

New Religions in Japan:

A Case Study of Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai

ASAI, Shizuo

Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai (hereafter Shinjikyokai) was established in 1952 by Sadao Inai (1905–1988). The term “new religions,” when applied to Japan, has tended to have a very broad compass. Indeed, one interpretation goes so far as to include even Kurozumikyo and Tenrikyo, which were born in the early 19th century. Shinjikyokai, which was established after World War II, can be considered a typical new religion. It is a religion that has experienced considerable growth since 1975 (the number of enrolled members has expanded by more than ten times, from almost 50,000 to more than 600,000 during the decade following 1975). Because of its radical expansion, it has attracted the interest of other religious groups and some of the mass media. However, since Shinjikyokai has tended—and, indeed, still tends—not to publicize itself, any investigation into its activities, organization, doctrines and reasons for its growth proves problematic. Indeed, it is such a closed religion that there have been very few scholastic works treating it. Thus, this brief paper is intended to rectify this situation by introducing certain aspects of Shinjikyokai which hitherto have escaped scholarly attention.

Until now, the most extensive work on Shinjikyokai has been *Kami wa Orita (The Advent of the Goddess)* published by Gakushu Kenkyu Sha in 1986. My research owes a great deal to this book, but since it was written by The Press Kanagawa, and therefore from a journalistic perspective, it does not say much about Shinjikyokai's doctrines or teachings. Moreover, a quarter of a century has elapsed since its publication. Thus, I believe there is merit in producing a more up-to-date

piece on this new religion, and one which addresses those aspects not covered in *Kami wa Orita*. First, I will summarize the history of Shinjikyokai, drawing on *Kami wa Orita* and other publications on Shinjikyokai.

Sadao Inai, Shinjikyokai's founder, was born in Toyama Prefecture in 1905 and came to Tokyo when he was fifteen to work as an apprentice at a tailor's shop. He became a successful tailor, but subsequently lost his shop and factory in a fire caused by an air raid during World War II. After the war ended in 1945, he moved to Yokohama and ran a bathhouse. The following year he was diagnosed with throat cancer. According to Shinjikyokai's legend, during this period of illness a goddess appeared one night in Inai's dream and told him: "Pray to and beseech me, Oyamanezunomikoto, and you will be saved, but you have to propagate my existence and teachings throughout the world in place of me." When Inai awoke the next morning he found himself completely cured, just as the goddess had promised. This represents the beginning of the history of Shinjikyokai. Inai continued to pray to Oyamanezunomikoto every day after, and eventually developed the ability to talk with her. Moreover, he received a divine power to heal and cure others, as well as being able to foretell their fortunes. Thus, by 1953, he considered himself ready to perform his mission as commanded by the goddess, and that year registered Shinjikyokai as a religious corporation. He announced himself as "Shisha" (literally "a messenger"), a divine agent of the goddess, and claimed to have been given the sacred name "Tomomaru-sai" by the goddess. From that point on he was called "Shisha Tomomaru-sai Sensei" ("sensei" meaning a master or teacher) by his followers.

Hideko Mori (1946-2002), who would become Tomomaru-sai's successor, was born one of three children to a large landowner in Yokohama. When she was twenty, she suffered from an unknown disease. The doctors said that there was no cure for her and that all that remained was to await her to pass away. However, at that time one of the Mori family's friends introduced them to Tomomaru-sai. Tomomaru-

sai's prayers had a great effect, and in three days Hideko, who had been on her death bed, recovered her consciousness, and within a few months she was even able to walk about outside. When she visited Tomomaru-sai to show her gratitude, he recognized her as an incarnation of Oyamanezunomikoto. He also saw in himself the precursor to Hideko as the true founder of Shinjikyokai.

In 1975 a scandal shook Shinjikyokai. One of the branch managers was arrested for an indecent act, while Tomomaru-sai became the subject of a police investigation concerning a violation of the medical law—he had treated believers without possessing a medical license—and other charges. The indictment against Tomomaru-sai was suspended, but this incident was taken up by the mass media and nearly 10,000 out of Shinjikyokai's almost 60,000 believers left the organization.

Hideko was the only branch manager who tried her best to defend Shinjikyokai and Tomomaru-sai at that time. Consequently, after this incident, young though she was, Hideko was promoted to second-from-top in Shinjikyokai (subordinate only to Tomomaru-sai himself), and was given a sacred title, "Fuku-Shisha" (assistant messenger of the goddess).

It was during the next decade, after Hideko became "Fuku-Shisha," that Shinjikyokai experienced astonishing expansion and developed into one of Japan's large new religions. Hideko was also given a holy name, "Tomomaru-hime," and when Tomomaru-sai became ill from overwork in 1984, it was formally announced to believers that she should become Tomomaru-sai's successor as the next "Shisha". In 1985 she became "Shisha," and the year after she was appointed to the most sacred role of "Chokushi", which is a prophet who can hear the voice of Oyamanezunomikoto directly, immediately, and at will, and ultimately entailed her being heralded to become the real savior by obtaining the whole power of Oyamanezunomikoto to save people all over the world.

In 1988 Tomomaru-sai passed away. Fourteen years later, in 2002, Tomomuru-hime followed suit. She was only fifty-five years old, and had died from overwork before seeing the completion of her long-proposed

project, the construction of a large shrine, which was eventually completed the year after her death. The number of believers stood at more than 800,000 at that time. Today, the number is almost the same, i.e. around 800,000, which means that since her death nearly ten years ago there have been approximately as many who have abandoned the religion as those who have joined it. It can be said that the expansion of Shinjikyokai markedly slowed down after the death of Tomomaru-sai, and that it almost stopped after the death of Tomomaru-hime.

After Tomomaru-hime's death, Shinjikyokai divided its own short history into three periods, declaring that the religion had now entered a new age: the period until Tomomaru-sai became ill and practically retired is called "the Age of 'Daishin'" ("Daishin" is the posthumous name of Tomomaru-sai); the period until the death of Tomomaru-hime is called "the Age of 'Chokushi'"; and the subsequent period is called "the Age of 'Shinkon'" ("Shinkon", simply speaking, is the abbreviation of Tomomaru-hime's posthumous name). Presently, i.e. in the Age of "Shinkon", Shinjikyokai is being managed by the Mori family: Hideko's older brother Shinichi Mori (1943-), younger brother Masahito Mori (1951-) and Shinichi's son, Nobuhide (1971-), who was designated to become the next "Shisha". Ever since 1988, Shinichi has been the representative director of Shinjikyokai in its role as a religious corporation because Tomomaru-hime had wanted to devote herself solely to saving people through praying and predicting their futures. Although Shinichi became formally the top of the organization, he tended to work behind-the-scenes, in the shadow of Tomomaru-hime, as long as his sister was alive. However, upon the death of his charismatic sister he, along with his younger brother, came to the forefront of the religion.

Masahito was given the holy name Tomomaru-kou and the title of "Fuku-Shisha" in 1988. After his sister's death he was promoted from "Fuku-Shisha" to "Shisha," and was placed in charge of the religious instruction of believers while his brother Shinichi took charge of the general administration of the organization. Masahito now constitutes the chief draw of Shinjikyokai, being very popular among its devotees.

Shinjikyokai started in a small room attached to the bathhouse Tomomaru-sai obtained after the war. In that room Tomomaru-sai, with the help of the goddess, used to give advice to those who came to him for help with various worries and troubles. Now it has a dozen buildings, including a prayer hall, lecture halls, a ceremony hall, a dining hall and other facilities. It also has a large cemetery and accommodation for seminars at Manazuru-city in the western part of Kanagawa Prefecture. In addition, it has more than twenty missionary institutions stretching from Hokkaido to Kagoshima. In short, it has grown into a large religious body.

In the little more than sixty-year history of Shinjikyokai this religion experienced several changes. Initially, Tomomaru-sai acted almost as a fortune-teller and healer. Those who were saved by his advice and miracle-cures contributed to increasing the number of believers. When the number of those who wanted to be saved from troubles by means of his predictions, or wished to be cured of diseases by his prayers, had increased, he established a branch system and gave many of his branch managers the power to tell fortunes and to cure those who suffer from illness. Regrettably, many of these branch managers, became corrupted on account of their arrogant belief that they were able to predict and cure people purely through their own power. They did not recognize that such power was granted by Oyamanezunomikoto through Tomomaru-sai, but rather thought they themselves had become godlike, and this caused trouble with their followers.

Tomomaru-hime tried to abolish the branch system and brought all the branches together under her influence after 1975 when the aforementioned scandal shook Shinjikyokai. It took ten years to abolish the old system and some of the branch managers and their followers left Shinjikyokai and established their own religious groups. However, it was precisely during those ten years that Shinjikyokai expanded drastically, with Tomomaru-hime placing more emphasis on the importance of recruitment than her predecessor Tomomaru-sai had done. Interestingly, at first, her role, like Tomomaru-sai's, had been akin to a

fortune-teller and a miracle-healer. Day after day she used to see as many followers as possible in order to give advice through the goddess's words and at the same time told them to propagate Shinjikyokai. However, as the number of believers increased, it became impossible to see all of them in person, and so her lectures and instruction came to take the place of predictions and miracles administered to believers on a one-to-one basis.

In Tomomaru-sai's lectures to followers, he had preached what constitutes happiness and how to attain it. As a result, his teachings tended to be very practical, and what he taught about happiness was very simple. He compared happiness to the six petals of a flower. If all six petals bloomed, happiness could be achieved. Those six petals were: to have a good husband or a good wife; to have good children, both boys and girls; to have good health; to have a steady occupation; to have enough money to live on; and to have a hope to live for. In order to make the flower of happiness bloom, he preached to his followers that they should keep to the teachings of Oyamanezunomikoto, which are: "Kami-no-michi" (which is literally translated as "the way of deities", meaning that we should worship gods and goddesses); "Hotoke-no-michi" (literally "the way of ancestors", meaning we should respect our ancestors); and "Hito-no-michi" (literally "the way of people", meaning we should observe social laws and mores). As examples of "Hito-no-michi", he also taught ten precepts: first, one should get along with one's family, and also with one's relatives and neighbors; second, one should try to compromise with others; third, one should not fight, but try to avoid conflict; fourth, one should not bear a grudge against others, but should forget the past; fifth, one should not hate but forgive others; sixth, one should stop backbiting and examine oneself as to whether one has any flaws; seventh, one should not act solely according to one's desire but rather should await one's day to come; eighth, one should do one's duty, and not make it one's burden; ninth, one should not betray others, remembering how it felt when one was betrayed in the past; and tenth, one should not behave selfishly, but should think about what others will

feel.

As we can see from the above, Tomomaru-sai's teachings were very simple and practical. However, Tomomaru-hime introduced many new ideas, such as "Kibou-no-michi" and "Myosei-no-shinri," and she appears to have tried to systematize the doctrines of Shinjikyokai by introducing new ideas.

First, there is "Kibou-no-michi" (literally meaning both "the way of hope" and "the ray of hope" because she attached the Chinese character "hikari," meaning "light or ray," to the word "michi," which literally means "way"), which, in addition to the literal meaning explained above, can be translated as "the gateway to happiness." Tomomaru-hime often used the expression "the 'Kibou-no-michi' has been opened," which can be understood to mean that since the gateway to happiness has been opened, the followers' prayers can more easily reach the goddess than before, which ultimately means that the devotees' hopes can more easily be realized. It therefore follows that if followers prayed earnestly and observed the teachings of the goddess, they could attain happiness more easily now, in Tomomaru-hime's time, than in the time of Tomomaru-sai, because the gateway to happiness has become open. Significantly, now the followers need not wait in line for a long time to see Tomomaru-hime in person and ask for her advice.

The second, and perhaps most important, new doctrinal idea that Tomomaru-hime introduced was "Myosei-no-shinri," which literally means "the truth of our bright next life." She preached that our essence lies not in our bodies but in our souls, which will continue to exist after our bodies have perished. When we die, our souls go to the world of souls, the world of our ancestors. Our souls will someday return to this world and will be put into some new-born bodies by the goddess, and when, in turn, our new-born bodies also pass away, the same cycle of life is repeated. This idea is quite similar to the Buddhist notion of the transmigration of souls. Buddhists, however, dislike transmigration cycles because they think this world is too full of suffering. On the contrary, Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime preached that this world

is paradisiacal in nature, though we humans have corrupted it, and that we can recover a paradise-like world with the help of the goddess and so enjoy a paradisiacal life in the here-and-now. In order to establish a paradise on earth, however, there is a condition: namely, that we have to change our fates into more fortunate ones by following the teachings of Oyamanezunomikoto. As the goddess of fate, she can change the fates of those who worship her and observe her teachings; therefore, as long as we are good believers in this world, we can return after our death with more fortunate fates and lead more fortunate lives than in the past cycle of life. Thus, transmigration becomes a good chance for the followers of the goddess to change their future cycles into happier ones.

Tomomaru-hime was concerned about what would become of Shinjikyokai after her death. She took pains to explain that it was not her personal power that could save believers, but rather that she was only a mediator between the goddess and the believers. The power itself, which was called “Ikou” (another important new idea), would remain forever and continue to save people.

More recently, Tomomaru-kou has changed a lot of the former teachings of Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime. Both Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime experienced such miraculous cures themselves that they tended to emphasize miraculous healings. Moreover, even though Tomomaru-hime introduced new ideas, her teachings were essentially the same as Tomomaru-sai’s—both told their followers earnestly to implore the goddess of fate while observing the teaching of “Kami, Hotoke, and Hito-no-michi” in order to change their fates and to experience miracles; fortunate fates were the key to miracles and happiness, they said.

Tomomaru-kou, however, does not emphasize miracles. At least, he does not try to provide examples of miraculous incidents as Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime often did. Indeed, he even appears to esteem lightly prayers to the goddess, preaching that followers need not keep prayer time exactly at six o’clock in the morning and in the evening, things which his predecessors had emphasized. Moreover,

predictions are excluded in today's Shinjikyokai, and Tomomaru-kou does not meet his followers in person. Conversely, his predecessors had made predictions on personal matters as often as possible when they met their followers, and they had said that every event and incident in the future is written on the face of each believer.

Furthermore, Tomomaru-kou does not talk much about his two predecessors, in contrast to most religions which make much of their founders. In fact, he no longer preaches on Oyamanezunomikoto at all before his devotees, and can almost be said to have excluded "Kami-no-michi" from the teachings of Shinjikyokai. Instead, he has put more emphasis on rituals, and encourages his followers to attend such rituals as marriage, coming-of-age, and longevity ceremonies, as well as others. In these rituals Tomomaru-kou, or his senior disciples, pray to the goddess for the happiness of the ritual-attending believers; these ceremonies represent the only instances in which today's Shinjikyokai takes on the appearance of a religion.

Significantly, however, both Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime often said that Shinjikyokai is not a religion, because their definition of religion was different from the ordinary meaning attached to this term. Their definition of religion was something that is made by human beings, and they said that Shinjikyokai was not made by men but by the goddess herself, and so Shinjikyokai does not constitute a religion. Of course, when we think of Shinjikyokai being founded by Tomomaru-sai, this assertion may sound unconvincing to us. Nevertheless, Tomomaru-kou may be said to be trying to adjust the realities of Shinjikyokai to his predecessor's statement: Shinjikyokai is not a religion. This may be the reason he makes light of such mystical words like miracles, predictions and prayers. In short, he may want to erase the supernatural atmosphere of religion from Shinjikyokai, and it is certainly true that if we leave aside the rituals and the big shrine, it becomes difficult to say that today's Shinjikyokai resembles a religion. Tomomaru-kou and his higher-ranking preachers do not talk about the goddess and miracles, but only about the morals necessary in order to get along with other people in

society: that is, what they call “Hito-no-michi.” They also started cultural courses such as ones on public welfare, English, sign-language and so on, which has almost nothing to do with the former teachings of Shinjikyokai. Not only that, they have also intentionally dismissed old ideas and practices which were easily associated with new religions. To provide but a single example, they do not encourage recruitment, in contrast to the time of Tomomaru-hime and Tomomaru-sai, when disciples worked very hard to obtain new believers. This explains why Shinjikyokai has ceased to grow when compared to previously.

Generally, aggressive missionary activities on the part of new religions have frequently been a cause of trouble to the societies around them. This may be the reason why Tomomaru-kou has urged restraint concerning this kind of activity. In the 1980s a lot of boards were hung up on the walls in local neighborhoods saying, “Get out of town, (Oyama) Nezu!” or similar such things. Today, by contrast, Shinjikyokai gets along quite well with the neighborhoods in which it operates. Indeed, it is now a very easy-to-approach organization, and even the suspicious family members of very devout devotees often end up accepting Shinjikyokai after attending its various lectures which used to be closed to all except formal members. These days, non-believers are frequently welcome to attend rituals. In brief, Shinjikyokai has certainly changed, and much of its change in direction has been due to Tomomaru-kou, who has adopted the course of a normal religious organization preaching ordinary morals and ethics while erasing its more mystic, occultist facets.

However, while Shinjikyokai has become an ordinary religion, it has also lost its former power and the magnetism through which it previously captivated many believers. For one thing, Tomomaru-kou lacks the charisma of both Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime; while his talks are certainly amusing and may be fascinating to some followers, he does not appeal to as many believers as his predecessors did. For instance, many used to sit on the floor of the bathhouse awaiting Tomomaru-sai’s appearance, while yet others waited sitting on sheets of newspaper on the ground around the bathhouse. They were, in sum, very

eager believers. Furthermore, even in the early days of Tomomaru-hime devotees would sit on the cheap carpet floor while crammed into crowded lecture rooms, and always did so without grumbling. When Tomomaru-hime began her lecture with “Welcome back here,” many of them, incredibly, wept with pleasure. Today, many listen to Tomomaru-kou in a comfortable theater-like hall, some napping, while in the case of videoed lectures played days later many vacant seats can be found. Shinjikyokai has evidently changed.

Today, those who join Shinjikyokai do not look especially religious but rather appear to be ordinary people who do not seem to have any particular purpose. When Tomomaru-sai and Tomomaru-hime were alive, those who joined Shinjikyokai had clear purposes; for example, they wanted to be saved from illness, poverty, personal problems and so on. Moreover, those who were saved became devout believers who then went on to comprise the mainspring for the expansion of Shinjikyokai. Needless to say, these same devout followers have now reached old age, and will disappear within a few decades. Even more significantly, the next generation (i.e. the sons and daughters of those same devout believers) are not necessarily as zealous as their parents. Most of this younger generation have never known in person either Tomomaru-sai or Tomomaru-hime, but rather know about them only through books or through conversations with their parents or grandparents (who themselves will soon not be around to relate their memories of Shinjikyokai’s founders). Given that Tomomaru-kou now does not talk about the goddess or his predecessors, can this new generation truly maintain a deep respect for them?

These days, many of Shinjikyokai’s preachers can be found reading a lot of books, most of which are ordinary ones on proverbs, fables and morals, because they want to obtain tips for their lectures. As the goddess, “Chokushi” and “Daishin,” disappear from their lectures, their speeches have become featureless and boring, the more so since we can find what they talk about on the bookshelves of many bookstores.

Tomomaru-kou has tried to open Shinjikyokai to the public, to

ordinary people. Today many non-believers pray in the big shrine, attend rituals and listen to preachers in bright, new lecture halls. When the Higashi-Nihon Earthquake occurred, Shinjikyokai contributed to the distribution of food in their Tohoku missionary institutions. In brief, it is no longer a closed religion. Tomomaru-kou has tried to change Shinjikyokai into something akin to a non-religious body, and to some extent he has succeeded. However, in succeeding, the former ardor of Shinjikyokai has disappeared. True, new buildings continue to be built even today and, at least outwardly, the organization looks to be prospering as before. However, internally Shinjikyokai seems hollow and superficial. If Tomomaru-kou and his brother, Shinichi, do not try to find some new approach to the organization's present problems, the prospects for Shinjikyokai do not look hopeful, especially in the near future when the older generation has gone and is succeeded by the next.

Selected Bibliography

- Asahi Shinbun, *Gendai-no Chiisana Kamigami*. Asahi Shinbun, 1984.
- Numata, Kenya, "Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai". *Shinshukyo Jidai*, vol.2. Taizou Press, 1994.
- , *Shukyo-to Kagaku-no Neo-Paradigm*. Sogensha, 1995.
- Oh-e, Michiko, *Onna-no Hanamichi*. Kodansha, 1982.
- Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, *Yuuwa*, vol. 1-228. Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, 1985-2011.
- , *Kiseki Taikendan-Shu*, vol.1-14. Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, 1988-1993.
- , *Shinjikyokai: Hikari-no Sokuseki*. Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, 1989.
- , *Shinjitsu-eno Michi: Hikari-no Sokuseki*. Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, 1990.
- , *Inochi-no Ayumi*. Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, 1997.
- , *Shinjitsu-no Michi: Shinji*, vol.1-13. Oyamanezunomikoto-Shinjikyokai, 1997-2003.
- Press Kanagawa, *Kami wa Orita*. Gakushu Kenkyu Sha, 1986.