of the other can only be remembered.

The physical presence of religious founders and leaders, then, can inspire and energize followers. Though their teachings may be largely similar to those of many other religious leaders in the past, the fact that they are alive, ready to be seen, listened to and touched, does much in attracting and keeping a vigorous membership in contemporary society. Regular visits paid to Yôkôshi Tomo no Kai Singapore by Tanaka rejuvenate and deepen the enthusiasm of his followers, energizing their proselytizing campaign. The fruits of Tanaka's labor is a Singapore membership which enjoys a large local Chinese following. Tenrikyô Singapore, on the other hand, lacks this advantage and must find other means to compensate for it.

The cases in Singapore suggest that for the growth and dynamism of new religions abroad, it is to the religions best interest to keep their founders alive as long as possible. Yet it must be pointed out that merely being alive does not guarantee a dynamic following. Founders and religious leaders must make periodic visits to its overseas contingents to maintain a certain level of enthusiasm and devotion among the followers. Agonshû shows all the signs of a dynamic religion in Japan (the religion is known for its aggressive advertising and staging annual festivals which draw massive crowds) but its overseas branches tell a different story. Agonshû Hawaii, for example, has a tiny membership consisting of elderly Japanese women who seem to meet more for the purpose of sharing sweets and gossip than for spiritual practice. Six or seven women meet twice a month and do not engage in any sort of proselytizing activities. That the founder of Agonshû, Kiriama Seiyû, rarely visits the Hawaii branch (leaving followers to their own accord with little means to boost their religious zeal) may in part account for the contrast between the dynamism in Japan and the moribund state in Hawaii.

The focus of our study, Shinnyoen, has also been impacted by the loss of its founder and the somewhat lengthy examples above allow us to draw certain conclusions concerning the Shinnyoen effort to expand overseas. First of all, the relative energy displayed by Shinnyoen in the nineties (the post-Itô era) cannot match the fervor of the religion in the seventies and eighties. During these decades Shinnyoen was one of the fastest growing Japanese new religions, reportedly increasing its membership tenfold.³⁷ According to some reports Shinnyoen increased the number of its followers by ten percent every year in the seventies, and by as much as twenty percent each year in the eighties.³⁸ Its development was so rapid and pronounced it grabbed the public's attention and spawned writings with such titles as "The Rapid Growth of Shinnyoen that even Sôka Gakkai Fears,"³⁹ alluding to the largest of the Japanese new religions. Moreover, the growth of the religion in the seventies and eighties was impressive enough that it lead some scholars to categorize Shinnyoen as a "new" new religion, in recognition of this dynamism. However, if attendance levels at its most successful branch temple abroad are any indication, Shinnyoen has since slowed down. This change in growth pattern can in part be traced to the passing of the Shinnyoen founder, Itô Shinjô.

Itô Shinjô died 12:23 am on July 19, 1989, depriving the Shinnyoen faithful who have joined the religion in the years since then physical access to the charismatic founder. While alive the charismatic founder paid regular visits to his branch temples abroad, especially to the Hawaii branch which, according to his youngest daughter, was one of Itô's favorites. His visits are noted for heightening the level of enthusiasm among the overseas followers especially in the period surrounding his stays. Followers at various Shinnyoen temples abroad, both Japanese and non-Japanese alike, have told me that tears suddenly welled in their eyes and they felt unexplainably pure when they saw Itô in person. Had this

³⁷ Shinnyoen claimed to have surpassed the two and a half million mark in 1988 (Nishiyama 1988: 247) however other data suggests a more modest growth, from over 200,000 members in 1974 to nearly 700,000 in 1989 (Shimazono 1992a).

³⁸ Akiba (1992) p. 71.

³⁹ In Kaminogô Toshiaki's, *Kyôso Tanjô* (1987).

been a different religion followers might have used the term "born again" to describe their experience. Regardless of terminology, it is clear that Itô's visits brought a sense of newness and vigor to the religion and its followers. His death has left a vacuum that the religion is finding difficult to fill.

If we view recent temple services at Shinnyoen Hawaii as a barometer, the loss of the Shinnyoen founder has had an impact on the dynamism of the Hawaii branch. While the founder's daughters have kept the tradition of making yearly visits to Hawaii, the level of excitement and enthusiasm of the followers cannot match the level when the founder visited the temple. The attendance level at Shinnyoen Hawaii's 24th anniversary "Festival of Joy" held in June 1997, for example, is a good indication of the state of the religion since Itô's passing.

Yôshu-sama, Itô's youngest daughter and deputy head of the order, served as the festival's officiant and guest of honor for this occasion. While Shinnyoen Hawaii has claimed to have had "well over 1,000 followers" since the late eighties, the turnout to welcome Yôshu-sama and celebrate the temple's 24th anniversary numbered roughly 400. More telling, and perhaps more embarrassing for branch temple organizers, only approximately half of the 400 plus chairs located in the reception area outside the temple were occupied by followers. Clearly the event was meant to seat close to 1,000 believers. Festival planners were either overly optimistic or based their seating plans on the attendance estimates of previous years. Another telling point that the dynamism of Shinnyoen Hawaii has waned somewhat since the death of its founder, was that in contrast to tears, I noticed a handful of followers nodding off during the 90 minute service.

Besides the nurturing effect he had on the faith of his followers at branch temples abroad, Itô's passing has had other implications for overseas recruitment efforts. In my view, because the basis of much of Shinnyoen's dynamism rests on a founder who is no longer alive, it encounters difficulty adjusting to foreign cultural settings. Despite the founder's death in 1989, Shinnyoen proselytizing videos continue to focus heavily on Itô and

his family. This may prove problematic for Shinnyoen in the future. In contrast to previous years when the religion emanated a sense of energy while looking towards the future, since the death of its founder, Shinnyoen now seems content to lock its reference point back to the time when Itô was alive. If the religion does focus on the future it is to fulfill the "great vow" made in the past by the Shinnyo parents (Kyôshu-sama and Shôjuin) to establish a universal training ground (sôgô dôjô). Because Shinnyoen relies on its founder as its main focal point when proselytizing, it may be increasingly difficult to gain new members as the elapsed time since Itô's death grows. What was said of Kyôdôin (Itô's first son who passed away at the age of two) by some members as reported in the Shinnyoen English-language publication, *The Nirvana*, may now be applied to potential converts regarding Itô as well: "'We've never met him. We don't really know him.' It is indeed difficult to revere someone whom one has never had personal contact with."⁴⁰

Owing to the tendency to be obsessed with the process of memorialization and reflection on the past, Shinnyoen is finding itself locked into a certain time period when the Itô family was alive. Such a disposition will test the religion's flexibility to meet the challenges and changes that time and circumstances bring about or that missionary work abroad presents. This is made especially acute when certain teachings are considered definitive for the religion yet are cultural and time specific. The *Seventeen Teachings for Women* in Shinnyoen, developed in 1957 and taught by the "mother" of the religion, Shôjuin, is illustrative of this:

1. Bring out your femininity.
2. Always keep in mind you are a woman.
3. Be gentle yet strong.
4. Avoid selfishness.
5. Do not bring sadness to people.

⁴⁰*The Nirvana* June 1993, No. 269.

6. Reflect upon yourself before criticizing others.
7. Avoid gossip.
8. Also listen to the opinions of others.
9. Put yourself in the place of others.
10. Be pure.
11. Always smile when meeting people.
12. Be a person whom others miss.
13. Always be honest.
14. Avoid quarreling.
15. Be modest.
16. Treat people with due respect.
17. Avoid unnecessary chatter.

An American female Shinnyoen follower confided that she found several of Shôjuin's teachings highly sexist and demeaning, and hence had some difficulty accepting what she considered "outdated" ideas. Although the teachings may pose a problem for the religion in its attempts to recruit young females in contemporary society, because the teachings are considered sacred and its author is dead, it is highly unlikely that any of the seventeen articles will be changed. They may be reinterpreted and rendered more palatable for the contemporary woman, but the *Seventeen Teachings for Women* will remain a central part of Shinnyoen and will continue to offend a number of potential female converts. As the following example demonstrates, in 1997, 30 years after her death, Shôjuin's teachings are still espoused as the ideal.

At Shinnyoen Hawaii's 24th anniversary "Festival of Joy," a female follower had the honor of presenting a proof in the presence of Shôjuin's youngest daughter, Yôshu-sama. "Jane," a Japanese American woman in her forties, told the congregation how she had mistreated her husband in the past, constantly quarreling with him and disrespecting him,

thereby causing much pain for her family in the process. During subsequent sesshin, messages from the Shinnyo spiritual world chided and rebuked Jane for her hubris of mind and selfish demeanor. The spiritual world charged her to learn how to serve and respect her husband as if he were Kyôshu-sama. After some resistance she decided to follow Shôjuin's example of serving her husband faithfully. According to Jane's testimonial, the turning point in her relationship with her husband occurred when he was asleep one evening and she put her palms together and bowed in gratitude to her husband. She repeated this act for several nights while he was asleep until she could muster enough faith to perform this in his presence while he was awake. Since then Jane's family life has improved tremendously. Moreover, her husband has since been elevated to a staff position at the temple while she has become a lineage parent.

As we have seen in the chapter on proselytizing strategies, proofs in Shinnyoen are not random storytelling but are testimonials that have been carefully selected, scrutinized, and edited for follower consumption. It must be noted therefore, as only one proof was presented for this special occasion, festival organizers must have been especially prudent in their selection. That a proof be selected that advocates the subservience of a wife to her husband indicates the influential power the deceased founders still have on the religion and, more importantly, how the religion is locked into a particular cultural and time period. Although the viewpoint behind Shôjuin's teachings is a theme common to many Japanese new religions--the preservation of traditional gender roles--a religion whose founder is still alive may be able to adjust to the contemporary situation, especially as it affects the movement's situation overseas. With the passing of the Shinnyoen founders, the group may have lost this flexibility.

The death of new religion founders brings to the fore the problems surrounding the issues of leadership succession and the transference of power. There are numerous challenges Japanese new religions face transferring leadership power while simultaneously maintaining organizational solidarity. According to Robert Sharf:

Since the leader's authority in many of the New Religions rests on personal charisma rather than on the sanction of the tradition, the transfer of power from one generation to the next is often fraught with difficulty. On the one hand, the leader might assume such a central role in the sect that his death leaves a vacuum impossible to fill. But the opposite is perhaps more common—charisma can be spread too widely, and the resulting centripetal forces pull the organization apart, with new sects spinning off in several directions.⁴¹

Shinnyoen seems to have passed the critical stage of losing its founder without suffering through power struggles or organizational schism. As we have seen, the relatively smooth transition from founder (Itô Shinjô) to successor (Itô Masako) is in large part the result of the strong organizational structure Shinnyoen has constructed. This structure allocates the bulk of its authority to its headquarters in Tachikawa and, as we have seen, as a consequence renders the adjustment of branch temples abroad to their host culture difficult. Paralleling the transition of power from founder to successor in Shinnyoen has been the subtle shift from a magico-religious organization to an ethic oriented one. We now turn our attention to the implications such a shift has on its overseas mission.

Practice

Magical and Ethical Elements in Japanese New Religions

There are clearly magical aspects present in Shinnyoen. Stories and testimonies abound of miraculous healings, sudden financial prosperity, and spiritual protection from otherwise sure mishap. In a Shinnyoen video sermon at Shinnyoen Hawaii on June 14, 1996 for example, followers heard the story of a wife who was saved from spousal abuse by

⁴¹Sharf (1995) p. 444.

simply chanting a Shinnyoen mantra, rendering her husband's legs weak and arms stiff, thereby making it impossible for him to strike her. At a service for international followers on Nov. 12, 1994 in Tokyo, members listened to a proof by a Sri Lankan follower who credited the power of Shinnyoen with extending his visa while his non-Shinnyoen friends were forced to leave the country. In a further attempt to impress upon his non-Japanese audience the spiritual power of the religion, the congregation heard how his Japanese language ability suddenly improved whenever he had the chance to learn about Shinnyoen. These and other stories, too numerous to detail here, are designed to attract and convince listeners of the wondrous magical power of Shinnyoen.

Self-cultivational practices are also a part of the Shinnyoen experience. In a proof given at Shinnyoen Hawaii on May 18, 1997, a tearful Japanese American woman in her mid-thirties told of how grateful she was for having received the wonderful blessing powers of bakku daiju⁴² that helped her mother miraculously recover from a severe stroke. However not long after her recovery, her mother's health took a turn for the worse and the follower's relationship with her mother became strained. In addition to her problems at home, "Lori" was passed over several times for a promotion she was hoping for at work. On top of all this, she also suffered from back problems as a result of a car accident. Confused and frightened by her situation, Lori received sesshin and there learned that she was responsible for her state of affairs. Her selfishness was revealed as the cause of her problems with her mother and she was encouraged to give more of herself to the three Shinnyoen practices (donation, voluntary work, and proselytizing) to right her situation. She agreed to do so. Soon after diligently performing the three practices her relationship with her mother improved and she received the promotion that was previously denied to her. She closed her testimony by promising to continue to change her arrogant and selfish ways and thanked the four deceased Itô family members for their spiritual guidance and protection.

⁴²The Shinnyoen teaching that the two Itô sons are shouldering the various sufferings of Shinnyoen believers in the spiritual world. See chapter two for further details.

Enticing listeners with magico-religious practices and experiences is a common proselytizing tool utilized by Japanese new religions abroad. However, studies of successful overseas propagation patterns suggest another shared tendency in proselytizing strategy among Japanese new religions encountering foreign cultures. PL Kyôdan in Brazil,⁴³ Seichô no Ie in Brazil,⁴⁴ Sôka Gakkai in Mexico,⁴⁵ and Mahikari in the Caribbean⁴⁶ and in Europe,⁴⁷ for example, all exhibit the following proselytizing pattern: the initial emphasis on magico-religious practices and experiences to create contact with the local populations and then a gradual shift away to an ethics based orientation or theoretical emphasis once the religion begins to establish itself. During the transition both magic and ethics are utilized as a means to attain salvational goals.

As the above examples suggest, magico-religious experiences and self-cultivational practices play major roles in Shinnyoen. However if proofs and testimonies in Shinnyoen publications over the years are an indication, like other Japanese new religions abroad, the religion has also initiated a shift in emphasis from one soteriological element to the other. The transference of leadership power from founder to successor--in other words the inability of successors to continue the founders' charisma and magical powers--often propels such a shift in orientation among Japanese new religions.⁴⁸ However in Shinnyoen's case the change in emphasis was most likely precipitated by the organization's need to exercise control over its reinôsha and branch temples. Be that as it may, the change in orientation from magic to ethics still has been consequential for Shinnyoen followers. In this section we review the relationship between magic and ethics discussed in a previous chapter and consider the implications the shift in emphases has had for Shinnyoen followers abroad.

⁴³Nakamaki (1991).

⁴⁴Carpenter and Roof (1995).

⁴⁵Ôkubo Masayuki (1991).

⁴⁶Hurbon (1991).

⁴⁷Cornille (1991).

⁴⁸The case of GLA, for example, makes this point clear. The failure of Takahashi Shinji's daughter to manifest the spiritual prowess of her father precipitated a change in the religion to a theoretical emphasis from a spiritual one.

Magic and Self-Cultivational Practice in Shinnyoen

A recent study on magic and self-cultivational practices in Shinnyoen attempted to show a link between the two soteriological elements. Nagai Mikiko suggests that what may at first appear contradictory, the relationship between ethical practices and such magical experiences as faith healing, is actually deeply connected in Shinnyoen and the new religions.⁴⁹ Nagai cites other scholars who take the same viewpoint including Fujii, who notes that "from the perspective of 'purification' ethical practice and magical rites are not contradictory, but actually share the same characteristics" and Shimazono, who, according to Nagai, insists that "magical and ethical elements work together and are mutually supportive."⁵⁰ Precisely what is the relationship between the elements? Nagai suggests that from the viewpoint of Shinnyoen followers, self-disciplinary actions "are consciously seen as means for attaining the transmission of spiritual power."⁵¹ In other words, ethical means are utilized for magical and spiritual gains. As Nagai states, "for many believers spiritual power is not the incidental result of self-disciplinary efforts directed primarily toward the goal of self-improvement, but the conscious purpose of those efforts from the very beginning."⁵² Finally, Nagai presents a number of experience narratives, including the following, as evidence to support her argument that self-cultivation is utilized as a means to bring about spiritual power in Shinnyoen:

My mother joined Shinnyoen in 1976, when I was still a child. After growing up I, too, began following the Shinnyoen teachings because of an interest in *sesshin*. I worked with the young people's group, participated in the Three Activities, and received the rank of *Daijô* in 1980. I married in 1984, gave

⁴⁹Nagai (1995) p. 302.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 313.

⁵²Ibid.

birth to a son the next year, and began sponsoring meetings for mothers with their children. I was blessed in every way, but was unable to increase my feeling of gratefulness. When I became pregnant with my second child in 1987, I was diagnosed as having cancer of the thyroid gland and was shocked when told I should terminate the pregnancy. Through *sesshin* I discovered that a distant ancestor of mine had been killed during a war by being pierced through the throat and chest. The ancestor, I was told, was causing my condition at this time when a new life was about to be born because he wanted someone to understand his own suffering. This was the voice of my ancestor, which I had been unable to hear before. I prayed deeply for the sake of the ancestor, then visited the hospital the following day. The doctor told me that the child was healthy, and I underwent successful surgery on the same day we held a memorial service (for the unfortunate ancestor). A baby girl was born on schedule. I am grateful for the salvation that comes from the unity of this world and the spirit world, and the liberation from suffering brought by meritorious deeds.⁵³ I vow to perform deeds of thankfulness, knowing that I have been repaid many times for the merit gained through diligent training.⁵⁴

When considering the above experience narrative we should be mindful of some key points to help us gain some insight into Shinnyoen's understanding of the magic - ethics relationship. First of all, Nagai rightly points out that experience narratives in Shinnyoen are carefully selected and edited for publication. Hence only the most impressive and inspiring stories appear. As a consequence only messages that the organization deems orthodox for follower consumption find their way to publication. Secondly, it should be noted that the

⁵³Translated here as "meritorious deeds", *bakku daiju* refers to the sacrificial deaths of Itô's two sons for the sake of all Shinnyoen followers. Thus the "meritorious deeds" here do not refer to the follower's acts but to the sons'.

⁵⁴Nagai (1995) p. 315.

above proof and other examples that Nagai uses as evidence for the link between magic and ethics are based on reports by Shinnyoen reinôsha and other long time followers, elite and seasoned members who have been in the religion for a number of years. Their responses and recollections, then, are based on experiences which have been re-interpreted and shaped by the organization's leaders over a long period. Thirdly, notice how self-cultivational practice is the result of magical elements, not the cause for it as Nagai suggests. The follower's determination to faithfully engage in practice springs from her gratitude for having been the beneficiary of spiritual power. Even at the outset of the narrative we see that magic has prompted a yearning for practice, as the follower is "blessed in every way" (been the recipient of magic) but is unable to increase her "feeling of gratefulness" (self-cultivational practice). In short, the above example is evidence that magic brings about self-cultivational practice and not vice-versa.

My intention here is not to challenge Nagai's assertions. I have heard numerous proofs and testimonies at Shinnyoen services that support Nagai's contentions that followers engage in self-cultivational practices to access spiritual power. Her article does a convincing job of presenting this side of the magic - ethics relationship. However, the relationship between magic and ethical practice is multi-faceted and Nagai's article may leave the impression that there is only one way to understand this relationship. As her own example demonstrates, there is more than one way to view the functions of magic and self-cultivational practices in Shinnyoen.

In my view, the relationship between magic and ethics is not always a deeply connected one as the above mentioned scholars suggest. In fact at times there is no relationship at all. While it is correct to claim that in many instances magical and ethical elements work together in Shinnyoen, it is also true to assert that generally the relationship is not balanced and on occasions the relationship is severed so completely that the two elements are at odds. At times the relationship between magic and ethics in Shinnyoen may be heavily slanted towards ethical practice (especially when there is the need to account for misfortune in

a follower's life) while on other occasions the magical power of the religion or founder has the limelight (usually when followers are bestowed with good fortune). The result of these differing perspectives leaves the impression that Shinnyoen utilizes magical elements to bring about desired behavior from its followers, while followers engage in set practices as a means to activate spiritual power from the religion.

There are also instances in Shinnyoen, however, when followers see a separation of magical and ethical elements and act accordingly. This often results when the practice of one negates the need for the other. In my opinion the root of such differences can be traced to the mixed messages Shinnyoen sends to its followers concerning magical and self-cultivational practices. Officially the healing of illness is brought about by the purification of the heart. However, spiritual cures may also be accomplished through the magical experience of having *osegaki* (a magical rite performed to appease suffering spirits) performed. The relationship between magic and self-cultivational practices in Shinnyoen is a fluid one, then, and one is left with the notion that magic and ethics are always related except when they are not.

Western Follower, Asian Believer

What are the implications of such a fluid relationship? That the relationship between magic and ethics is an ambiguous one in the Shinnyoen teaching structure can be a source of confusion and frustration for overseas members. The resultant phenomenon is what may be termed "Western follower" and "Asian believer." At an International Followers meeting held at the Tokyo temple in Hirô on December 17, 1994 for example, a complaint was lodged by an overseas follower against her Japanese counterparts.⁵⁵ In this French woman's view, many Japanese believers are lackadaisical in their ethical practice due to their belief that Shinnyoen magic and miracles will compensate for behavioral shortcomings. She cited the actions of several insincere and rude Japanese believers who had been in the religion for a

⁵⁵The meeting was led by four *reinôsha* (two men and two women). There were 14 overseas followers in attendance.

number of years. In her opinion their boorish behavior were examples of a lack of personal transformation caused by the emphasis and reliance on karma and osegaki. Such followers need only hand over money to the religion for a ritual to be performed on their behalf to appease whatever suffering spirit is wreaking havoc in their lives, and all wrongs will be righted. Little or no change of behavior or practice is required to bring about spiritual solutions. In fact, followers need not even attend the rituals for them to be effective. For this overseas follower, the magical aspects of Shinnyoen confused her search for a system of ethics. Other overseas followers echoed her sentiments, one French follower even suggesting that the magical aspects of Shinnyoen were "ruining the religion" for him.

In the above example some followers (overseas members and, if we are to believe the follower from France, Japanese ones as well) have clearly severed the ties between magical and ethical elements in Shinnyoen. More importantly from the religion's overseas proselytizing standpoint, the follower from France raised a significant issue: the presence of magical and ethical elements, far from working together and being mutually supportive as one scholar suggests, have the potential to create a dichotomy among the Shinnyoen membership. The meeting for international followers leads us to believe that European and American followers tend to view practice in Shinnyoen as an ethical means to personal transformation and "higher consciousness,"⁵⁶ whereas many Japanese and Asian believers appear to seek out spiritual solutions couched in ritual and magical contexts that fit with their cultural assumptions.

We must note here that Shinnyoen is not the only Japanese new religion with the Western follower and Asian believer phenomenon. Other studies of Japanese new religions abroad have also found that Oriental and Occidental followers tend to seek different goals in the same religion. According to Bryan Wilson and Karel Dobbelaere in their study of Sôka Gakkai in Britain, for example, "Whereas earlier studies in Japan indicate that members there

⁵⁶I have little idea what this term means but it is a favorite with overseas followers from Europe and the US. mainland.

have cited healing as a primary benefit achieved through their faith, occidental members are reported as regarding the acquisition of a sense of direction as the major blessing experienced by virtue of their practice."⁵⁷

The ambiguous relationship between magic and self-cultivational practices in Shinnyoen, then, on occasion breeds conflicting interpretations of the religion and variant followers as a result. Whether or not Shinnyoen purposely stresses different aspects of the religion to different followers is unclear, yet what I have learned from other followers' experiences with sesshin leads me to believe that this could be a possibility. Due to difficulties in gaining the cooperation of the religion I was denied permission to conduct a formal and comprehensive survey, however the limited data gathered from interviews with overseas followers suggests that western followers are inclined to receive or "hear" guidance in sesshin that involves seeking a solution to their troubles in the direction of self-cultivational practices. Guidance for Japanese believers, on the other hand, is likely to include a request for *ogoma* or *osegaki* rites to be performed as part of their remedy in addition to prescribed practices. Perhaps American, British, and French followers tend to ignore recommendations made by *reinôsha* to request *osegaki*, however, and focus instead on advice offered to follow various forms of the three practices (voluntary work, donation, recruitment).

The subtle shift in emphases from magic to ethics in Shinnyoen as discussed in Chapter Three has resulted in mixed messages being sent to followers. Currently Shinnyoen offers an ethical religion for those seeking transformation and an alternative morality. It also offers a magical religion for those seeking mystical experiences. However in its attempts to be both it runs the risk at times of being neither. Such diversity has done less to attract new followers than it has to create confusion among existing ones.

⁵⁷Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994) p. 13.

Final Remarks

Diversity and Flexibility

If the traditional and established religions in Japan are the result of diligent efforts to transform what was then considered new into something Japanese, Japanese new religions that proselytize abroad can be viewed as attempts to turn something Japanese into something universal.⁵⁸ The eclectic nature of Japanese new religions and the general ease in which they readily incorporate features from both eastern and western traditions, lends evidence for their propensity to expand beyond Japanese religious boundaries.⁵⁹ Overseas missions, however, present a serious challenge to the flexibility of Japanese new religions. Robert Carpenter and Wade Roof, in their study of Seichô no Ie in Brazil, suggest that Japanese new religions are capable of meeting such a challenge. According to Carpenter and Roof, "Japanese New Religions, owing to their innate flexibility, should be well suited, indeed, for transplantation into other societies outside Japan."⁶⁰ Our study of Shinnyoen abroad does not support such conclusions. As an overseas proselytizing campaign, Shinnyoen has for the most part struggled, despite its syncretic and eclectic composition and success at home.

As the above pages have shown, the degree to which Japanese new religions abroad can adapt their Japanese identity to fit their host culture's religious ethos will determine the success they will achieve with non-Japanese populations. Flexibility, then, is a key for expansion into foreign cultures. However flexibility must not be confused with diversity.

⁵⁸Inasmuch as they require non-Japanese members abroad to adopt the organization's ways and not vice versa. Examples include Shinnyoen's insistence that all members belong to the organization's parent-child relationship as it has evolved in Japan, and follow its rule of removing footwear before entering the temple and wearing socks while in the temple. Also, Japanese new religions that emphasize their Japanese character in order to make proselytizing inroads do so with the belief that such particular traits will attract a wider audience, hence the Japanese language and cultural courses offered at Tenrikyô and MOA which appeal to Japanese and non-Japanese alike.

⁵⁹Arai (1996) p. 102. Examples of their syncretistic character include the founder of Sekai Kyûseikyô, Okada Mokichi (1882-1955), claiming to be at one time the bodhisattva Kannon and at another the Christian Messiah.

⁶⁰Carpenter and Roof (1995) p. 45.

Shinnyoen is a diverse religion. The religious fabric of Shinnyoen is a multidimensional one where threads of traditional Japanese Buddhism and folk religion are interwoven with strands of modern technology and a sound organizational structure. Here centuries old chanting and meditation training flow into contemporary video presentations on ultra-modern viewing screens and then back again into silent prayer and reflection, creating a distinctive tradition, offering its followers spiritual guidance, compassion and identity--all necessary ingredients for a meaningful and happy life. Whether performing voluntary work, making monetary contributions to aid earthquake victims, or bringing new members into its fold and developing close personal relationships, the followers of Shinnyoen are entrusted with the timeless message of "promoting harmony and linking all." Shinnyoen is clearly a diverse Japanese religion with a universal message that spans across the spectrum of "old" and "new" religion.⁶¹

While its religious makeup is diverse, however, its organizational and ideological framework is rigid. The tight organizational structure that limits the ability of branch temples abroad to adjust to their host cultures, the intense worship of a Japanese family which creates a barrier for acceptance by non-Japanese followers, and the mixed messages relayed to followers regarding its practices does not bode well for a successful overseas campaign. Despite this one could argue that the fact that Shinnyoen has opened temples at various points around the globe indicates a religion that is achieving a measure of success abroad. The success abroad must be tempered, however, when considering its growth among non-Japanese communities.

Even at its most successful branch temple abroad, Shinnyoen Hawaii, the religion has only managed to muster a handful of non-Japanese followers. At Shinnyoen Hawaii where attendance levels at temple services regularly number in the hundreds, I have rarely observed more than ten non-Japanese followers during my five years of participant

⁶¹The recent rise of new religious movements within the established Japanese religions has blurred the distinction between "old" and "new" religion. However one might argue that these distinctions were never clear in the first place. That Shinnyoen incorporates traditional as well as innovative aspects is as much evidence of the group's diversity as it is evidence of the arbitrariness of the terms.

observation. Five or six non-Japanese believers are usually the norm. Considering the points delineated in this chapter, the low turnout of non-Japanese followers is not surprising as the organization, beliefs, and practices of Shinnyoen are clearly designed to accommodate a Japanese audience.

In conclusion, if our study of Shinnyoen abroad is any indication, the religion's diversity at home has not necessarily produced flexibility abroad. Unless Shinnyoen can remedy its situation, the religion abroad will likely continue to be unsuccessful in its attempts to recruit non-Japanese followers and may eventually stagnate in the process. The ability of the religion to translate diversity into flexibility will prove crucial to the growth of Shinnyoen abroad.

Appendix I

Shinnyoen Founder and Family Members

Itô Fumiaki

Itô Shinjô

b. March 28, 1906

d. 12:23 am July 19, 1989

Posthumous name (kaimyô): Shinnyo Kyôshu Kongo Shinin Jôjû Guhô Shinjô Dai Hon-i

Titles: Shukan (head, prior to Makoto Kyôdan)

Kanchô (head, during Makoto Kyôdan)

Kyôshu (founder of Shinnyoen)

Sôoya-sama (*spiritual parents* ; term used to refer to Shinjô and Tomoji)

Itô Tomoji

b. May 9, 1912

d. 5:10 pm August 6, 1967

Posthumous name: Shôjuin Tomoji Jiô Daisôjô

Titles: Enshu (head of Shinnyoen)

Titles: Sôoya-sama (*spiritual parents* ; term used to refer to Shinjô and Tomoji)

Itô Eiko

b. May 1933

Itô Chibun

b. July 29, 1934

d. 2:05 am June 9, 1936

Posthumous name: Kyôdôin Chibun Zendôji

Titles: Ryôdôji-sama (*both virtuous boys* ; term used to refer to the two Itô sons, Chibun and Yûichi)

Itô Yûichi

b. April 8, 1937

d. 6:55 am July 2, 1952

Posthumous name: Shindôin Yûichi Honbushô

Titles: Ryôdôji-sama (*both virtuous boys* ; term used to refer to the two Itô sons, Chibun and Yûichi)

Itô Atsuko

b. July 1940

Itô Masako

b. April 1942

Titles: Keishu-sama

Married Saitô Isao on October 2, 1973.

Itô Shizuko

b. October 1943

Titles: Yôshu-sama

Married Kobayashi Yasuhiro on May 17, 1972.

Appendix II

Shinnyoen Branch Temples Abroad

(UK, Hawaii, Singapore, France)

Shinnyoen UK

Woodstock Lane North
Long Ditton
Surrey KT6 5HL
England
Tel.: (44) 181-398-2221
Opened: June 25, 1994

Shinnyoen Singapore

73 Grange Road
Singapore 1024
Tel.: (65) 733-4461
Opened: November 19, 1994

Shinnyoen France

Shinnyoen Hawaii

2348 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, Hawaii 96826
Tel: (1) 808-947-2814
Opened: May 13, 1973

16, Avenue du General Mangin
75016 Paris, France
Tel.: (33) 4288-0802
Opened: October 13, 1985

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