



Justin STEIN\*

## The Japanese New Religious Practices of *jōrei* and *okiyome* in the Context of Asian Spiritual Healing Traditions



In generalizations about the healing practices of the new religions, *Jōrei* and *Okiyome*, the purification rituals of *Sekai Kyūsei-kyō*, *Shinji Shumei-kai*, and *Mahikari*, have been mislabeled as forms of faith healing. According to the cosmologies, leadership, and membership of these groups, these techniques do not require faith, but in fact are the source of faith due to their empirically verifiable results. This paper contextualizes these practices and their underlying cosmologies and etiologies, by placing them in a history of Japanese religious thought and practice and by contrasting them with yogic healing, *qigong*, and *Reiki*: other Asian spiritual practices that also claim to heal the sick through the manipulation of invisible, cosmic energies. It concludes that these religions' conceptions of purity and pollution, inherited from *Ōmoto-kyō*, is significantly different from those of the dominant Japanese religious traditions, and that the emphasis on purity distinguishes these practices from the other spiritual healing practices, which emphasize balance.

*Keywords:* healing – Japanese new religions – Mahikari – Okada Mokichi – purification

---

\* Doctoral student at the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. I would like to acknowledge the great debt I owe to my gracious hosts at *Sekai Kyūsei-kyō* in Kyoto and Bangkok, *Shinji Shumei-kai* in Kyoto, *Mahikari* in Tokyo and Canberra, as well as the staffs of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto and the Motoyama Institute for Life Physics in Tokyo for the use of their facilities. Furthermore, Patricia Masters and Nagai Hiromi were of invaluable assistance during the fieldwork. Also, thanks to Paul Hines and Zachary Warnow for reading early drafts of this paper, Marc Capener and Ariel Cook for consultations on Chinese medicine, Takashi Miura and Pierce Salguero for their consultations on some technical terms, and Christoph Kleine, Martin Repp, and Katja Triplett for their editorial suggestions.

Perhaps the most prominent of all the worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) offered by Japanese new religions (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教) are their claims to effective healing practices. The literature of these movements is full of testimonials by those who have both experienced and effected miraculous recoveries, and this proclivity has not gone unrecognized by the literature on these movements. Shimazono (2004: 6) notes, “especially frequent are cases in which someone suffering from an illness has experienced relief from it after a healing ceremony in a new religion and then goes on to become a fervent believer,” and Offner and van Straelen (1963: 159) go so far as to write that “the desire for healing has been the primary motivation for becoming an adherent [of the new religions].”

Yet there seems to be an important disconnect between the way certain scholars of new religions have labeled these healing techniques and the way the groups themselves see their own practices. While it has been common practice to label these practices as forms of *shinkō chiryō* 信仰治療 or “faith healing,”<sup>1</sup> several new religions deny that faith is necessary for their healing practices. Rather, they appeal to scientific worldviews by claiming that their healing practices obey universal, fixed laws; their scientism is illustrated by their use of technological metaphors to describe said practices. Healing is said to operate via vibrational frequencies (Higuchi 1994: 8), radiation (Okada 1998: 3), or particles called *reishi* 霊子 (Schneider 1962: 141), and it is said to function as does a television (Tebecis 1982: 19) or radio. (McVeigh 1997: 83-84)

Belief in the efficacy of their methods is considered constructive, just as faith in the efficacy of modern medicine has spawned the placebo effect,<sup>2</sup> but ultimately unnecessary, as they claim that something more fundamental is at work: a set of spiritual laws that govern all phenomena, from illness to poverty to strife.<sup>3</sup> These laws, which describe the correspondence between the spiritual and the material worlds and the dependence of the latter upon the former, are said to be demonstrable through scientific experiments on both human and non-human subjects (Tebecis 1982: 293-309) and will eventually be taught as part of medicine and science. (Okada 1991: 44)

Such use of scientific rhetoric to justify spiritual worldviews can influence the decisions of the ill or their families to turn from biomedicine to alternatives, including spiritual healing practices. This search for healing in religion may seem

1. Hardacre 1986: 5; Kitagawa 1966: 315; Thomsen 1963: 23; van Straelen 1962: 232, 238-239; Varley 2000: 336.
2. Or, as the proverb goes, 鰯の頭も信心から (“with belief, even a sardine’s head [has power]”); Okada Mokichi (1984: 112-113) cites this proverb to contrast faith with “true religion.” He also says the power of placebo supports the efficacy of his healing practice: it even works for people who don’t believe in it, whereas biomedicine often doesn’t work, even for people who do believe in it. (Okada 1991: 52-53)
3. Shimazono (2004: 6) cites these three conditions as a summary of motivations for joining a new religion.

irrational, and thus antithetical to modernity, but as Young (1990) has argued regarding the new religion Mahikari 真光,<sup>4</sup> a belief that invisible spiritual forces affect this world need not be at odds with rationality and can actually complement materialist ideology. Once someone accepts that physical health depends on spiritual forces in addition to physical forces, an internal logic is maintained. This has spawned the explicit goal of a number of new religions to synthesize science and religion, producing a “spiritual science,” and the related claim that their healing techniques represent empirically verifiable applications of spiritual knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

This paper focuses on the healing techniques said to operate independent of faith through the channeling of divine “light” (*ohikari* お光り), practiced by a family<sup>6</sup> of Japanese new religions including Mahikari, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō 世界救世教, and Shinji Shumei-kai 神慈秀明会. The first two sections are primarily descriptive, outlining the practices themselves and the belief system that underlies these practices. The third section contextualizes these practices within the history of Japanese religions and the fourth places them within a broader context of Asian spiritual healing practices said to operate independently of faith: Indian yoga, Chinese *qigong*, and non-sectarian Japanese spiritual healing practices such as Reiki.

Its final section analyzes continuities and disjunctures between these traditions. The chief of these is that, while each of these spiritual disciplines claim that their healing practice works via the manual manipulation of invisible energies, their conceptions of how that healing can be effected diverge into two models: one of *purity* and one of *balance*. While some tentative explanations are offered about the historical roots of this divide, this broad sketch can be thought of as an exploratory response to Inoue’s (1991) call for the healing practices of the new religions to “be studied within a comparative framework that also takes into account traditional healing methods” and, like that call, it offers ample opportunities for future research on the subject.

This article incorporates information collected in field research conducted with Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, Shinji Shumei-kai, and Sukyō Mahikari in Japan, Thailand, and Australia in 2001 and 2002. In the course of participant-observation, I “received

- 
4. By “Mahikari,” I refer to a group of new religions, including Sukyō Mahikari 崇教真光 (Sukyō True Light) and Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan 世界真光文明教団 (Church of the World True Light Civilization), as their split is the result of a successional debate after the death of Mahikari’s founder, and there is little difference between the two sects in doctrine or practice. (Broder 2008: 333-334n; Young 1990: 35n)
  5. Okada 1984b: 111; 1991: 44; Tebecis 1982: 289-90; 2009: 360.
  6. Due to overseas expansion and sectarian fracturing, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō and Shinji Shumeikai groups are known by many different names, including Izunome Kyōdan いずのめ教団, Johrei Fellowship, Messianity, Shumei 秀明, Su no Hikari Kyōdan 主之光教団, and Tōhō no Hikari Kyōdan 東方之光教団.

healing” from members of the clergy and laity many times. Despite clearly having explained my primary interest in their practices was that of a researcher, members of each religious group made efforts to initiate me, in line with their doctrine that salvation is contingent upon membership. (Okada 1984a: 44-46) I was initiated into Sekai Kyūsei-kyō in Bangkok and thus was also able to experience “giving healing” as a member for a short time.

### *The Healing Practices of jōrei and okiyome*

Mahikari, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, and Shinji Shumei-kai are three Japanese new religions, each structured around a similar healing practice, called *jōrei* 浄霊 (spirit purification) in the latter two religions and *okiyome* 御浄め (purification) in Mahikari.<sup>7</sup> In these sects, healing is the primary attraction for most new members (Davis 1980: 102), a component of daily life for active members,<sup>8</sup> and “proof” that God performs miracles. (Okada 1984a: 137) The initiation into these groups involves receiving a golden amulet (*omamori* お守り)<sup>9</sup> claimed to channel God’s light allowing initiates to perform healings; during these practices, practitioners believe that they directly interact with the divine source of this spiritual light through their amulets. This empowerment of the laity that Hardacre (1986: 97) calls “lay centrality, [the] tendency to narrow the gap between leaders and followers,” accomplished through the bestowal of these amulets and the authorization to perform healings, is a salient factor in the popularity of these sects.<sup>10</sup>

The ritual practice of these healing techniques begins with both the practitioner and the recipient demonstrating gratitude and respect to the central deity by placing their hands in prayer position (*gasshō* 合掌), bowing twice, and clapping

7. While this is the standard kanji used by Mahikari groups for their healing practice (also called “the technique of true light” *mahikari no waza* 真光の技, “raising the hand” *tekazashi* 手翳し, or “dry cleaning” *kuriningu* クリーニング), they sometimes use alternate orthographies to emphasize alternate meanings 御清め (“purification, cleansing, exorcism”) or such as お気与め (“giving *ki*”). For further examples of Mahikari’s use of alternate characters, see McVeigh (1997: 229-235). In English language settings, such as Australia, Mahikari members typically use the phrase “giving light” although in publications this is often “giving True Light,” “cleansing” or “purification.” (Tebecis 1982 and 2009)
8. After my initiation into Sekai Kyūsei-kyō in Bangkok, I was encouraged to perform *jōrei* three to ten times daily, as regular practice increases one’s ability to channel light.
9. This amulet is also called an Ohikari お光り (“light”) or a “sacred focal point” in the Sekai Kyūsei-kyō religions and an Omitama 御み霊 in Mahikari.
10. Actually, as the lay followers of Kurozumi-kyō 黒住教, the New Religion Hardacre examines in her work, are typically not authorized to perform their healing practice of *majinai* 呪い, her term “lay centrality” is even more applicable to the sects described in this paper.

thrice. While members always undergo this formal element during healings in the prayer hall, which is believed to be the most effective location for healing,<sup>11</sup> it can be omitted in less formal settings, such as healings done in private homes. In Sekai Kyūsei-kyō and Shinji Shumei-kai, the bowing sequence is directed first towards the scroll that hangs in the altar's central position and then to a photograph of the sects' founder, which hangs to the right of the altar. The words "*Meishū-sama, arigatō gozaimasu*" ("Thank you very much, Enlightened Master") are directed towards the founder, and repeated thrice. Mahikari members (*kamikumite* 神組み手) bow first to the central scroll, then to a statue of Daikoku,<sup>12</sup> and recite a formal declaration of the names, intention, and gratitude of the two parties. After the bowing, a prayer<sup>13</sup> is recited, though on informal occasions this too is sometimes omitted. The practitioner informs the deity, the founder, or both, of the intention to dispel impurities and the practitioner and recipient bow to one another.

At this point the practitioner raises one hand and holds it slightly cupped with a relaxed wrist and the palm facing the recipient. The hand is held between eight inches and two feet away from the recipient. The practitioner focuses his or her attention just below the first knuckle of the third finger, opposite the center of the palm, from where the light is said to radiate. Practitioners are taught to visualize a stream of light flowing to specific parts of the recipient's body. The treatment always begins with the recipient's forehead<sup>14</sup> and slowly scans over the entire body, front and back, focusing on different "vital spots" (*kyūsho* 急所) where impurities are thought to accumulate.<sup>15</sup> The raised hand may be switched as fatigue dictates. The

11. This is attributed to the presence of the *goshintai* ご神体 or scroll that hangs above the center of the altar. It is believed that the scroll transmits the powerful healing energy of the central god. The scroll is described as analogous to a satellite dish in that it collects and intensifies the omnipresent divine light to allow for highly effective healing in its presence. (McVeigh 1997: 83)
12. Mahikari claims that Daikoku 大黒, one of the "seven lucky gods" (*shichi-fukujin* 七福神) and traditionally the god of wealth and farmers, represents "Izunome-sama, the [kami] responsible for materializing [God's] will on earth." (Tebecis 1982: 36)
13. The origins and significance of this prayer, the Amatsu-norito 天津祝詞, will be discussed later in the paper.
14. This area is of particular importance as, similar to the theory Descartes expressed in *The Passions of the Soul* [1649], both Okada Mokichi and Okada Yoshikazu teach that the pineal gland in the mid-brain is the seat of the "primary soul" (*shukon* 主魂). (McVeigh 1997: 41; Okada 1991: 48)
15. Each group teaches slightly different body zones, but the typical order for treatment is: (front) forehead, crown, left shoulder, right shoulder, throat, sternum, solar plexus, lower abdomen, left hip, right hip. (back) occiput, left shoulder, right shoulder, cervical vertebrae, thoracic vertebrae, left kidney, right kidney, lumbar vertebrae, coccyx, left hip, right hip. The kidneys are particularly emphasized as a reservoir for the physical impurities associated with karmic clouds.

Mahikari treatment ends with the practitioner sweeping the hands in front of the recipient three times, each time saying “*oshizumari*” 御静まり (“calm down”) sternly. After the treatment, the two parties thank each other and the deity, hands in *gasshō*. Especially during healings in the prayer hall, both parties will typically then repeat the ritual bowing to show gratitude and respect to the deity and the founder. Finally, the recipient often follows a healing treatment by making a donation to the branch temple by placing money in an envelope, on which a name or prayer may be inscribed, and placing the envelope in a collection box.

### *The Cosmologies and Etiologies of jōrei and okiyome*

In order to better understand these healing practices, a summary of the beliefs that underlie them is in order. The essential foundations of Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, Shinji Shumei-kai, and Mahikari (founded in 1947, 1970, and 1960, respectively) are near-identical as they all stem from the revelatory teachings of one man, Okada Mokichi 岡田茂吉 (1882-1955), now reverently referred to by members of the former two groups as Enlightened Master (Meishū-sama 明主様).<sup>16</sup> Mahikari members do not recognize Okada Mokichi, but instead follow the teachings of their sect’s founder, Okada Yoshikazu 岡田良一 (1901-1974), also known as Okada Kōtama 岡田光玉 (“Light Gem”), but typically referred to as Great Savior (Sukuinushi-sama 救い主様). There is no family relation between the two Okadas, however, their teachings are nearly identical.<sup>17</sup> The most significant difference between their beliefs is that, whereas Mahikari teaches that nearly all problems, from personal health to social ills and natural disasters, are “due to disturbance by spirits” (Tebecis 1983: 43), the

16. While English-language publications typically translate Meishū-sama as “Enlightened Master” (when a translation is offered), it can also mean “enlightened ruler” or “wise ruler.” Matsuoka (2008: 8) chooses to translate the characters more literally as “Lord of Light.”

17. Though largely unknown to Mahikari members and denied by Mahikari leadership, evidence that Okada Yoshikazu was not only a member of Sekai Kyūsei-kyō from 1947 until 1957, but a paid minister of that organization from 1949 until 1953 would account for said similarities. (Allerton, n.d.; Broder 2008: 337-338; Davis 1980: 314n) However, Broder (2008: 355) has also shown that Okada Yoshikazu was so profoundly influenced by the practices of Makoto no Michi Kyōkai 真の道教会 that Mahikari might be considered “an off-shoot” of that group. Thus, perhaps Mahikari might best be thought of as hybridizing elements of the worldview and healing practice of Sekai Kyūsei-kyō with separate revelations and practices from Makoto no Michi Kyōkai.

other two groups place less emphasis on individual spirits and instead usually refer to the cause of suffering as less anthropomorphic “spiritual clouds” (*rei no kumori* 霊の曇り).<sup>18</sup>

Each of the three sects worships a paternal savior deity<sup>19</sup> that, after a prolonged absence, is returning to purify the world and re-establish worldwide paradise. The “World of Night” (*yoru no sekai* 夜の世界) that is ending is characterized as *yin* (*in* 陰), associated with femininity, water, the moon, disease, and darkness, while the coming “World of Day” (*hiru no sekai* 昼の世界) (and the divine purifying energy which heralds it) is characterized as *yang* (*yō* 陽), associated with masculinity, fire, the sun, health, and light.<sup>20</sup>

They teach that their deity is continually purifying the world by dispelling physical, mental and spiritual pollutants; this purification process is expressed as disease, conflicts, and natural disasters. The disease, poverty, and war that characterize today's world are symptomatic of the world-renewing “Baptism by Fire” that is rapidly cleansing global “spiritual clouds” in preparation for the rapidly-approaching paradise on earth wherein all shall live in health, prosperity, and peace. (Okada 1984a: 103-110; Tebecis 1982: 30)

These sects describe reality as existing simultaneously on multiple causally linked planes.<sup>21</sup> Okada Mokichi (1984: 51) writes, “according to the natural laws of existence, all that appears in the physical world first originates in the spiritual world, just as mental thoughts give rise to all physical actions,” which Tebecis (2009: 26)

- 
18. Although exorcising “attaching spirits” does not play a central role in Okada Mokichi’s philosophy or the practices of either Sekai Kyūsei-kyō or Shinji Shumei-kai, he does write that “when [spiritual] clouds reach a certain density, an animalistic spirit ... possesses the individual.” (Okada 1984a: 159)
  19. The identity of this deity will be discussed in more depth in the next section but, theological quandaries aside, English-language publications by these groups often simply refer to the central deity as “God.”
  20. This association of *yin* with disease and *yang* with health is not typical of yin-yang philosophies, as will be discussed in the analysis section.
  21. Mahikari’s teachings can be so inconsistent in their account of the number of planes of existence that their teachers refer to there being both two and three primary planes of existence, even within the same paragraph. (Davis 1980: 39; Tebecis 1982: 340) Apparently the three planes (physical, astral or mental, and spiritual) is the true teaching, but it is often simplified for theoretical explanations of disease, karma, and purification. The explanation offered by Mahikari teachers is that the when the dual forces “rotate and create existence,” the triadic world comes into being. (McVeigh 1997: 39)

echoes when he writes “spirit first, mind next, body follows.” As the spiritual world is considered primary and the physical world a reflection thereof, physical healing can only take place insofar as spiritual purification is undergone.<sup>22</sup>

This ontology of correspondence that considers one's physical state to be a reflection of one's spiritual state is related to the concept of karma. An individual whose spirit is sullied by karma, accumulated through one's actions as well as inherited from ancestors and past lives, is thought to be prone to indulge in intoxicants and unhealthy food, thus creating a buildup of pathogenic toxins. These toxins can be purged through spiritual purification, which may cause expurgatory symptoms such as increased mucous production or frequent excretion.

What we perceive as illness can be the physical consequence of either this purification process or the spiritual clouds or spirit disturbances preventing *ohikari* from nourishing the physical body.<sup>23</sup> *Jōrei* and *okiyome* are said to work by using a raised hand to direct *ohikari*, channeled through the practitioner's amulet, to different areas of the recipient's physical body where toxins accumulate. The connection between physical toxins and spiritual impurities is a two-way street: while physical toxins from food additives to medicines provide an attaching point for spirits or spiritual clouds, it is the existence of spiritual clouds that make it possible for toxins to accumulate in the first place. (Okada 1984b: 111; Davis 1980: 24) These new religions also stress the importance of organic agriculture, called “nature farming” (Okada 1991: 71) or “yoko agriculture”<sup>24</sup> which prevents chemical fertilizers or pesticides from polluting human bodies and the environment. (Tebecis 2009: 307-310) Once the individual is wholly purified, both spiritually and physically, he or she can only prevent the reappearance of spiritual clouds by refraining from impure thoughts, misdeeds, or ingesting toxins.

22. Okada 1991: 45-46; Tebecis 1982: 340. Okada Mokichi (1991: 46) even gives a modern spin to Plato's classic allegory of the cave: “One should think of the spiritual world as a film bearing images that are projected as a movie; regard the material world as what you see on the screen.”

23. Personal communication with a minister of Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, Kyoto, January 2002.

24. This Mahikari phrase *yōkō* 陽光 literally translates to “sunshine” but the characters for “yang” and “light” are both significant for the cosmology of the organization, as well as its history. The first religious organization that Okada Yoshikazu founded was called *Yōkōshi Tomo no Kai* 陽光子友乃会 (Association of the Sunshine Children Friends).

This conception of purity and pollution is based on belief in an invisible energy or “spiritual radiation” (Okada 1998: 3) that pervades existence and purifies the body; like the *élan vital*,<sup>25</sup> this energy must be present to sustain life. (Okada 1991: 47) The central deity is the ultimate source of this energy; this deity and its energy are associated with *yang* characteristics. The relation between spiritual radiation and spiritual clouds is related to the conception of purity (*harae* 禊) and pollution (*kegare* 穢れ, 汚れ, or 気枯れ). The less polluted the practitioner, it is said, the more light he or she is able to channel, analogous to a pipe being free of debris. Prayer is also believed to aid the purification. The light and prayer accelerate the detoxification process of disease, and can superficially exacerbate the symptoms of disease as the spiritual clouds begin to dispel. The treatment must coincide with a change in lifestyle to be effective; otherwise the individual will accumulate more toxins or karma, and the clouds will again form.<sup>26</sup>

### Historical Contexts

As is the case in many, if not most, of the New Religions, the philosophy detailed above is highly syncretistic. Okada Mokichi (1984a: 15) himself used the metaphor that Sekai Kyūsei-kyō was “a department store religion” with different sections for Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Shintō, and Daoism. Honest enough about his propensity to borrow, he typically fails to reference antecedent New Religions that possess quite similar healing rituals and worldviews. While the references to established religions may serve his interests by lending legitimacy to his sect, this section demonstrates that, while Okada’s thought indeed draws on diverse beliefs and practices from these religions, his syncretism was inherited from the new religion Ōmoto-kyō, of which he was a member and missionary.

The healing practices of the new religions are in line with the importance of healing rituals throughout the history of Japanese religion; healing practices by clergy, mountain ascetics (*yamabushi* 山伏) and female shamans (*miko* 巫女) have long attracted followers to temples and shrines and lent credence to the belief that physical health is causally linked to spiritual activity. This belief underlies the story from the *Nihongi* that tells of the first Buddhist icon to arrive in Japan. Upon

25. This phrase was coined in 1907 by vitalist philosopher Henri Bergson to refer to the force that differentiates the living from the dead and drives both the lives of individuals and the evolution of species; it is commonly used as a synonym for *pneuma* (Greek), *prāṇa* (Sanskrit.), *qi* (Chinese), and *ki* (Japanese). Okada Mokichi (1984a: 319-322) acknowledges Bergson’s influence on his beliefs. Bergson seems to have been reasonably well-known in Japan; Nishida Kitarō studied Bergson’s works in university, and one of his colleagues studied with Bergson in Paris. (Jones 2002: 59)

26. Personal communication with a minister of Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, Kyoto, January 2002.

receiving a copper and gold statue of Śākyamuni from the King of Baekje in 552, Emperor Kimmei was unsure whether it should be worshipped. “As an experiment,” he gave it to the head of the Soga clan, who built Japan’s first Buddhist temple in its honor. However, as an epidemic struck, the emperor’s other advisors claimed that this foreign deity had incurred the wrath of native *kami*. The statue was thrown into a canal and its temple was burnt to the ground. (Aston 2005 [1896]: 65-67) An alternate telling of the story relates how, as the illness grew worse, belief in the power of the Buddha grew. The icon was fished out, the first Japanese Buddhist temple was dedicated to Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来, the Buddha of Healing, and the severity of the disease declined. (Matsunaga and Matsunaga 1974: 11-15)

Since that time, prayers of healing to Yakushi Nyorai and the arhat Binzuru 賓頭盧 has enjoyed “enduring popularity” in Japanese Buddhism, as seen at countless temples where their statues are well polished by the hands of believers hoping for a divine cure (Birnbaum 1979: xv) Yet the healing practices of *jōrei* and *okiyome* may resonate more profoundly with the ancient story of Japan’s first Buddha than with these contemporary Japanese Buddhists. While modern-day afflicted Buddhists might be said to be reliant on the faith of their parents in the power of the Buddha, the ancient Soga family in this tale could be seen as “experimentalists” in the sense that their faith in the power of Buddhism grew out of their immediate experiences. Winston Davis (1980: 294) relates how the rise of Buddhism was based on empirical experimentation: “Practical-minded emperors allowed select individuals to worship the new Korean deity as an experiment, that is, to see whether it would fulfill ‘every prayer’ [as promised by its Korean donor].” It is this spirit of “try it and see” that is often invoked in the teachings of Mahikari, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, and Shinji Shūmei-kai.

Ancient mythology aside, several elements of these groups’ practices directly stem from traditional Japanese religion. Perhaps most obviously, the Shintō ritual of bowing and clapping to invoke and worship *kami* is undergone quite often: upon entering or leaving the prayer hall, approaching the altar, and both before and after *jōrei* and *okiyome*. As at traditional temples and shrines, there are *temizuya* 手水舎 fountains outside of the prayer halls for the ritual washing of hands and rinsing out of the mouth. This symbolic purification is undergone out of respect for the *kami* to be worshipped and represents approaching one’s original divine nature before the accumulation of karmic pollution. The greater symbolism for these new religions is based on the teaching that one’s body and spirit must be entirely pure to survive the transition from the ending age of dark *yin* energy to the dawning age of fiery *yang*.<sup>27</sup>

27. This practice somewhat contradicts the symbology of these groups, in which water typically symbolizes the pollution of the ending age.

The most important prayer in these three groups, recited before *jōrei* and *okiyome* as well as during services, is the Amatsu-norito 天津祝詞, a rewritten version of the Nakatomi prayer to the gods of the heavens (*amatsukami* 天津神) recited by Shintō priests during the biannual Ceremony of Grand Purification.<sup>28</sup> This prayer is based on the Shintō creation myth that, at the time of the polarization of male and female energies, “light, pure elements branched off to become heaven (*ame*), while heavy, turbid elements branched off to become earth (*tsuchi*). . . . The *amatsukami* are said to have descended from heaven to pacify and perfect this world.” (*Basic Terms of Shintō* 1985: 2) This sort of Shintō mythology, albeit filtered through other new religions’ interpretations (particularly that of Ōmoto-kyō) may be the ultimate origin for these groups’ descriptions of a hierarchical spirit world “in which the better sort of spirits, having higher vibrations, can hover closer to the Light without being burned up” (Davis 1980: 76) and those of the heavenly god who is returning to purify our world and re-establish paradise. (Okada 1984b: 64-65)

In these three groups, traditional Japanese deities are still worshipped, though the identities attributed to them are at times indistinguishable from those of the creator deity. At different points in its history, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō has considered the Buddhist figures Kannon Bosatsu and Miroku Bosatsu to be the central deity.<sup>29</sup> Mahikari eschews these traditional Buddhist figures and worships an abstract *yang* deity called Sushin 主神 (“Lord God” or more commonly “Su God”), to whom Okada Mokichi (1984a: 211) also alluded in his writings. Mahikari also worships Miroku Ōmikama, “the savior of mankind,” said to be a Shintō *kami* of whom Miroku Bosatsu, Daikoku, and Okada Yoshikazu are incarnations. (Davis 1980: 35; Tebecis 1982: 36)

28. Herbert 1967: 387; Teeuwen and van der Veere 1998: 56, 79; Teeuwen 2000: 100. Teeuwen (2000: 100) writes: “Recitation of this formula had become part of standard *onmyōji* 陰陽師 [Yin Yang Master] practice by the tenth century and soon penetrated into certain esoteric Buddhist rituals as well.” The Amatsu-norito is recited in Ōmoto-kyō, Mahikari, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, and Shinji Shumei-kai, with different phrasing from sect to sect believed to enhance the *kotodama* 言霊, or the magical power of the words. The three sects under examination have also added phrases about the coming Kingdom of Miroku (Skt. Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future.) to introduce the eschatological theme of world-renewal (*yonaooshi* 世直し).

29. Okada Mokichi’s first organizations (Dai Nihon Kannon Kai and Nihon Kannon Kyōdan) considered Kannon Bosatsu as the central deity and his followers still believe that he first received the healing energy in the form of a sphere from the end of Kannon’s staff. However, Kannon’s association with watery *yin* attributes made him incompatible with the fiery *yang* power of *jōrei*. First it was claimed that Kannon was causing the world to mirror his own transition from *yin* to *yang* energies, but this theory seems to have been lost importance as devotion shifted to Miroku Bosatsu.

Miroku's return to this world to re-establish divine paradise has been long awaited in Japan's folk tradition (Davis 1980: 295; Sponberg and Hardacre 1988), and the twentieth century saw an intense flowering of eschatological yearning. The imagery used by these religions to describe the events surrounding the return of Miroku directly parallels that of Christian eschatology (e.g. "baptism by fire," the "seed-people" of the new civilization, and the empyrean theocracy of the savior to last one thousand years<sup>30</sup>). The similarity between these phrases and the language of the Christian Bible, along with frequent references to Jesus,<sup>31</sup> suggests that both of the Okadas studied Christianity at least cursorily, but it also illustrates the influence of Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871-1948).

Deguchi was co-founder of the new religion Ōmoto-kyō 大本教, of which Okada Mokichi became a member in 1920 and a missionary in 1928, leading a Tokyo branch temple until founding his own spiritual healing clinic in 1934 and sect in 1935. (Staemmler 2009: 267) The fact that Okada Mokichi had previously been an active proselytizer of the Ōmoto-kyō doctrines that the eschaton was at hand, that the one true god had returned to purify this polluted world and establish a heavenly kingdom on earth, and that Deguchi was "the *miroku* or the future Buddha who is to be the master of the new world order," can explain the source of many of Okada's teachings.<sup>32</sup>

The personal component of this purification is the cleansing of "the 'clouds' of sin piled on the soul by one's ancestors." (Davis 1980: 75) These clouds, which can take the form of evil spirits, are expelled by a healing practice called *miteshiro otoritsugi* み手代お取次 ("transfer through a hand substitute") that shares similarities to the practices of *jōrei* and *okiyome*. Like *jōrei* and *okiyome*, the practice begins with Shintō ritual bowing and clapping and the recitation of the Amatsu-norito; after this, the practitioner holds up a rice ladle (*oshakushi* お杓子) to direct divine spirit (*shinki* 神気 or *reiki* 霊気) into, and evil spirits and disease out of, the recipient's body. (Davis 1980: 74) Also like *jōrei* and *okiyome*, *miteshiro* ends with further clapping and

30. For example, the imagery of a "baptism by fire" (Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17) that will be survived by "seed-people" of a new civilization to be ruled by the savior in a thousand-year theocracy. (Revelation 7; 20: 4-6)

31. Okada Mokichi (1984a: 166) often quotes Jesus and Śākyamuni Buddha together and calls them "earth's greatest spiritual teachers." He is also familiar with non-scriptural elements of Christian thought as is evidenced by his references to Dante. (Okada 1984a: 74) Both Okadas equate their eschatological prophesies with Christian ones. (Okada 1984a: 401-402; Tebecis 1982: 25)

32. Kitagawa 1966: 312*n*; Offner and van Straelen 1963: 64-5*n*, 69. Okada also incorporated other teachings of Deguchi into Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, including the rejection of Western medicine, the promotion of art as spiritual practice, and the idea that truth, goodness, and beauty would be the chief characteristics of the age to come. (Staemmler 2009: 269).

bowing (Staemmler 2009: 266). However, unlike the practices under consideration in this paper, *miteshiro* can only be performed by Ōmotokyō missionaries, not by laypeople, and it is “only performed on special occasions in order to cure existing illnesses or end series of misfortunes,” as opposed to *jōrei* and *okiyome*, which should be practiced daily to remove spiritual pollution. (Staemmler 2009: 273)

While the structure of Okada’s eventual healing practice may have been modeled after *miteshiro*, Okada’s biographers write that it was Ōmotokyō’s earlier mediumistic practices called *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神 (“settling spirits and returning to the kami”) or simply *chinkon* that provided him with his first experiences of healing powers.<sup>33</sup> *Chinkon* and *kishin* are methods of mediated spirit possession that were systematized in the mid-nineteenth century by the Shintō scholar Honda Chikaatsu 本田親徳 (1823-1889) in his “spirit studies” (*reigaku* 靈学) and incorporated into a new religion called Inari Kōsha 稻荷請社 in 1891 by Honda’s student Nagasawa Katsutate 長沢雄楯 (1858-1940). Nagasawa, in turn, taught the practice to Deguchi Onisaburō, who combined them into a single practice in Ōmoto-kyō, where Okada learned it and practiced it extensively: “To ... as wide a circle of people as possible, he administered *chinkon*. The results were amazing. He had the power to heal.” (Sekai Kyusei Kyo 1998: 124) Okada’s healing successes with *chinkon* helped convince him that God was “inside” of him. “The more that I doubted,” he wrote, “the more miracles occurred to dispel my doubts.” (Ibid.) However, as *jōrei* and *okiyome*, with their silent channeling of invisible spiritual energies to heal, more closely resemble the practice of *miteshiro otoritsugi* than they do the mediated possession practices of *chinkon kishin*, Staemmler (2009: 261) suggests that scholars have over-emphasized the connections of these healing practices to *chinkon* and have largely overlooked those to *miteshiro*.<sup>34</sup>

As discussed, the “Ōmoto lineage” sects of Mahikari, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, and Shinji Shumei-kai each worship a deity associated with fire and the heavens, and believe that their healing practices channel the deities’ *yang* energy to purify the body. This is thought to mirror the purification that the world is undergoing in its

33. The *chinkon kishin* of Ōmoto-kyō that was also called simply *chinkon* does not correlate to the earlier *chinkon* practice of Honda Chikaatsu, but rather to the mediumistic ritual that Honda had called *kishin*. Deguchi and Ōmoto-kyō members also referred to this practice as *yūsai* 幽齋 (“imperceptible ceremony”). (Staemmler 2009: 135) For more on the mediumistic practices of *chinkon kishin*, see Staemmler 2009. While *chinkon kishin*’s sensational effects helped the organization gain public attention and grow into a membership numbering in the millions, its practice was banned by Deguchi Onisaburō in 1923; just months later, Deguchi developed the *miteshiro otoritsugi* healing technique to replace it. (Kimura 1995; Staemmler 2009: 261-262)

34. Examples of scholarship that stresses the relationship between *jōrei* and *chinkon kishin* include Tsushiro Hirofumi’s *Chinkon Gyōhōron* (cited in Staemmler 2009: 9-10, 261) and Broder (2008: 345-346).

transition from an age of *yin* pollution to one of *yang* purity and salvation. They claim that disease results from “spiritual clouds” (associated with *yin* and darkness) and that only the heavenly “spiritual light” (associated with *yang*) can disperse. Here the dichotomy of purity (*harai*) and pollution (*kegare*) is clearly correlated with *yin* and *yang* in a way that stands in contrast with the oppositional dualisms at the core of other forms of Asian spiritual healing.

### *Indian, Chinese, and Non-sectarian Japanese Spiritual Healing Practices*

Teachers of Indian yoga claim that its philosophy is the oldest still in existence; they refer to clay seals from the prehistoric Indus River Valley said to depict carvings of ascetics prefiguring Śiva, the Hindu god of yoga, practicing a meditation technique said to cultivate *siddhis* or supernormal powers, including the ability to heal.<sup>35</sup> Like the Japanese new religions that are the subjects of this paper, Indian yogis teach that reality exists on three planes – the physical, the subtle, and the causal – with three corresponding human bodies: the dense body, the astral body and the spiritual body. This layered cosmos is permeated with a vital energy called *prāṇa* (“breath”), which dissociates into two energies, *śiva* (masculine) and *śakti* (feminine). In the human body, *prāṇa* is normally polarized, with *śiva* at the crown of the head<sup>36</sup> and *śakti* at the base of the spine. The goal of yoga, literally “union,” can be understood as the marriage of *śakti* and *śiva* through the practice of meditation, physical postures, and exacting standards of personal hygiene on physical, ethical, and spiritual levels. (Rama 1990: 32-33)

*Prāṇa* is described as traveling through the body along an intricate network of tubular pathways known as *nāḍīs*. The number of *nāḍīs* is often estimated as exceeding seventy-two thousand, but the major three, *idā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumṇā*, follow the central column of the spine. *Idā* and *piṅgalā* emerge from the left and right side of the perineum, terminate at the corresponding nostrils, and channel *śakti* and *śiva*, respectively.<sup>37</sup> *Suṣumṇā* is non-dual and runs the length of the spinal column. The function of *suṣumṇā* depends on a balance of *śiva* and *śakti*; as Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1997: 522-523) writes, “the main aim of hatha yoga is to bring about a balanced flow of prana in ida and pingala nadis . . . so that neither the

35. Hewitt 1991: 460; Saraswati 1997: 4. The idea that the lotus posture in these seals is related to the practice of yoga is challenged by David Gordon White (2009: 48-59), who argues that it is simply a mark of royal sovereignty.

36. The physical location of the crown *cakra* (Skt. *sahasrara*,) corresponds roughly to the anterior fontanel or the location of the soft spot in a baby’s skull.

37. According to the earliest sources, *idā* and *piṅgalā* terminate at the nostrils (Motoyama 1981: 136-137). Swami Sayananda Saraswati (1997: 521) teaches that these *nāḍīs* actually terminate on either side of *ājñā cakra* (the third eye) between the eyebrows.

mental nor physical faculties are dominant. . . . Then sushumna, the most important nadi, begins to flow.” While their accounts of the subtle body differ on some technical aspects, Swamis Rama and Saraswati agree that yoga strives to balance the masculine and feminine energies in the body.

Concomitant with this subtle anatomy is the belief that the proper flow of *prāṇa* through the *nadīs* ensures health and vitality; blockages cause illness and death. (Atreya 1997: 3) Therefore, if the blocked *nadīs* can be cleared and the proper flow of *prāṇa* is established, the cause of disease will be remedied and the sick will be healed. Yogic healing practices use the healer’s body to channel cosmic *prāṇa* through the healer’s body, out the healer’s eyes, palms, fingertips, and/or *ājñā cakra* (“third eye”), and into the recipient’s physical and subtle bodies. The hand can touch the body or can be held facing the body up to two feet away. Physical co-presence is not always required; some healers are believed to project *prāṇa* thousands of miles to heal. Honing these yogic healing abilities is said to take years of daily practice (Motoyama 1981: 248).

The philosophical foundations of *qigong* 气功 (“breath work” [kikō, Jp.]) and its associated healing practice of external *qi* treatment (*wàiqì zhì liáofǎ* 外气之疗法) are grounded in Chinese cosmology. The cosmos is composed of a non-dual primary substance called “primordial breath” or “source *qi*” (*yuánqì* 元气) that serves as the matrix for the polarization of the complimentary and interdependent forces of *yin* and *yang*, symbolically depicted in the ubiquitous *tàijí* diagram.<sup>38</sup> The human body is considered to exist at this level, “the level of the energetic-material cosmos,” in which *yuánqì* is differentiated into the *qì* 气 (“breath”) of the meridian system<sup>39</sup> on the *yang* side, and the *xuè* 血 (“blood”) of the circulatory system on the *yin* side. Thus, “a person becomes ill when chi and blood are not circulating well [because] the *yin* and *yang* are out of balance.” (Dong and Essner 1995: 25, 40) Moreover, *qi*, which is *yang* relative to blood, itself has *yin* and *yang* components (*yíngqì* 膺气 [“nutritive breath”] and *wéiqì* 维气 [“defensive breath”]) that must be in harmony in the individual to maintain health. (Maciocia 1989: 8-9, 44-45)

38. Commonly referred to in English as “the *yin-yang* symbol,” the *tàijí* 太极 (“Supreme Ultimate”) diagram shows the two forces as an interpenetrating cycle; whenever *yin* or *yang* reaches its extreme in the diagram, it contains the seed of its opposite.

39. Analogous to the *nadīs* of the yogic system, *qi* is thought to flow through the body through subtle channels called meridians (*jīng* 经). The twelve “regular” meridians are associated with the solid *yin* organs (*zàng* 脏 [zō, Jp.]) and the hollow *yang* viscera (*fù* 腑 [fù]) which they govern. They in turn are governed by two “irregular” meridians known as the “conception” (or “functional”) (*rèn* 妊 [nín]) meridian, which runs from the perineum (*huìyīn* 会阴) to the lower lip and is the main conduit for *yin* energy, and the governing (*dū* 督 [toku]) meridian which runs from the perineum up the spine to the anterior fontanel (*bǎihuì* 百会), then down to terminate at the upper palate, and channels *yang* energy. (Yu 1995: 55-56; Yuasa 1993: 84, 100)

The five major schools of *qigong* have different purposes in cultivating *qi*; of main interest to us is the medical tradition.<sup>40</sup> The medical practitioners who use external *qi* therapy produce a form of energy called *rénqì* 仁气 ("humane breath") outside of the body that they can direct at a recipient through their breath, eyes, fingertips, or palms.<sup>41</sup> First, they use their hands and intuition to locate obstructions or stagnations in the patient's energetic body. "Usually the *qi* is released from between two inches to a foot away from the body, and the treatment may take three to thirty minutes" (Dong and Essner 1995: 39). The recipient's body, if receptive to the energy, will convert the external *rénqì* to internal *jīngqì* 经气<sup>42</sup> or defensive *wéiqì*. This practice is said to use up some of the practitioner's *jīngqì* in the production of *rénqì*; thus, a limited number of recipients can be treated in one day. Furthermore, it is said to take a minimum of one year of intensive daily practice to cultivate enough *qi* to be able to perform external *qigong* healing, and practitioners must maintain daily meditation practice to prevent being drained of their vitality. (Dong and Essner 1995: 54-55, 76). However, other *qigong* practitioners say that they access *yuánqì* to prevent depleting their own.<sup>43</sup>

Like India and China, Japan's history is full of religious practitioners who heal with their hands, ostensibly by manipulating an invisible energy called *ki* 気. These spiritual healers appear within the "established religions" (*kisei shūkyō* 既成宗教) (as opposed to the "new religions"), but are perhaps most commonly found within what is sometimes called "folk religion" (*minkan shinkō* 民間信仰), a catch-all category for non-sectarian Japanese religious practice. (Hori 1968) The early twentieth century was a fertile breeding ground for non-sectarian spiritual healing groups alongside

- 
40. Dong and Essner (1995: 6) present these five schools (and their respective goals) as: Buddhist (cultivation of mind and moral sentiment), Confucian (correct thought and altruism), Daoist (gnosis of mystical relationship between individual and cosmos), medical (cure and prevention of illness), and martial (strengthening body and training to attack in protecting oneself or others).
41. Dong and Essner 1995: 33-35, 144. This *qi* is thought to emanate from the *lāogōng* 勞宮 acupoint in the center of the palm, the same point from where practitioners are said to channel *hikari* in *jōrei* and *okiyome*.
42. This *jīngqì*, the energy of the meridian system, should not be confused with its homonym *jīngqì* 精氣, the "essential breath" of the kidneys.
43. For example, the healing method of "Cosmic Chi Kung" taught by Mantak Chia (2001: 4), claims to let the practitioner channel "cosmic" energy and, accordingly, treat many recipients without ill effect; he claims this practice is "more traditional" than the *qigong* currently practiced in China.

the more renowned new religions. The most influential of these spiritual movements (and one of the few to still exist today) may be Reiki 霊気 (“spirit breath”),<sup>44</sup> founded in the 1920s by Usui Mikao 臼井甕男 (1865-1926).<sup>45</sup>

While the details of Usui’s life story are contested due to a lack of hard evidence and disputes between Reiki lineages, reportedly he practiced *qigong* at a young age and “wondered if a way existed to heal without having to first store up healing energy and leaving one depleted at the end.” (Lübeck et al. 2001: 13) He may have belonged to a spiritualist research group called Reijutsu-kai 霊術会 (Spirit Technique Association) which met at the base of Kurama-yama 鞍馬山, a sacred mountain northeast of Kyoto. (Beckett 2009: 11; Lübeck et al. 2001: 13) According to Usui’s memorial stele, he studied a variety of subjects, including Buddhist scriptures, divination, incantation, medicine, history, and psychology, and performed ascetic practices (*shugyō* 修業) at Mt. Kurama.<sup>46</sup> It states that, at the end of a twenty-one day period of such austerities, “he felt a large Reiki over his head” which gave him the ability to channel *reiki* and perform healings. (Deacon 2003: 2)

All Reiki initiates undergo “attunements,” which allow students to begin channeling the healing energy.<sup>47</sup> As originally taught, Reiki apparently made use of diverse forms of healing,<sup>48</sup> but as practiced today, it is primarily a laying of hands

44. While in 1920s Japan, the technique was called Usui-shiki Reiki Ryōhō (“臼井式霊気療法 Usui-style Spirit Energy Treatment”), in contemporary Japan the practice is typically spelled out レイキ in the *katakana* syllabary typically used for “loan words” from other languages. This may be to avoid the “creepy” connotation modern Japanese may have with the first character, which is also used in compounds such as *yūrei* 幽霊 (“ghost”), or simply because native Japanese words spelled in *katakana* can connote fashionability, as on covers of popular magazines.
45. Other contemporaneous groups that taught healing by channeling invisible energies include the Jintai Rajiumu Gakkai 人体ラジウム学会 (Human Body Radium Learning Society) or Jintai Hōshanō 人体放射能 (Human Body Radiation) of Matsumoto Chiwake 松本道別 and the Taireidō 太霊道 (The Way of Great Spirit) of Tanaka Morihei 田中守平. Tanaka taught of a force called Reishi 霊子 and may have influenced Usui. (Lübeck et al. 2001: 16; Paterniti n.d.; Shortt and Sweeney 2012).
46. The performance of ascetic practices in the mountains, including fasting and meditation, is commonly used by *yamabushi* both to “rid [the aspirant] of defilements” and to stimulate the “interior heat” used in healing. (Blacker 1975: 22, 26, 91-93)
47. This “initiation” (*denju* 伝授) or “spiritual initiation” (*reiju* 霊授) is said to be related to the practice of “empowerment rituals” (*kaji* 加持) at the center of the initiations and healing practices of esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教), in which the power of the administering priest is augmented by the power of a deity.
48. Among the techniques reportedly taught by Usui were a diagnostic technique that used both hands and intuition to sense blockages in a recipient’s energy field, a quick movement of the hands to clear energy fields, and healing techniques using the breath and the eyes. While most these techniques have not been widely taught for decades, there has been some recent revival in their use under the name “Traditional Japanese Reiki.” (Lübeck et al. 2001: 146-188)

technique that can be enhanced by the visualization of sacred symbols and the recitation of mantras. There are also Reiki techniques used that said to allow the practitioner to heal across space (“distance healing”) and time (negating the effects of karma). While Reiki’s core teachings are not overtly religious, it is emphasized that one is channeling a cosmic, spiritual energy. At the same time, the practice is typically emphasized as entirely natural, not miraculous, and the energy is conceptualized as pervading all existence. Many practitioners fit Reiki into religious systems and various lineages claim Usui was a Christian minister (Lübeck et al. 2001: 25), a Shingon Buddhist adept (Yeshe 2000: 110), or even a “lay priest” of Tendai Buddhism (Ellyard 2004: 4).<sup>49</sup>

Today, instruction in Reiki practice often includes the basic energetic theories and meditation practices of Indian or Chinese (or both) traditions, including the theories of the *cakras* and the esoteric Daoist meditation of the “microcosmic” and “macrocosmic orbits.” (Chia 2001) While similar healing practices in Indian and Chinese traditions are traditionally only taught to advanced students who have spent years preparing their bodies to channeling energy, and are said to require great discipline to master and pose potential dangers to the practitioner, those who have undergone the Reiki initiations reportedly achieve accelerated progress in these meditations safely. (Derrick 2002)

While millions worldwide practice Reiki today, Usui’s memorial states that, in the few years between his initial religious experience and his death, he and his disciples were able to teach over two thousand students, some of whom founded similar movements. Koyama Kimiko 小山君子 (1906-1999), a recent president of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai 臼井靈氣療法学会, the oldest Reiki organization in Japan, reportedly said that both Deguchi Onisaburō and Okada Mokichi studied under Usui. (Beckett 2009: 11, 206) While their organizations may never have grown as large as Deguchi’s Ōmoto-kyō or Okada’s Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, other verified students of Usui also went on to found their own spiritual healing groups.

One such school is Tenohira Ryōji 手の平療治 (“palm therapy”), founded by Eguchi Toshihiro 江口俊博 (1873-1946). Eguchi had reportedly been a friend of Usui’s and a Reiki instructor, although he reportedly also taught his own technique at Usui’s training center.<sup>50</sup> Around 1929, Eguchi is said to have taught his healing practice at the religious commune in Kyoto called Ittōen 一燈園 (Garden of One Light), where the divine is called “Light” (*obikari*),<sup>51</sup> and apparently Eguchi’s

49. This final assertion has become quite common in recent English-language literature on Usui, despite that the word *zaike* 在家 that it often translates as “lay priest,” is typically used in Japanese Buddhism to simply mean “layperson.”

50. King 2007: 10; Lübeck et al. 2001: 16. Davis (1980: 78) refers to Tenohira Ryōji as “the most important of these non-sectarian thaumaturgical manual healing schools.”

51. For more on Ittōen and the imagery of light, see Davis (1992: 189-225).

technique is still practiced today. (Stiene and Stiene, n.d.) This technique, upon examination, bears similarities to *jōrei* and *okiyome* as well as *Reiki*. According to a manual written by Eguchi's son-in-law, "the practitioner should pray, then raise his hand," which "can be placed directly on the recipient's body . . . [or] held a short distance away" to project healing energy which penetrates the body to melt circulatory obstructions and restore harmony. (Miyazaki in Davis 1980: 78) Eguchi's technique also bears similarities to the so-called "ancient Shintō" (*koshintō* 古神道) taught by Yamada Mokoto (1992), in that the right hand is used for healing while the left hand is held at the hip, palm up, "to collect the radiant energy of the sun." (Davis 1980: 78)

Another student of Usui's who went on to found his own school of healing practice is Tomita Kaiji 富田魁二. He described his technique in a 1933 book entitled *Reiki to jinjutsu – Tomita-ryū teate ryōhō* 霊気と仁術・富田流手あて療法 (*Spirit Energy and Humanitarianism: Tomita-style laying of hands treatment*) which was republished in 1999. Along with techniques for healing with the hands, Tomita's book describes a meditation practice that he calls "the fundamental technique for working with spiritual energy": the silent recitation of the *waka* poetry by the Meiji Emperor known as *gyosei* 御製. This practice, first taught by Usui, was also part of Eguchi's technique, and these *waka* are still chanted by members of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai and Irtōen today. (Stiene and Stiene 2003: 199-200; n.d.)

#### *Analysis and Unanswered Questions*

The preceding comparison of the healing techniques, cosmologies, and etiologies of select Japanese new religions with those of other spiritual healing traditions from India, China, and Japan, reveals numerous similarities and differences between these schools of thought and practice. All of these healing practices are based on vitalist philosophies that teach of the universal existence of an *élan vital* that can be manipulated by the hands (and, to some extent, the eyes and breath) to cure and prevent physical disease on a metaphysical level. This healing energy exists independent of faith although, as the mind is capable of controlling it to varying degrees, an individual's intentions are believed to be able to affect its efficacy. Reducing the underlying mechanism of these healing practices to a phenomenal force provides a model to explain how such healing can operate independently of faith or divine intervention. Spiritual healers from the traditions of *yoga*, *qigong*, *Reiki*, *jōrei*, and *okiyome* all consider it inevitable that that the scientific study of human energies will eventually afford an empirical explanation of healing that, as cultural faith in the empirical currently surpasses our faith in the intangible, may lend authority to the growing interest in energy healing methods.

However, there is a fundamental discrepancy between the new religions and most of the non-sectarian traditions that I discussed, which comes down to the difference in their “master metaphors”: *purity* on the one hand and *balance* on the other. As we have seen, these Japanese new religions consider physical health to be a reflection of spiritual purity and illness one of spiritual pollution. In contrast, the Indian and Chinese spiritual healing techniques we have examined, like the traditional medical systems of those societies, define health in terms of a balance of opposing forces and illness as an imbalance.<sup>52</sup> As both *yin* and *yang* must remain in balance, an excess or deficiency of either can be the cause of disease, even death. Okada Mokichi (1984a: 211) alludes to this when he writes that the coming age will be an age of *kami*, characterized the fusion of *ka* (the *yang* energy of fire) and *mi* (the *yin* energy of water). However, this teaching is contradicted by his insistence that, in the coming age, “the spirit of fire will become the greater force, changing darkness into light as its purifying power burns away spiritual clouds.” (Okada 1984a: 401)

This purifying power of light (*ohikari*) and the “element of fire” (*kasō* 火素) is so at the heart of these Japanese new religions that McVeigh (1997: 111) says that, in Mahikari, “everything is related in some way to this cosmo-logic of purity.” The medical anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984: 34-36) describes the profound significance of purity and its association with health in Japanese culture, but I find this traditional belief, expressed in religious rituals and restrictions regarding impure things,<sup>53</sup> to be quite different from claims that good health results from one being in a state of absolute *yang*. (Okada 1984b: 71; Tebecis 1982: 200) The presentation of pollution and purity as related to *yin* and *yang*, respectively, is also inconsistent with prior beliefs in Japanese religion. Water, a physical manifestation of *yin* energy, has long been a symbolic and ritual means of purification, from the symbolism of Shinto mythology and prayers to the waterfall austerities of the *yamabushi*. (Blacker 1975: 91-93; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984: 36)

52. For want of space, I was unable to go into the diverse systems of Āyurveda or Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in this paper, but they are related to those of yoga and *qigong*, respectively, and generally conceive of health as a balance of complementary elements or forces and disease as their imbalance. However, there may be an interesting parallel for future research in the use of the powerful *yang* herb *fū zǐ* 附子 by the Sichuan medical school of *Huōshén Pài* 火神派 (Fire Spirit School) in the treatment of nearly any ailment. (Fruehauf 2009)

53. Blacker (1975: 41-42) describes an assortment of these impure things (corpses, blood), actions (birth, consummation of marriage, menstruation), and people (who have come into contact with impure things or committed impure actions) but ultimately says that in practice today “Two sources of pollution only have to be reckoned with, death and blood.” She certainly was not writing on behalf of the members of these new religions, for whom all manners of things, including physical toxins, negative emotional moods, karmic debts, and darkness can all be considered both causes and symptoms of impurity.

Furthermore, the call to “return” to our “original” state of absolute purity (Tebecis 1982: 200) also conflicts with Shintō beliefs that ascribed such perfection to the world of *kami*. If, as Sakurai Tokutarō argues, pollution (*kegare* 汚れ) can be understood as not simply the opposite of purity (*harai* 祓い), but as the withering (*kareru* 枯れる) of energy (*ke* 気), cyclic gain and loss of purity as befits the human condition just as they do the natural landscape, which is revitalized in seasonal festivals. (Cited in Davis 1992: 76) The frequency with which members of these new religions engage in purification practices could be said to routinize purification in the same way that Shimazono (1979: 401) wrote about the routinization of mediumship in the new religions. This is logical, as the purification rituals of *jōrei* and *okiyome* may originally derive from the mediumistic practice of *chinkon kishin* described in section three.

The question is then raised: from whence did the *harai* absolutism arise in these Ōmoto lineage new religions? Hardacre (1986: 89) writes that “the similarity among the New Religions in their ideas on illness and healing has no single point of origin. . . . Instead, it is part of contemporary religion’s heritage from the Tokugawa period” and its stress on individuals’ responsibility for the quality of their own lives. While this resonates with the conclusion of Matsuoka’s (2008: 161) study of the appeal of Sekai Kyūsei-kyō in Brazil, where he writes about its stress on the ability of human beings “to change their lives by themselves,” I think that these analyses may be too ready to gloss over the importance of *tariki* 他力 (“other-power”).

An important legacy of the belief in the defiled Age of the End of Dharma (*mappō* 末法) stressed in medieval Japanese Buddhism is the idea that we live in an age of decadence in which it is impossible to attain enlightenment without the grace of a compassionate and powerful deity. In this sense, the purification practices of *jōrei* and *okiyome* might be considered analogous to the *nenbutsu* recitations of Pure Land Buddhist sects, to allow for rebirth in a paradisaical land where Dharma can be easily practiced. The dichotomy between *mappō* and the Pure Land directly correlates with these three sects’ dichotomy of the modern “Age of Night” and the coming “Age of Daylight.” In a sense, both birth in the Pure Land and survival of the “baptism by fire” via the purifications of *jōrei* and *okiyome* (said to rely on divine energies) are both examples of salvation through an interaction of *tariki* and *jiriki* 自力 (“self-power”). This subject of the importance of self-power and other-power in the purification practices and philosophy of the new religions in question, is rich enough to be the focus of another paper entirely.

A second point that requires further attention is that of these groups’ initiation practices. As noted, the healing methods of yoga and *qigong* typically require years of training to develop and, as they can drain practitioners of their personal energy, are considered dangerous without proper guidance. The twentieth-century Japanese techniques of *jōrei*, *okiyome*, and Reiki, are typically taught in a weekend course that involves receiving an amulet (in the new religions) or a ritual “attunement” (in Reiki)

that allows the initiate to channel the divine healing energy.<sup>54</sup> While some Indian yogis accelerate their students' advancement through initiatory "transmissions" called *śaktipāta*, this is usually after an initial practice period that prepares the body to handle this sudden increase in energy flow. (Desai 1990: 69-70) Teachers of the Japanese techniques acknowledge that meditation and practice will improve the quality of one's treatments, but still they authorize the practice of healing after a brief workshop. While certain yogis are said to be able to project energy through their *ājñā cakra* to perform healing at any distance, most yogic healers never achieve this ability; "distance" healing is taught to all intermediate-level students of *jōrei*, *okiyome*, and Reiki. Further research should be done into historic precedents for these initiation rites, perhaps in the esoteric Buddhist ritual empowerments called *kaji* 加持 (Skt., *adiṣṭhāna*; Tib., *jin gyi lab pa*).

To learn where to properly apply *qi*, *qigong* practitioners spend years studying complex models of human energetic anatomy; practitioners of *jōrei*, *okiyome*, and Reiki are told that the divine nature of the energy will direct it where it is needed. (Lübeck et al. 2001: 68-9; Tebecis 1982: 291) The energies of *ohikari* and Reiki are thought incapable of causing harm, in contrast to *ki*, which can be misused by the inexperienced or used in martial arts. (Lübeck et al. 2001: 62-63, 69; Tebecis 1982: 48, 61) While the effects of the contemporary Japanese techniques are thought to be very subtle, possibly requiring months of treatment and detoxification, the energy of *qigong* therapy is thought to work immediately and with few treatments. It is clear that, in addition to the philosophical difference between the model of purity and that of balance, these conceptions of initiation and the nature of energy are further fundamental differences between the healing techniques from Japan examined in this paper and those of Indian and Chinese tradition.

Finally, the claim that these religions are working towards the synthesis of the disparate worlds of physical science and spiritual healing is another tantalizing subject for further consideration. Some contradictory statements made by their leaders on the subject may symbolize a deeper ambivalence between their embrace and rejection of materialistic science. First, both Okada Mokichi and Okada Yoshikazu simultaneously teach that their "spiritual energy" is identical to (Davis 1980: 32; Okada 1984: 52) and completely different from (Davis 1980: 30; Okada 1984: 50) electromagnetic force. Both founders also claim that the sensible physical world is the object of science and that "the invisible world" is the unquantifiable

54. Most Reiki today is taught at three levels; the first level, which authorizes healing, is typically taught in a one- or two-day workshop. Recent writers suggest that Reiki, like the martial arts, may have been originally taught in many more grades and it could take a student a number of years to sufficiently master a certain level and advance. (King 2007: 41, 68-69; Stiene and Stiene 2003: 132)

spiritual realm (Okada 1991: 45; Tebecis 1982: 339), despite the fact that physics has quantified invisible forces, such as gravity and electromagnetism, for centuries. They seem resistant to science's ability to reduce the immaterial into abstract formulae.

Yet the "naturalization" of the invisible spiritual dynamics underlying physical phenomena such as health and disease seems to be precisely one of their goals. If Okada Mokichi had faith that science could one day empirically describe the "unlimited power" of spirit, paving the way for a scientific freeing humanity from "limited physical power" (Okada 1991: 44, 52), his critiques of the limitations of science seem unjustified. Similarly, if Tebecis' claim (1982: 339) that Mahikari is "a type of science" is to be taken seriously, he must abandon his claim that "life cannot be explained at all in terms of human science" (1982: 290) and somehow give evidence for Mahikari's elaborate metaphysics. Further study may yet reveal "spiritual energy" to be a currently unknown physical force, and its measurement may in no sense demean its value.

While the synthesis of religion and science may yet be some way off, if it is to occur at all, these new religions have succeeded in incorporating scientism, or the philosophy thought characteristic of scientists, into their teachings. Their leadership continually stress that faith is not necessary to benefit from "divine light," and consistently go on to discuss the incredible "faith" that results from witnessing the amazing effects of the healing practices.<sup>55</sup> Tebecis (2009: 34) writes that Okiyome "has nothing to do with faith healing. . . . [One's] belief about God and divine matters become stronger as a result of one's experiences, but belief is not required in order to begin." This contrast between the "faith" of faith healing and the "belief" that grows from experience is sharp: the former is the more traditional conception of the term as faith in that which is essentially unknowable; the latter is rhetorically framed to resemble the belief of physicists that their experimental results are proof of a natural order. As Fox (1990: 30-31) argues regarding contemporary belief in spiritism, for followers of these spiritual healing modalities, belief in energies hitherto unknown to science can provide transcendent meaning within the "scientific-technical world."

---

55. Indeed, it is taught that animals, plants, electronics, automobiles, etc. all benefit from treatments, which detracts from suggestions purification works via placebo effect or other psychological means. (Davis 1980: 156-160).

### References

- Aston, W. G., trans. 2005 [1896]. *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest of Times to A.D. 697*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle.
- Atreya. 1997. *Prana: The Secret of Yogic Healing*. Mumbai: Jaico.
- Basic Terms of Shintō (Revised Edition). 1985. Tokyo: Kokugakuin University Press.
- Birnbaum, Raoul. 1979. *The Healing Buddha*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Blacker, Carmen. 1975. *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Broder, Anne. 2008. "Mahikari in Context: *Kamigakari*, *Chinkon kishin*, and Psychical Investigation in Omoto-lineage Religions. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35 (2): 331-362.
- Chia, Mantak. 2001. *Cosmic Healing I: Cosmic Chi Kung*. Chiang Mai: Universal Tao.
- Cohen, Ken. 1997. *The Way of Qigong: The Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing*. New York: Ballantine.
- Davis, Winston. 1980. *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 1992. *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Deacon, James. 2003. *Translation of the Usui Memorial*. Translated by Jiro Kozuki. James Deacon's Reiki Pages. [http://www.aetw.org/pdf/Usui\\_Memorial.zip](http://www.aetw.org/pdf/Usui_Memorial.zip) (Accessed November 2008)
- Derrick, Glen. 2002. "Reiki and Chi Kung." *Reiki News*. <http://www.reiki.org/reikinews/reikin19.html> (accessed December 2010).
- Desai, Yogi Amrit. 1990. "Kundalini Yoga Through Shaktipat." In: John White (ed.). *Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, pp. 27-47.
- Dong, Paul and Aristide H. Essner. 1995. *Chi Gong: The Ancient Chinese Way to Health*. New York: Marlowe and Company.
- Ellwood, Robert S. 1974. *The Eagle and the Rising Sun: Americans and the New Religions of Japan*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Ellyard, Lawrence. 2004. *Reiki Healer: A Complete Guide to the Path and Practice of Reiki*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.
- Fruehauf, Heiner. 2009. *The Importance of Aconite (fuzi): Teachings from the Sichuan Fire Spirit School*. [http://www.classicalchinesemedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/fruehauf\\_fuziinterview1.pdf](http://www.classicalchinesemedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/fruehauf_fuziinterview1.pdf) (accessed December 2010).
- Hardacre, Helen. 1986. *Kurozumi-kyō and the New Religions of Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- . 1994. "Conflict Between Shugendō and the New Religions of Bakumatsu Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religions Studies* 21 (2-3): 145-148.
- Herbert, Jean. 1967. *Shintō*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Hewitt, James. 1991. *The Complete Yoga Book*. London: Rider.
- Higuchi, Kiyoko. 1994. *The Light of Johrei*. Torrence, CA: Johrei Fellowship.
- Inoue Nobutaka. 1991. "Recent Trends in the Study of Japanese New Religions." <http://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/cpjr/newreligions/inoue.html> (accessed December 2010). Originally published in: Inoue Nobutaka (ed.). *New Religions: Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion* (2), translated by Norman Havens. Tokyo: Kokugakuin University.
- Jones, Christopher S. 2002. "A Lost Tradition: Nishida Kitarō, Henri Bergson, and Intuition in Political Philosophy." *Social Science Japan Journal* 5 (1): 55-70.
- Kimura, Ikuko. 1995. "Yasuaki Deguchi: The Omoto Religion and Aikido (08)." *Aikido Journal*, 104. <http://www.aikidojournal.com/article?articleID=256> (accessed December 2010).
- King, Dave. 2007. *O-Sensei: A View of Mikao Usui*. 2nd ed. Lulu.com.
- Kitagawa, Joseph. 1966. *Religion in Japanese History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lübeck, Walter, Frank Arjava Petter and William Lee Rand. 2001. *The Spirit of Reiki: The Complete Handbook of the Reiki System*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.
- Maciocia, Giovanni. 1989. *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine: A Comprehensive Text For Acupuncturists and Herbalists*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.
- Matsunaga, Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga. 1974. *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism Vol. 1: The Aristocratic Age*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International.
- McVeigh, Brian J. 1997. *Spirits, Selves, and Subjectivity in a Japanese New Religion: The Cultural Psychology of Belief in Sūkyō Mahikari*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press.
- Motoyama Hiroshi. 1981. *Theories of the Chakras: Bridge to Higher Consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.
- Offner, Clark B. and Henry van Straelen. 1963. *Modern Japanese Religions*. New York: Twayne.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. 1984. *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Okada Mokichi. 1984a. *Foundation of Paradise: From the Teachings of Meishu-sama (Tengoku no Ishizue)*. Torrence, CA: Johrei Fellowship.
- . 1984b. *Johrei: Divine Light of Salvation*. Kyoto: Society of Johrei
- . 1991. *Health and the New Civilization*. Torrence, CA: Johrei Fellowship.
- . 1998. Natural Power. *Shumei* 212: 3.

- Paterniti, Giuseppe. n.d. "TAIREIDO" *Seki Ji Do - School of Traditional Reiki*. [http://www.reikitradizionale.it/alter\\_pagine/taireido\\_eng.html](http://www.reikitradizionale.it/alter_pagine/taireido_eng.html) (accessed October 2012)
- Rama, Swami. 1990. "The Awakening of Kundalini." In: John White (ed.), *Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, pp. 27-47.
- Saraswati, Swami Satyananda. 1997. *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. Munger, India: Bihar Yoga Bharati.
- Sekai Kyusei Kyo. 1998. *The Light From the East: Mokichi Okada*. Volume One. Atami: Sekai Kyusei Kyo.
- Shimazono Susumu. 1979. "The Living Kami Idea in the New Religions of Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6: 389-412.
- . 2004. *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*. Melbourne: TransPacific Press.
- Shortt, Frank, and Allan Sweeney. 2012. *Usui's Teacher: The Writings of Tanaka - The SECRETS of Taireido and Reishi*. 2nd ed. Kent: Mastership Pathway UK.
- Sponberg, Alan, and Helen Hardacre (eds.). 1998. *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Staemmler, Birgit. 2009. *Chinkon Kishin: Mediated Spirit Possession in Japanese New Religions*. Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Stiene, Bronwen and Frans Stiene. 2003. *The Reiki Sourcebook*. New York: O Books.
- . n.d. "Eguchi Toshihiro and Palm Healing." *International House of Reiki*. <http://www.reiki.net.au/news.asp?id=67> (accessed December 2010).
- Tebecis, A.K. 1982. *Mahikari: Thank God For the Answers at Last*. Tokyo: L.H. Yōkō Shuppan.
- . 2009. *Is the Future in Our Hands? My Experiences with Sukyo Mahikari*. Second Edition. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.
- Teeuwen, Mark, and Hendrik van der Veere. 1998. *Nakatomi Harae Kunge: Purification and Enlightenment in Late-Heian Japan*. Buddhist Studies 1. München: Iudicium Verlag.
- Teeuwen, Mark. 2000. "The Kami in Esoteric Buddhist Thought and Practice." In: John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (eds.), *Shintō in History: Ways of the Kami*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 95-116.
- Thomsen, Harry. 1963. *The New Religions of Japan*. New York: Charles Tuttle.
- van Straelen, Henry. 1962. "The Japanese New Religions." *Numen* 9 (3): 228-240.
- Varley, H. Paul. 2000. *Japanese Culture*. Fourth Edition: Updated and Expanded. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

- White, David Gordon. 2009. *Sinister Yogis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yamada Makoto. 1992. *Koshintō no gyōhō to kagaku* (The 古神道の行法と科学 discipline and science of Old Shintō). Tokyo.
- Yang, Jwing-Ming. 1989. *The Root of Chinese Chi Kung: The Secrets of Chi Kung Training*. Jamaica Plain, MA: YMAA.
- Yeshe, Lama. 2001. *Medicine Dharma Reiki: An Introduction to the Secret Inner Practices With Extensive Excerpts From Dr. Usui's Journal*. Delhi: Full Circle Publishing.
- Young, Richard Fox. 1990. "Magic and Morality in Modern Japanese Exorcistic Technologies – A Study of Mahikari." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17 (1): 29-49.
- Yu Gongbao. 1995. *Chinese Qigong Illustrated*. Beijing: New Word Press.
- Yuasa Yasuo. 1993. *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki-Energy (Ki, Shugyō, Shintai)*. Albany: State University of New York Press.