

TURBULENT PRIESTS AND MILLENARIAN PROTEST:  
OUTSIDE VOICES OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN INTERWAR JAPAN

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role played by two popular religious movements – Nichirenism (*Nichirenshugi*) and Ōmotokyō – in the promulgation of nationalism in Japan during the years between the two World Wars. While it has long been accepted that religion played a central role in the formation and promulgation of nationalism in twentieth-century Japan, the nature of that role has been much less well understood. Specifically, Western thinking has long assumed that Shintō, in its role as state religion and ideological anchor, was unchallenged as a nationalist vehicle in Japan. This view overlooks the crucial role played by other popular religious organizations outside the framework of Shintō in the inculcation of modern Japanese nationalism. While most religious sects resigned themselves to toeing the official line, two were abnormally active in promoting themselves as champions of Japanese nationalism. These were the so-called “Nichirenists” – a firebrand group of nationalistic Buddhists of the Nichiren denomination that emerged in early-twentieth century Japan – and the enormously popular grassroots millenarian religion of Ōmotokyō. Both incorporated the pillars of State Shintō into the heart of their doctrines and championed themselves as the truest advocates of the emperor and his polity: Ōmotokyō in the form of a tightly-organized grassroots movement and Nichirenism as a powerful spiritual fountainhead for militarists and political extremists. In both cases, their adoption of nationalism as a central pillar of their doctrines was a tactical move intended to cultivate more harmonious relations with the state. This was especially true in the case of Ōmotokyō, an organization that had since its genesis been regarded by the authorities as a pariah. This strategy paradoxically drew Nichirenism and Ōmotokyō to the extremist fringe of the nationalist wing, with both movements figuring prominently in the Shōwa Restoration movement in Japan in the early-1930s – a movement dedicated to overthrowing the parliamentary system and creating a *bona fide* emperor-led dictatorship. Ultimately, their strategy failed, and somewhat ironically both movements were eventually crushed in the mid-to-late thirties by the very authoritarian political culture that they had helped create. Furthermore, in spite of their links to ultranationalist organizations involved in political terrorism, both movements were

suppressed purely on ideological grounds. In the end, the suppression of Nichirenism and Ōmotokyō was not brought on by any real contradiction with the official ideology, but rather by the challenge that the mere existence of these independent voices posed to a state aspiring to totalitarianism.

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, Germaine and Howard, and to my sister Valerie, for their boundless love,  
support, and encouragement.

## INTRODUCTION

The most enduring cliché about modern Japan holds that the Meiji Restoration of 1868 saw the imposition of secular Western-style governance on a premodern society rooted in an archaic theocratic ideology, whose resurgence in the mid-1930s drove the country into a savage war of conquest. Since the end of the Second World War, the prevalent Western view of Japanese nationalism has been that of a thousand-year-old ideology of emperor-worship that suddenly erupted into an inferno of *banzai*-shouting soldiers and *kamikaze* pilots. This view has led historians to characterize prewar Japan as a country that while modern on the surface was closer in terms of social development to the civilizations of antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Prewar and wartime Japanese nationalism, in stark contrast to Nazism, Maoism, and other forms of twentieth century extremism, tends to be viewed as intrinsically anachronistic, not so much nationalism in the Western sense as a form of tribalism sustained by Japan's ethnic homogeneity and geographical isolation. As Benedict Anderson notes, nation, nationality, and nationalism have all proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze, with the result that "In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it is conspicuously meagre."<sup>2</sup> In the case of Japanese nationalism, in spite of a number of groundbreaking works on ideology and social change in modern Japan in recent decades, postwar-era paradigms of the ancient myth of the divine emperor to which every citizen gave their unswerving obedience still prevail in historical writings on Japan.<sup>3</sup>

At the core of traditional Western views of Japanese nationalism is the emperor system and its religious underpinnings, the importance of which was emphasized by wartime Japan observers such as Robert Ballou. In his 1945 treatise *Shinto: The*

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<sup>1</sup> Noted British historian Paul Johnson asserts that "At the beginning of modern times Japan was a very remote country, in some respects closer to the society of ancient Egypt than to that of post-Renaissance Europe." Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties (Revised Edition)*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, p.177.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (Revised Edition)*. London, New York: Verso, 1991, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> See Carol Gluck's groundbreaking 1985 treatise *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) for a thorough and illuminating study of the formation of the institutions and national ideology of the modern Japanese state.



*Unconquered Enemy*, Ballou alleges that “It was not merely men and airplanes, machine guns and bombs, which attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. [T]he bombs on Pearl Harbor, and the later Banzai-shouting infantrymen and *kami-kaze* suicide pilots – all were individual expressions of the force of Shinto, a religion which has never emerged from primitivism, the ancient emperor-worshipping religion of self-styled “divine” Japan, with its heaven-established mission to conquer the world.”<sup>4</sup> And in spite of the voluminous amount of scholarship on modern Japanese social and political history, this view continues to pervade writings on Japan. Japanese nationalism, however, is as much a modern phenomenon as its Western counterparts, and its development accords with Anderson’s theory that “nation-ness” and nationalism are cultural artefacts which originated from the ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces towards the late-eighteenth century. In Japan’s case, these discrete historical forces were the development of “nativist” school of thought, the expansion of the country’s road networks, the spread of mass literacy and the gradual standardization of spoken Japanese.<sup>5</sup> The nineteenth century then presented the Western threat posed by imperialism, the formation of a national army and the implementation of conscription, the adoption of a national system of education, and the creation of State Shintō – and the subsequent politicization of religion – all influenced the foundation of modern Japanese nationalism.

Considering that Japanese nationalism has traditionally been viewed as synonymous with the Shintō religion, the amount of scholarly writing on the religious underpinnings of modern Japanese religion is surprisingly limited. Murakami Shigeyoshi and Helen Hardacre have shed considerable light on the manner in which Shintō was within a century transformed from an assortment of shrines and local cults with no semblance of central authority and little in the way of common doctrine into a potent political force and an ideological pillar of the state. And scholars such as Tokoro Shigemoto, Sheldon Garon, and, more recently, Brian Victoria in his 1997 work *Zen At War* have examined the way in which Buddhist sects and other religions outside the framework of State Shintō assimilated contemporary currents of nationalism and

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<sup>4</sup> Robert O. Ballou, *Shinto: The Unconquered Enemy (Japan’s Doctrine of Racial Superiority and World Conquest)*. New York: The Viking Press, 1945, pp.4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.4.

expounded them on their own terms. However, the full extent of the role of popular religious movements in the promulgation of Japanese nationalism is not generally appreciated. As Thomas Nadolski writes in his comprehensive work on the new religion of Ōmotokyō, “Too often, foreigners have been left with the impression that, from 1868 to 1945, the imperial mythical system was a monolithic religious unit to which the Japanese people gave wholehearted and uniform obedience.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Edwin Lee, in his essay on the influential Nichiren Buddhist leader and nationalist theorist Tanaka Chigaku, emphasizes his relevance, along with other Buddhist leaders, to “developments often regarded as Shintō-imbued.”<sup>7</sup> The role of non-Shintō religious groups in the advancement of Japanese nationalism is of enormous consequence. However, it is a subject that has received very little scholarly attention.

Religious movements, in fact, were uniquely positioned to serve as vehicles for the dissemination of nationalism, as defined by the Meiji-era ideological pillars of *chūkun* (loyalty), *aikoku* (love of country), and subservience to the *kokutai*.<sup>8</sup> While the Meiji period did see the emergence of State Shintō, centred around the cult of the emperor, as a guiding ideology, the early Meiji campaign to suppress Buddhism and impose Shintō as a *de facto* state religion was an abject failure. The government subsequently rejected religion as a pillar of the modern Japanese state and opted instead for an essentially secular nationalist ideology under which religious organizations could operate freely, provided their teachings did not conflict with those of the *kokutai*, in which the imperial myth was enshrined. On the other hand, the process by which the early Meiji leaders sought to elevate Shintō resulted in the thorough politicization of religion in Japan. While on the surface the traditional symbiosis between Shintō and Buddhism remained the dominant feature of Japanese religions, Shintō shrines, traditionally of secondary status to Buddhist temples, gained unprecedented political significance as local pavilions for the official ideology, and the nation’s other religious communities, specifically Buddhist sects and the

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas P. Nadolski, *The Socio-Political Background of the 1921 and 1935 Ōmoto Suppressions in Japan*. Ann Arbor, MI.: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975, p.285.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin B. Lee, “Nichiren and Nationalism: The Religious Patriotism of Tanaka Chigaku”, in *Monumenta Nipponica* 30:1-4 (1975), p.19.

<sup>8</sup> The term *kokutai* translates literally as “national polity”, is a Meiji-era term for the political system as founded in the Meiji period, in which the centrality of the emperor was understood.

so-called Newly-Arisen Religions (*shinkō shūkyō*) soon realized that considerable political capital could be gained through active advocacy of the state and the national ideology and that opposing the official line was to court repression from above. In short, religious organizations could no longer afford to be neutral *vis-à-vis* the state.

However, the degree to which religious organizations became advocates of Japanese nationalism varied considerably. While most simply painted themselves in patriotic colours and quietly went about their regular activities, others were much more vociferous in their espousal of nationalism.<sup>9</sup> The Newly-Arisen Religions were among the strongest voices of nationalism among religious groups, both as a product of political inculcation at the grassroots level and as a political move on the part of sect leadership charged with defending their creeds against a government deeply suspicious of their doctrines and activities. While most Buddhist sects sought to maintain a low profile, a new school of Buddhist leaders, influenced by the example of politicized State Shintō and seeking political capital themselves, sought to recast their religion as a nationalist vehicle of equal stature. Out of these two groups, two religious movements emerged as formidable forces in the diffusion of nationalism: the venerable Buddhist sect of Nichiren and the new religion of Ōmotokyō. Nichiren Buddhism's tradition of fierce exclusivism and forceful proselytization, together with its founder's reputation as an esteemed patriot, converged with State Shintō-influenced imperialist ideology in the late-Meiji period to form a religious ideology known as "Nichirenism" (*Nichirensugui*) which was to become synonymous with ultranationalism and imperial expansionism during the interwar years, and serve as a spiritual fountainhead for a motley assortment of political extremists. And the Ōmotokyō sect, both as a result of the fiery grassroots nationalism of its Meiji-era foundress Deguchi Nao and the political machinations of her ambitious and charismatic successor Deguchi Onisaburō, evolved from a small rural millenarian cult into a expansive, heavily nationalistic religious movement with a veritable media empire, paramilitary

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<sup>9</sup> Brian (Daizen) A. Victoria's treatise *Zen At War* (New York: Weatherhill, Inc, 1997) examines the responses by Buddhist sects to early twentieth century discourses of nationalism and militarism in Japan. The majority of sects, he argues, quietly embraced emperor-centred nationalism and produced doctrinal justification for the use of violence within the context of war.

branches, and links to a variety of organizations dedicated to expanding Japan's overseas empire and promoting emperor-centred authoritarianism at home.

This thesis argues that as a result of the Meiji-era promotion of State Shintō and the subsequent politicization of religion, the desire for political capital and safety from suppression, and the religions' pre-existing nationalistic underpinnings, Nichirenism and Ōmotokyō successfully established themselves as alternate voices of Japanese nationalism in the interwar period. For its part, the state was generally tolerant of the existence of these alternate voices. While Ōmotokyō was always regarded as politically suspect (and was briefly suppressed in 1921), the Japanese governments of the 1920s and early-1930s tolerated its eccentric leader's activities due to his advocacy of Pan-Asianism and endorsement of emperor-centred patriotism. And the interwar Nichirenists, in spite of their doctrinal contradictions with the tenets of State Shintō (namely the supremacy of Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra over the will of the deities of Shintō), as well as its well-known following among extremists intent on overthrowing the parliamentary system, were also shown remarkable tolerance by the state until the mid-1930s, with radicals like Ketsumeidan leader Inoue Nisshō being treated with remarkable lenience in spite of their known involvement in anti-state terrorist activity. However, by the mid-1930s, spurred by numerous socio-political factors, notably paranoia caused by anti-state radicalism and army factionalism, the increasingly repressive prewar Japanese governments moved to suppress all influential religious movements that operated outside of state control. Ōmotokyō, with its powerful base and longtime stormy relationship with the state, was the first to fall victim to state repression in 1935, and with the greatest thoroughness and brutality. With the suppression of Ōmotokyō began the process by which all independent religious groups of significance were silenced by the state, culminating in the purge of the writings of Nichiren and the arrest of numerous Nichiren Buddhist leaders in 1941. In the end, the suppressions of Nichiren Buddhism and Ōmotokyō were not brought on by any incongruity with the official state ideology: it was the fact that they existed as independent voices of nationalism that brought about their demise.

The individuals and organizations discussed in this thesis have all individually received attention from historians. Professor Tokoro Shigemoto's 1966 treatise *Kindai*

*Nihon shūkyō to nashonarizumu (Modern Japanese Religion and Nationalism)* is the most comprehensive work to date on the convergence of Nichiren Buddhism and modern Japanese nationalism, with particular emphasis given to the writings and activities of Tanaka Chigaku and Kita Ikki. And other writings on these and other notable Nichirenists – namely Ishiwara Kanji and Inoue Nisshō – give significant weight to the religious underpinnings of their nationalist worldviews. Ōmotokyō has received considerably more scholarly attention than Nichirenism, notably by Thomas P. Nadolski in his sweeping 1975 work *The Socio-Political Background of the 1921 and 1935 Ōmoto Suppressions in Japan*, Emily Groszos Ooms’ in her 1993 treatise *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Ōmotokyō*, and Matsugu Miho in her excellent 1993 article “Ōmoto ni okeru shinkō to soshiki no tenkai” (“The Development of Ōmoto Belief and Organizational Structure”). Nadolski and Matsugu in particular reveal the degree to which the religion enthusiastically adopted nationalism and sought to establish broad nationalist ties. However, in spite of the remarkable similarities between the trajectories of these two religious movements, and the well-known ties between representatives of the two, they have yet to be examined together within the broader context of popular religious nationalism. This thesis contributes to the literature on modern Japanese religion and nationalism through an in-depth examination of their convergence as a powerful extra-state nationalist force.

## BACKGROUND – RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE MEIJI PERIOD

### *Early Meiji State Sponsorship of Shintō*

In January 1936, in the midst of the Japanese government’s suppression of Ōmotokyō that had begun the previous month, the noted New Buddhist scholar Professor Takashima Beihō offered his opinion on the conditions that permitted the explosion of sects such as Ōmotokyō in an article entitled “Why Have Evil Religions Flourished?” (“Jashūkyō wa naze hanjō suru ka”). Among the reasons he cited were “the mercurial nature of [national] ideology, [ . . . ] the anti-religious character of the Meiji educational system, and the

'laziness' of the established religions."<sup>10</sup> To one unacquainted with the educational policies of the Meiji Period, the second explanation is perhaps the most surprising, given that the Meiji era saw the adoption and promotion of State Shintō as a national religion and guiding ideological beacon. However, as recent scholarship has shown<sup>11</sup>, the attempts by the Meiji leaders to reshape radically the religious fabric of Japan and create a genuine national religion and ideological foundation out of Shintō was a failure, and one that led the leaders of Japan to relegate State Shintō to a supporting role, leaving religious life in Japan as diverse as it had been for centuries.

The religiously heterogeneous society that emerged in the late-Meiji period – protected by the 1889 guarantee of freedom of religion in the Meiji Constitution – differed sharply from what the early Meiji leaders had originally envisioned, which was a Japanese state in which Shintō would supplant Buddhism as the country's dominant religion and form the backbone of Japanese society. Their primary reasons for endorsing Shintō were threefold. Firstly, the rhetoric of *kokugaku* (national learning) which dominated Bakumatsu and early Meiji political discourse was distinctively anti-Buddhist; advocates of Shintō derided Buddhism as a foreign import and chastized the leading Buddhist sects as bloated, corrupt instruments of Tokugawa feudalism.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the dizzying array of Buddhist sects in Japan – as well as the considerable political influence wielded by the larger sects such as Shinshū and Jōdo-shū (Pure-Land) – prevented the unification of Japanese Buddhism for employment as a political instrument. And thirdly – and most significantly – while it otherwise lacked a single comprehensive doctrine prior to the Meiji period, Shintō's enshrinement of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, the mythical progenitress of imperial line, and its assertion of the divinity of the emperor made the creed an obvious choice for a founding ideology for the Meiji leaders who sought to forge

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<sup>10</sup> Takashima Beihō, "Jashūkyō wa naze hanjō suru ka" ("Why Have Evil Religions Flourished?") in *Chūō kōron* 51 (January 1936), p.419.

<sup>11</sup> English language sources of note on the subject are Murakami Shigeyoshi's work *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980) and Helen Hardacre's *Shintō and the State, 1868-1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> See Martin Collcutt's essay "Buddhism: The Threat of Eradication" for an overview of the anti-Buddhist campaigns of the late-Tokugawa and early-Meiji periods, in Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman, eds., *Japan In Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.

a modern nation state with the imperial house as its central pillar. In 1868, one of the first actions of the fledgling Meiji government was to drop the Tokugawa rulers' endorsement of Buddhism and issue the *shinbutsu bunri* edict,<sup>13</sup> which ordered the total separation of Shintō from Buddhism. In the same year, the Shintō-dominated Department of Divinity (Jingikan) was created as the highest organ of the state, surpassing even the Council of State (Dajōkan)<sup>14</sup>. And in January 1870, the government issued the Declaration of "Daikyō"<sup>15</sup> ("Great Teaching"), a declaration which announced the government's intention to create and promote a state religion. An excerpt from an 1871 paper makes clear the campaign's intention of employing religion as a foundation of the state: "The spirit of Daikyō is on the basis of worshipping the gods to clarify the moral principles, to make the people's minds right, and to make them perform their duties. So education and politics must go in hand."<sup>16</sup> The Declaration of Daikyō set in motion the so-called Great Promulgation Campaign (*Daikyō sempu undō*), a government-sponsored Shintō-led campaign which sought to systematically homogenize the religious fabric of Japan and forge an all-encompassing state religion, which began in 1870 and lasted until 1884.

While the Great Promulgation Campaign was overwhelmingly dominated by adherents to Shintō deities and institutions, neither the campaign nor the creed it sought to produce was ever explicitly identified as "Shintō". Indeed, the so-called National Evangelists, the foot soldiers of the Promulgation Campaign, included representatives of Buddhist sects and newly-arisen religions such as Kurozumikyō and Konkōkyō. Moreover, while the campaign emphasized the cult of Amaterasu Ōmikami and the Three Deities of Creation enshrined in the mythological texts *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*<sup>17</sup>, equal emphasis was given to the Three Great Teachings (*taikyō, sanjō no kyōsaku* – respect for the gods and love of country, making clear the principles of Heaven and the Way of Man,

<sup>13</sup> The term *shinbutsu bunri*, which literally translates to "the separation of Shintō deities and Buddhas", was adopted as a slogan by anti-Buddhist advocates in the late-Tokugawa period, together with *haibutsu kishaku* (Eradication of Buddhism). Collcutt, "Buddhism: The Threat of Eradication", p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> Hardacre, *Shintō and the State*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Alternately romanized as "Taikyō" in many sources.

<sup>16</sup> Marukawa Hitō, "Religious Circumstances in the Late Tokugawa and the Early Meiji Periods," in the Oyasato Research Institute, Tenri University, ed., *The Theological Perspectives of Tenrikyō: In Commemoration of the Centennial Anniversary of Oyasama*. Tenri City: Tenri University Press, 1986, p. 296.

<sup>17</sup> Takamimusubi no kami, Amenominakanushi no kami, and Kamimusubi no kami.

and reverence for the emperor and obedience to the will of the court), a tactic believed to have been adopted, in part, to draw Buddhists into the campaign.<sup>18</sup> However, Buddhist support for the essentially Shintō campaign was minimal. Buddhist leaders in the 1870s were wary of Shintō designs against their religion, and still smarting from the nationwide backlash against their religion following the *shimbutsu bunri* edict and the 1871 injunction which brought temple and shrine estates under government control, thus stripping Buddhist sects of their traditional property rights. Meanwhile, the lifting of the Meiji-era ban on Christianity in 1873 – primarily in response to diplomatic pressure from the West – allowed Christian missionaries to play a role in the reshaping of the religious landscape of Japan. However, the political climate in Japan remained deeply hostile towards the religion, and thus it was denied an official role in the religious affairs of Meiji Japan.

With Buddhism nursing its wounds incurred by the early-Meiji anti-Buddhist backlash, and Christianity, while legal, still a national pariah, Shintō came to be the unquestionably dominant creed in the Great Promulgation Campaign. However, creating a workable national religion out of Shintō proved to be a formidable, and ultimately unsuccessful, task. While Buddhism, the traditional rock on which pre-Meiji Japanese society stood, had been in decline during the late-Tokugawa period, during which time the emergence of “nativist” thought and popularization of national pilgrimage sites, notably the Ise shrines, had given Shintō a considerable boost, the traditional symbiosis between Shintō and Buddhism had existed for so long that the two had ceased to function as separate religions, and as Helen Hardacre notes, prior to the Meiji period the term “Shintō” itself was not widely understood.<sup>19</sup> At the grassroots level, attempts by the National Evangelists to promote Shintō-style funerals and other such unfamiliar practices were met with resistance from both local clergy and the populace. Meanwhile, satirists ridiculed the campaign, denouncing its teachings as unbelievable, its rituals as unpopular, and its leaders as unfit to serve the nation.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the lack of cohesion within the ranks of the Shintō evangelists plagued the campaign from the start, and these internal divisions sharpened as the campaign progressed. Prior to Meiji, Shintō had known no all-

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<sup>18</sup> Hardacre, *Shintō and the State*, p.43.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.44.



inclusive doctrinal tradition or comprehensive organizational structure, and apart from Amaterasu Ōmikami, none of the central deities of the campaign had a widespread following. In 1875, a pantheon dispute (*saijin ronsō*) emerged between Shintō's most influential centres, the Grand Shrines of Ise and Izumo Shrine, over the demand that the central deity of Izumo be included in the national pantheon as lord of the underworld.<sup>21</sup> The government had sought to bring all Shintō shrines under the control of Ise; however, the challenge posed by Izumo thoroughly divided the Shintō world and had a permanently crippling effect on the credibility of the campaign. In his influential 1875 treatise *Bunreimon no gairyaku* (*Outline of Civilization*), Meiji statesman Fukuzawa Yukichi dismissed Shintō as "an insignificant movement trying to make headway by taking advantage of the imperial house at a time of political change."<sup>22</sup>

Even before 1875, the Meiji government's support for Shintō as a national religion had begun to decline. As Professor Sakamoto Koremaru of Kokugakuin University points out, by 1871 the government began to perceive the need for a united Shintō-Buddhist front against the spread of Christianity, which led to the 1871 demotion of the Department of Divinity to below the Council of State and creation of the broader-based Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Kyōbushō*) the following year.<sup>23</sup> And the 1875 Pantheon Dispute, and the Shintō world's inability to settle it, led the government to question the suitability of religion as an ideological pillar of the state. While the state refrained from interfering in the deities issue, it took steps to downgrade Shintō as a national teaching. In 1877, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was reconstituted as the Bureau of Shrines and Temples, thus bringing Shrine Shintō onto equal footing with Buddhism. And in the early 1880s, the government created legislation which distinguished "rites" (*saishi*) from "religion" (*shūkyō*) and banned priests of national shrines from performing duties previously conducted by ordinary Shintō priests such as funerals.<sup>24</sup> In this way, the government drew

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>22</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Bunreimon no gairyaku* (*Outline of Civilization*), 18<sup>th</sup> Edition. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1983, cited in Hardacre, *Shintō and the State*, p.50.

<sup>23</sup> Sakamoto Koremaru, "Religion and State in the Early Meiji Period", in *Acta Asiatica* 51 (1987), pp.49-50.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 138-139.

a sharp distinction between “State” and “Shrine” Shintō, and as such elevated the former to the level of “supra-religion”. While Shintō rites would continue to dominate imperial ritual, and State Shintō would continue to permeate society as a quasi-religious vessel of imperial authority and as a locus of civic duty through the Three Great Teachings, Shrine Shintō would no longer enjoy special state privileges, and on the surface it appeared that after a decade-long hiatus, the traditional spiritual dynamic of Japan had been restored. Meanwhile, the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (Kyōiku Chokuko), much to the dismay of Shintō leaders, limited the role of religion in public education to state-sanctioned shrine visits, and in 1889, in response to pressure from both Western powers and some Buddhist leaders, an article guaranteeing freedom of religion was included in the Meiji Constitution.<sup>25</sup>

*Responses to the State’s Sponsorship of Shintō by the New Religions and Buddhist Sects*

While the early-Meiji campaign to create an exclusive state religion out of Shintō ultimately failed, it did produce three significant effects: the politicization of Shrine Shintō, the wholesale conversion of the three Bakumatsu-era New Religions to the nationalist cause, and the creation of New Buddhism (*Shinkō Bukkyō*) in response to the Shintō challenge.

Shintō, as many scholars have noted, can in no way be said to have existed as a single cohesive religious group prior to the Meiji Restoration. However, the politicization of Shintō in the early Meiji years had a profound impact on the religious fabric of Japan. As Sheldon Garon points out, “[I]n the 1870s, officials gradually transformed local Shintō shrines into political instruments for inculcating emperor-centred patriotism and values of social harmony.”<sup>26</sup> The impact of the Great Promulgation Campaign also went well beyond the boundaries of established Shintō organizations. It has been frequently noted that the leaders of the so-called “Newly-Arisen Religions” (*shinkō shūkyō*) were among the campaign’s most enthusiastic participants. The new religions saw the campaign as an

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<sup>25</sup> Sheldon Garon, “State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912-1945” in the *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12:2 (1986), p.277.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.279.

opportunity to both proselytize within government-sanctioned parameters and to lobby for official recognition as nominal Shintō sects. The religion of Kurozumikyō, founded in 1814 by a Shintō priest and faith-healer named Kurozumi Munetada, was one such sect. Having spread rapidly through the Bakumatsu and early Meiji periods, it was the most active of the new religions in the Great Promulgation Campaign, with a total of 1,744 active National Evangelists in 1883.<sup>27</sup> Although it considered itself an independent religion, Kurozumikyō's strong ties to Shintō (notably its veneration of Amaterasu Ōmikami) made its acceptance of official Shintō designation unproblematic, and its status as one of the thirteen Shintō sects, which was accorded to it in 1846, allowed it the freedom to proselytize along its own lines during the campaign.<sup>28</sup> For the religion of Konkōkyō (The Religion of the Golden Brightness), the road to official recognition would prove more challenging. Founded in 1859 by a farmer named Kawate Bunjirō (who would later adopt the title Konkō Daijin), the religion lacked Kurozumikyō's ties to organized Shintō and as such its members were forced to affiliate with established shrines in order to participate in the promulgation campaign. However, the sect's participants proved to be among the campaign's most zealous, speaking of the campaign as a "holy war", attacking Buddhism, and championing Shintō as the best "protector of the state."<sup>29</sup> This aggressive pro-Shintō stance paid off handsomely for the sect, as its membership swelled into the hundreds of thousands, and in 1900 Konkōkyō was granted official Sect Shintō status. The third, and most controversial, of the new religions of the early Meiji era was Tenrikyō (The Religion of Heavenly Wisdom). Founded in 1837 by a rural woman named Nakayama Miki, the foundress' apocalyptic and anti-authoritarian teachings drew the ire of the Bakumatsu and early Meiji authorities and was twice attacked by the government, once in the mid-1860s and again in the mid-1870s. While the sect was denied a role in the Great Promulgation Campaign, the foundress and her associates, determined to achieve official recognition, made considerable efforts to conform its rites and rhetoric to State Shintō designations. Tenrikyō was accorded official Sect Shintō

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<sup>27</sup> Hardacre, *Shintō and the State*, p.55.

<sup>28</sup> Harry Thomsen, *The New Religions of Japan*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1963, pp.62-63.

<sup>29</sup> Hardacre, *Shintō and the State*, p.57.

status in 1908, due largely to the sect's enthusiastic support for the state during the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>30</sup>

The early Meiji government's thorough embrace of Shintō also had a profound effect on Japan's Buddhist sects. While the government soon saw the futility of attempting to suppress a religion practiced by the majority of Japanese, Buddhist leaders were equally quick to realize that their best hope for defending and revitalizing their religion was to align themselves with the same brand of nationalism being promoted by their Shintō counterparts. Anti-Christianity was a strong characteristic of Meiji-era Buddhist rhetoric, and Buddhist leaders were anxious to promote their religion's usefulness to the state through their staunch opposition to foreign creeds and their promotion of Japanese values in the form of the acceptably inter-doctrinary Great Teachings. As early as 1868, Buddhist sects, led by the powerful Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji branches of the Shin sect, sought strength through intersectorian patriotic alliances, and in that year the two Honganji branches spearheaded the Alliance of United [Buddhists] Sects for Ethical Standards (Shoshū Dōtoku Kaimei), an organization that called for unity under the Law of Sovereign and the Law of Buddha, as well as the expulsion of Christianity from Japan.<sup>31</sup> By the 1880s, a new and vigorous school of Buddhist thought known as New Buddhism (Shin Bukkyō) had begun to promote Buddhism as the religious vehicle most suitable to represent Japan as a modern nation. As Brian Victoria notes, "New Buddhism was designed to answer the anti-Buddhist critique of the early and middle years of the Meiji period. [ . . . ] It insisted that although "foreign-born," Buddhism could still effectively promote loyalty to the throne, patriotism, and national unity," and it "made the case that its basic doctrines were fully compatible with the Western science and technology then being so rapidly introduced into the country."<sup>32</sup>

By the mid-1890s, with the Sino-Japanese War as a backdrop, some Buddhist leaders began invoking the term *kōdō* ("Imperial Way") in conjunction with their religion, arguing that faith in Buddhas and serving the emperor were one and the same. Meiji-era Buddhist leaders such as Inoue Enryō, the noted Shin-sect priest and scholar, argued that

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<sup>30</sup> Garon, "State and Religion", p.282.

<sup>31</sup> Victoria, *Zen At War*, p.6.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, pp.12-13.

Buddhism would never have survived in Japan without the patronage of the emperors throughout the ages, and that Japanese Buddhists owed their lives to both the Buddha and the emperor. This conjecture came to be coupled with the notion that Japan, as the pinnacle of the development of world Buddhism, was entrusted with the sacred task of “awakening” the supposedly stagnated Buddhist societies of the Asian mainland, a notion that would become increasingly salient as Japan joined the ranks of the colonial powers in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Imperial Way Buddhists thus successfully defended Buddhism against the early-Meiji Shintō sponsors who attacked it as a non-native creed by recasting the internationalism of their religion along the lines of *la mission civilisatrice* espoused by the Western colonial powers. Kita Ikki, the nationalist ideologue and devout Nichiren Buddhist, encapsulates this worldview in his description of Japan as “the Greece of Asian culture” and its people as “the chosen people declared by the way of heaven.”<sup>33</sup> These two notions also converged with the virulent anti-Western, anti-Christian views held by many Meiji-era Buddhist leaders, a view further galvanized as Japan came to assume an increasingly hostile stance towards Russia at the turn of the century. Upon the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, Inoue Enryō proclaimed that, as a Western, Christian nation, “Russia is not only the enemy of our country, it is also the enemy of the Buddha.”<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, the most significant consequence of the early Meiji leaders’ endorsement of Shintō as a national religion was the thorough politicization of religion in Japan. While it failed to create a true national religion out of Shintō, it created out of it a religious community considerably more cohesive and politically assertive than it had ever been, bolstered by its symbolic ties to the imperial house. And it also created expectations for other religious organizations. The Great Promulgation Campaign had demonstrated the considerable political capital that was to be gained by religious groups from demonstrating to the state their loyalty and nationalist zeal. Indeed, for religious groups of politically suspect origin, such as Tenrikyō, such demonstrations of loyalty and

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<sup>33</sup> Kita Ikki, *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō* (*The Plan for the Reorganization of Japan*), 1919, cited in Abe Hirozumi, “Nihon ni okeru fashizumu shisō no keisei” (“The Formation of Fascist Thought in Japan”), in *Nihonshi Kenkyū* 123 (1972), p.45.

<sup>34</sup> Victoria, *Zen At War*, p.29.

patriotism were a necessary defense against government suppression of their activities. And while by the end of the Meiji Period, the established religions of Japan, including the major Christian sects and the three established New Religions, had achieved official recognition and had for the most part assumed conservative, non-assertive roles, the religious movements that would emerge during the next half-century would face the same obstacles and opportunities, and as such, in the cases of the interwar Nichirenists and Ōmotokyō, would produce some of the nation's most fervent religious nationalists of the early twentieth century.

### NICHIREN BUDDHISM: SHAKUBUKU AND INTERWAR NATIONALISM

#### *Historical Background*

The decade following the end of the Second World War saw Nichiren Buddhism<sup>35</sup> emerge yet again as a trenchant and controversial socio-political force, in the form of Nichiren-based organization Sōka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society). This laymen's association, which was first founded in 1930 as Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society) was suppressed during the war years due to its leader and followers' refusal to pay tribute to Shintō icons. Re-established in 1946, its membership and influence mushroomed during the occupation and post-occupation period, with approximately ten million adherents by 1962 and an increasingly influential political wing, the Kōmeitō (Clean Government Party).<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, considering its prewar history, Sōka Gakkai has consistently been one of the strongest voices of opposition to state efforts to revive controversial national symbols such as Yasukuni Shrine, and has affiliated itself with a variety of antiwar and labour causes. And to this day, Sōka Gakkai founder Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, who died in prison in 1944 following his arrest for *lèse majesté* the previous year, is held up by the society as an "antiwar martyr".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Nichiren Buddhism is alternately referred to in Japanese writings as *Nichiren-shū* (the Nichiren sect) and *Hokke-shū* (Lotus sect).

<sup>36</sup> Thomsen, *New Religions*, p.81.

<sup>37</sup> Victoria, *Zen At War*, p.202n.

While no Nichiren organizations of comparable size and influence to the postwar Sōka Gakkai existed in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century, the venerable Buddhist sect founded by the rebellious thirteenth-century priest Nichiren played a highly prominent role in Japanese Buddhism from the late-Meiji period to the outbreak of the Second World War. (See Annex 1 for a brief summary of the life of Nichiren.) Among the most well-known prewar representatives of Nichiren Buddhism was the outspoken socialist and anti-militarist priest Seno'o Girō, whose early embrace of Imperial Way Buddhism gave way in the mid-1920s to a socialist platform which advanced the causes of the least privileged segments of Japanese society, including factory workers, landless peasants, *burakumin*, and Koreans.<sup>38</sup> However, the most prominent Nichiren adherents of the prewar years were to be found at the opposite end of the political spectrum in the form of "Nichirenism" (*Nichirensugui*)<sup>39</sup>, the militant, fiercely nationalistic brand of Nichiren Buddhism that emerged in the late-Meiji period and found a prominent voice in the polemics of political extremism of the interwar years. While the majority of Buddhist sects in Japan quietly adopted a patriotic, pro-state line, the Nichirenists, in keeping with Nichiren Buddhism's tradition of exclusivism and aggressive proselytization, embraced a combative, idiosyncratic brand of nationalism unmatched in modern Japanese Buddhism, and serve as an inspiration for a wide range of extremism in the years leading up to the Second World War.

Extremism, confrontation with authority, and embroilment in controversy have characterized Nichiren Buddhism since the sect's establishment in the Kamakura Period (1185-1336). It has often been noted that Nichiren Buddhism is unique among Buddhist sects in Japan in that it may be termed "the religion of a man and a book", namely Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra, which he championed as the sole path to salvation. This central belief led Nichiren Buddhism to develop a strongly exclusivist doctrine more akin to Christianity or Islam than to its fellow Buddhist sects, which it has denounced throughout

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen S. Large, "Buddhism, Socialism, and Protest in Prewar Japan: The Career of Seno'o Girō", in *Modern Asian Studies* 21:1 (1987), p.156.

<sup>39</sup> Kobayashi Hideo, the noted scholar of interwar nationalism, defines "Nichirenism" as "the Nichiren voice of the opposition", implying a politically active religious force akin to "Islamism", in Kobayashi, "Inoue Nisshō no shisō to kōdō: Nihon fashisuto no ichiruikei" ("The Thought and Activities of Inoue Nisshō: A Model for Japanese Fascists"), in *Rekishi Hyōron* 400 (1982), p.123.

its history with the same vigour that it has denounced non-Buddhist religions. Three further elements have long characterized the Nichiren denomination. The first is the concept of *shakubuku*. Literally translating to “break and subdue”, *shakubuku* refers to aggressive proselytization through direct confrontation with practitioners of other creeds, a notion which sharply contrasts the *shōju* (“embrace and accept”) method, the mild approach to teaching the Dharma prevalent in Japanese Buddhism which eschews direct criticism of other viewpoints.<sup>40</sup> The second element is millenarianism, drawn from Mahayana Buddhist mysticism, which asserts that apocalypse will accompany the Final Dharma age (*mappō*), an age which Nichiren prophesized would be brought on by humankind losing sight of the truths of the Lotus Sutra. The third characteristic of the Nichiren sect has been a strong nationalist undertone. Nichiren famously referred to himself as “the pillar of Japan,” and asserted that Japan was the land where the true Buddhism of the Lotus Sutra would prevail and be disseminated worldwide.<sup>41</sup> Many Nichiren followers have denied that the founder’s message was nationalistic. For example, the renowned Nichirenist scholar Dr. Satomi Kishio, states that while Nichiren validated the importance of the state at the popular level, he did not preach nationalism; on the contrary, he advocated on behalf of the whole world.<sup>42</sup> However, the writings of Nichiren, notably his treatise *Risshō ankoku ron* (*The Establishment of Righteousness and Security of the Country*) contained considerable doctrinal ammunition for Dr. Satomi’s famous father, Tanaka Chigaku, and other Nichiren-inspired nationalist ideologues. A further characteristic of Nichiren Buddhism has been a tradition of intensely individualistic followers driven by a sense of self-righteousness and divine duty, traits which were exemplified by the sect’s thirteenth-century founder. In his biography of Nichiren, Meiji-era religionist Anesaki Masaharu asserts that Nichiren “stands almost a unique figure in the history of Buddhism, not alone because of his persistence through hardship and persecution; but for his unshaken conviction that he himself was the messenger of

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<sup>40</sup> Jacqueline Stone, “Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus: Nichirenist Exclusivism in Historical Perspective”, in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21:2-3 (1994), p.233.

<sup>41</sup> Anesaki Masaharu, *Nichiren, The Buddhist Prophet*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916, p.43.

<sup>42</sup> Tokoro Shigemoto, *Kindai Nihon shūkyō to nashonarizumu* (*Modern Japanese Religion and Nationalism*). Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1966, p.75.



Buddha.”<sup>43</sup> Such unshakable conviction of divine purpose would be a defining characteristic of the modern Japan’s most important Nichiren followers.

The experience of Nichiren Buddhism in the Bakumatsu and Meiji periods paralleled that of Buddhism in general. The threat posed by the rising anti-Buddhist tide of the late-Tokugawa period cast a shadow over the sect. Moreover, the leaders of the anti-Buddhist campaign specifically chastized the Nichiren denomination as an unruly sect.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, a growing number of Nichiren leaders concluded that coexistence with Shintō, neo-Confucianism, and Western intellectualism – in addition to the dominant forms of Buddhism – was necessary to ensure its survival. Notable Bakumatsu and early-Meiji Nichiren leader Udana-in Nishiki boldly advocated the abandonment of the practice of *shakubuku*, and even dismissed Nichiren’s most hallowed treatise, the *Risshō ankoku ron*, as an anachronistic work.<sup>45</sup> The wave of anti-Buddhist persecution that followed the *shimbutsu bunri* edict in 1868 further convinced the majority of Nichiren leaders that a low, non-confrontational profile was required to weather the storm. However, following the official incorporation of the present-day Nichiren-shū in 1876, with the status of the religion appearing more secure, the dynamic of Nichiren Buddhism began to shift back towards its exclusivist roots. Among the most prominent Meiji-era Nichiren clerics was Honda Nisshō, who gained significant publicity through his insistence that a subsection on *shakubuku* be included in the section of the publication *Bukkyō kakushū kōyō* (*Essentials of the Buddhist Sects*) devoted to the Nichiren denomination, the resulting court case reviving support for the practice within the sect.<sup>46</sup> Another influential Meiji Nichiren leader, Ogawa Taidō, defended *shakubuku* on the grounds that it was the essential way to pay one’s debt to Japan, further asserting that Nichiren was alone among Buddhist sects in its compatibility with “revering the *kami* and loving the nation” and urged the government to endorse the Nichiren sect as the one true form of Buddhism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Anesaki, *Nichiren*, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> Collcutt, “Buddhism: The Threat of Eradication”, p.145.

<sup>45</sup> Stone, “Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus”, p.247.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, pp.250-251.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p.250.

It was thus from this increasingly hardline and nationalist climate within the Nichiren world in the mid-Meiji period that the school of "Nichirenism" (*Nichirensbugi*), led by Tanaka Chigaku, came to redefine Nichiren Buddhism as a nationalist vehicle without equal in modern Japanese Buddhism.

*Tanaka Chigaku and the Birth of "Nichirenism"*

Nichiren Buddhism has long been derided in both Japanese and Western scholarship as an intrinsically nationalistic and militaristic religion. But while certain passages in the writings of Nichiren unquestionably contain these elements, this reputation owes much to the writings and activities of the highly influential Nichirenist preacher and nationalist ideologue Tanaka Chigaku. According to Kobayashi Hideo, a leading scholar of interwar nationalism, Tanaka's Nichirenist doctrine was unprecedented in its unequivocal subordination of Nichiren Buddhism to the emperor ideology of Japan and in its emphasis on the nationalist tenets of Nichiren's teachings, notably the *Kokushu shōsetsu* (Law of the Nation) which emphasized national unity, global unification (under Japan's guidance) and the consolidation of Japanese values and founding myths.<sup>48</sup> Born seven years prior to the Restoration in what was still called Edo, Tanaka (*né* Tada Tomonosuke) was the third son of a physician and former devotee of Pure-Land Buddhism who had converted to the Nichiren sect. Following his father's death in 1870, he was enrolled as a novice in a Nichiren temple in northeastern Tokyo, and in 1874 entered the Nichiren academy of Daikyō-in, a predecessor of Risshō University, during which time he adopted the sobriquet "Chigaku" ("Wisdom and Learning").<sup>49</sup> During this time, Tanaka came to be disillusioned with the sect's leaders, whom he saw as diluting the absolutism of Nichiren's teachings in the midst of the government's State Shintō promulgation drive, a disillusionment that drove him to break away from the priesthood in 1879 and pursue a career as a lay preacher of the "true" Nichiren Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> In 1881, on the anniversary of Nichiren's proclamation of his faith, Tanaka founded the Rengekai

<sup>48</sup> Kobayashi, "Inoue Nisshō", p.124.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, "Nichiren and Nationalism", p.20.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

(Lotus Society)<sup>51</sup> in Yokohama and began lecturing on themes such as the life of the founder, exegeses of the Lotus Sutra, the falseness of non-Nichiren Buddhist teachings, the evils of Christianity, and the importance of *shakubuku* as a civic duty.

The 1890s saw Tanaka relocate to Osaka, following the consolidation of the Risshō Ankokukai in the Kanto region. It was during this period that his synthesis of Buddhism and Shintō – the basis of his religious nationalism – took form. In his 1894 treatise *Bukkyō fūfu ron* (“Treatise on Buddhist Married Life”), written on the occasion of the Emperor Meiji’s twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, he compared married life to the inseparable bonds between Nichiren Buddhism and Japan (as represented by the imperial vessel), and concluded the work with the twin salutations of *Namu myōhō renge kyō* and *Nippon teikoku ban-banzai* (“Imperial Japan Forever and Ever”).<sup>52</sup> Following his own second marriage in 1896, Tanaka moved to Kamakura, from where he would direct his organization for the next twenty years. And it was here, in the city in which Nichiren’s most important work took place, that Tanaka wrote his most influential work, *Nichiren shōnin no kyōgi* (*The Doctrine of Saint Nichiren*), in 1911, the work which would form the basis of Tanaka’s nationalist Nichirenism and serve as an inspiration for his best-known, and most radical, followers. In this treatise, Tanaka cast the thirteenth century priest as the champion of the Japanese nation, and called for world unification through Nichirenism, with the emperor at its core. Professor Tokoro Shigemoto, the noted critic of Nichirenism, dismisses the work as a deformation of the teachings of Nichiren, arguing that while Nichiren promoted the idea of the nation, he cannot be said to have promoted nationalism.<sup>53</sup> However, according to *Nichiren shōnin no kyōgi*, “Nichiren was not only a religious thinker, but foremost a leader of the nation, and therefore [in Tanaka’s equation] losing the ideals of Nichiren is tantamount to losing the ideals of the nation.”<sup>54</sup> According to the work:

“The nation of Japan, as ‘one nation-one family’, is a divine kingdom at the centre of the world, and within this realm of the enlightened was born a divine class of defenders of the

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<sup>51</sup> In 1885, the society was renamed the Risshō Ankokukai (The Establishment of Righteousness and National Security Society), after the Nichiren treatise *Risshō Ankoku Ron*.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, “Nichiren and Nationalism”, p.25.

<sup>53</sup> Tokoro, *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō to nashonarizumu*, p.78.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.77.

marvelous law of the Lotus Sutra for the purpose of creating a righteous united world [ . . . ] Japan's very purpose of existence is the implementation of this plan, as a country conceived for building Nichiren Buddhism."<sup>55</sup>

In 1914, Tanaka decided to amalgamate all of his followers into a single organization, the Kokuchūkai (the Pillar-of-the-State Society), named after Nichiren's famous "I am the pillar of the state" declaration. Based in a facility known as Saishō-kaku ("Tower of the Greatest Victory", also taken from Nichiren's writings) in the town of Miho in Shizuoka Prefecture, overlooking Suruga Bay and Mount Fuji, this would serve as the primary locus of his activities for the rest of his career. He would continue to travel and lecture until illness curtailed his activities in the late-1930s, embarking on a tour of Korea and Manchukuo in the summer of 1935 at the invitation of the Commandant of the Guandong Army.<sup>56</sup> And his nationalist and imperialist convictions only hardened with age. Tanaka staunchly defended the 1931 invasion of Manchuria, asserting that "the reason for the invasion of Manchuria is to teach the Chinese real ideology. For the sake of dignity, we will try to make peace through force. Therefore the Japanese army is in the right, and righteousness is its strength."<sup>57</sup> He further championed the Japanese army in Nichirenist terms as executors of *shakubuku*:

"The Japanese army is an army of justice in building peace. In other words, we are helping people through force. That is the way of Nichirenist *shakubuku*. [ . . . ] War is the mother of peace."<sup>58</sup>

Tanaka believed in Japan's divine mandate to unite the world under the banner of Nichiren and the emperor. In 1905, following Japan's military triumph over the Russian navy, he declared that "The war with Russia is divinely inspired to make Japanese citizens aware of the heavenly task of their country."<sup>59</sup> He even went so far as to compile diagrams of the stages in which the Nichirenization of the world would take place. By the 1950s he foresaw a total of 19,900 students, 19,200 instructors, and 23,033,250 adherents

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<sup>55</sup> Tanaka Chigaku, *Nichiren shōnin no kyōgi* (*The Doctrine of Saint Nichiren*), 1911, cited in Hori Makiyo, "Inoue Nisshō to 'kagi no shakubuku': Ketsumeidan jiken ni tsuite" ("Inoue Nisshō and his Terrorist Ideas: Some Notes on the Blood-Pledge Corps Incident"), in *Waseda seiji keizaigaku zasshi* (*The Waseda Journal of Political Science and Economics*) 328 (1996), pp.174-175.

<sup>56</sup> Lee, "Nichiren and Nationalism", p.24.

<sup>57</sup> Tokoro, *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō to nashonarizumu*, p.78.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, "Nichiren and Nationalism", p.28.

as a result of worldwide proselytization, and he envisioned a country-by-country and city-to-city spread of Nichirenism over a fifty-year period finishing with Wellington, New Zealand.<sup>60</sup>

Disagreement remains as to the degree to which Tanaka actually advocated military aggression. Tokoro, in no uncertain terms, blasts Tanaka as a “Nichiren fascist” on the grounds of his virulent criticism of pacifism and democracy.<sup>61</sup> Edwin Lee, on the other hand, in his article “Nichiren and Nationalism”, describes the man as a “religious patriot”, and suggests that although he asserted that aggression on behalf of the Lotus Sutra was just, he did not unequivocally sanction militarism.<sup>62</sup> However, there can be little disagreement that his best-known followers interpreted his message as a call-to-arms in the literal sense, both on the international and the domestic fronts. One such follower was a young army officer by the name of Ishiwara Kanji. His chance encounter with Tanaka in 1920 had a profound impact on his view of Japan’s destined role in the world, and as such influenced his *modus operandi* during his tenure as co-commandant of the Guandong Army in Manchuria with Lieutenant-Colonel Itagaki Seishirō. Another such follower was a vagabond and former army spy by the name of Inoue Nisshō, whose radical interpretations of the writings of Tanaka and Nichiren were to form the ideological underpinnings of a terrorist organization responsible for a spate of high-profile political assassinations in the early 1930s, acts which, in tandem with the 1931 invasion of Manchuria, ushered in an era of increased authoritarianism and aggressive imperialism.

### *Ishiwara Kanji and the “Final War”*

The spiritual dilemma which the future Lieutenant-Colonel Ishiwara Kanji faced in his early years was typical of a man of his era in Japan. Born in Tsuruoka, Yamagata Prefecture, in 1886, he began his military career at the Military Preparatory School in Sendai at the age of thirteen, and, following two years of training at the Central Military Preparatory School in Tokyo, enrolled in the Japanese Military Academy in 1907 for

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>61</sup> Tokoro, *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō to nashonarizumu*, p.78.

<sup>62</sup> Lee, “Nichiren and Nationalism”, p.27.

officer training. According to Mark Peattie's biography of Ishiwara, the young man dabbled in Christianity for a time, and later explored Shintō, which he ultimately dismissed as an insufficiently dynamic religion for the tumultuous times in which he lived.<sup>63</sup> His first exposure to Nichiren Buddhism came in 1919, during his assignment with the Department of Military Training, after a conversation with a fellow officer, who resolutely denounced the sect, drove him to explore its writings. And in the following year, he stumbled upon a notice announcing a lecture by Tanaka under the Kokuchūkai banner. Within weeks of attending the lecture, Ishiwara had converted to the Nichiren faith and had embarked on what would be a long-lasting affiliation with Tanaka's organization. Ishiwara's conviction of the importance of the nation and the imperial institution, Peattie notes, had already been inculcated well before his conversion to Nichirenism, more as a result of his military training than of his religious orientation, and he further suggests that his decision to join the Kokuchūkai is above all a testimony to the organization's compatibility with Ishiwara's pre-existing views.<sup>64</sup> However, Tanaka's idiosyncratic brand of *kokutai*-centred Nichirenism was to have a deep impact on Ishiwara's worldview through his ties to Tanaka's organization and his close friendship with Satomi Kishio, with whom he spent a great deal of time during his three years in Germany as a student of military history.

While Ishiwara shared Tanaka's Shintō-influenced view of Nichiren and the emperor as the twin pillars of the Japanese nation and his belief in the necessity of employing force to defend and propagate the Nichiren faith, the emphasis of Ishiwara's Nichirenism differed somewhat from that of Tanaka. In his readings of Nichiren's writings, Ishiwara was most struck by Nichiren's apocalyptic prophecies. He became convinced that the world had entered the period of *mappō* (the days of the "Latter Law") – the last of the three periods in Buddhist eschatological chronology following the death of the Buddha – a period which Nichiren, in his treatise *Senjishō* (*Selections of the Time*), predicted would culminate in cataclysmic world conflict between the defenders of true Buddhism and its opponents. The result of this, Nichiren prophesied, would be Armageddon, followed by a reign of universal and eternal peace with the world united

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<sup>63</sup> Mark R. Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975, p.38.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p.43.

under the law of the Lotus Sutra. As Peattie notes, Nichiren's prophecies of global war served as a driving force for Ishiwara throughout his military career; as Ishiwara himself wrote in his later years, these prophecies "gave to my military studies the most steadfast objective."<sup>65</sup> In addition to this, as Kobayashi Hideo asserts, the unification of the world in the name of the emperor and Nichiren that Tanaka expounded in *Nichiren shōnin no kyōgi* held great meaning for the young officer, and, according to Kobayashi, "in his role as a soldier, he sought to bring this plan into fruition."<sup>66</sup>

It would be a considerable leap of logic to suggest that Ishiwara sought to jumpstart the "final war" through his leading role in instigating Japan's invasion of Manchuria. Indeed, the years following his return to Japan in 1932 saw him adopt a less-hardline military stance, making known his support for the idea of eventual independence for Manchukuo and bitterly opposing plans for further military expansion in China. However, on the domestic scene he remained resolute in his militaristic views, calling for the creation of a military-dominated "national defense state". And while Ishiwara's military stewardship helped bring about the end of the February 26<sup>th</sup> Young Officers' Mutiny in 1936, his personal sympathy for the Shōwa Restoration cause was well-known, and a number of postwar scholars have suggested that his role in suppressing the attempted coup was a last resort, and that he otherwise would have thrown his support behind the ill-fated Kōdō-ha (Imperial Way) faction. This, combined with his increasingly "soft" line on China, began to arouse opposition among his colleagues in the late-1930s.<sup>67</sup> In the end his intractable opposition to the invasion of China resulted in his removal from the General Staff in September 1938, which all but terminated his influence in military affairs. He remained defiant, however, once famously declaring, "Do you know what Nichiren said when they tried to execute him at Kamakura? He said, 'If Japan is so decadent I have no regrets at perishing.' Well, Japan is that rotten today."<sup>68</sup> His religious convictions continued to fuel his uncompromising personality, and he remained politically active in his final years. In an October 1945 address entitled "The Course for a New

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>66</sup> Kobayashi, "Inoue Nisshō", p.124.

<sup>67</sup> Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji*, p.291.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.308.

Japan”, Ishiwara argued that postwar Japanese governance should be a highly moral and religious force along the dictates outlined in the *Risshō ankoku ron*.<sup>69</sup> And he still steadfastly defended Nichiren’s prophecy of a “final war”, arguing that such a conflict would most likely arise between the United States and the Soviet Union. Ishiwara died in 1949; in a curious 1951 eulogy to both him and Kita Ikki, the noted interwar nationalist Ōkawa Shūmei praised Ishiwara’s Nichiren faith, which he claimed allowed him to die with dignity.<sup>70</sup>

*“Kill One, Revive All”: The Terrorist Ethos of Inoue Nisshō*

Four years after Ishiwara’s first brush with Tanaka and the Kokuchūkai, another significant figure in interwar nationalism was drawn to the Kokuchūkai headquarters in Miho. This figure, however, would go on to apply Tanaka’s Nichirenist ideology in a much more literal and forceful manner than Ishiwara or any of Tanaka’s other followers. While the name Inoue Nisshō is generally familiar only to scholars of interwar ultranationalism, he is a figure of enormous consequence as leader of the terrorist organization Ketsumeidan (“Blood Pledge Corps”)<sup>71</sup> and instigator of the 1932 “Ketsumeidan Incident”, in which former finance minister Inoue Junnosuke and Director-General of the Mitsui *zaibatsu* Baron Dan Takuma were assassinated, on February 9 and March 5 respectively, and the “May 15 Incident” of the same year, in which Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi was shot and killed. Inoue was a self-styled Nichiren priest<sup>72</sup>, whose Nichiren-inspired self-image as a saviour of Japan and religious visions of a “national renovation” (*kokka kakushin*) inspired him to assume the role of executor of divine justice through direct violent action. Drawing on slogans lifted from the writings of

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.358.

<sup>70</sup> Ōkawa Shūmei, “Futari no hokekyō gyōja” (“Two Nichiren Devotees”), in *Kaizō* 32:10-12 (1951), p.104.

<sup>71</sup> In English language sources, *Ketsumeidan* is translated variously as the “Blood Pledge Corps”, the “Blood League”, and the “Blood Brotherhood Association”.

<sup>72</sup> As Stephen Large notes in his article on Inoue and the Ketsumeidan group, contrary to popular belief, Inoue was never officially registered as a Buddhist priest of the Nichiren sect, but was a purely self-styled priest, in Stephen S. Large, “Nationalist Extremism in Early Shōwa Japan: Inoue Nisshō and the ‘Blood-Pledge Corps Incident’, 1932”, in *Modern Asian Studies* 35:3 (2001), p.534.



Nichiren such as “Sacrifice one’s life for the Buddhist faith,” and “Kill one, revive all,” Inoue’s literal interpretations of Nichiren’s militaristic assertions served as the basis for a terrorist ideology.

Inoue (*né* Shirō, later adopted the name Akira) was born in 1887 in the village of Kawaba in Gunma Prefecture, the fourth son of a doctor. Writings on him describe him as a solitary and troubled young man. Like Ishiwara, Inoue was drawn to Christianity for a time; unlike Ishiwara he was actually baptized by a local pastor, but soon afterwards abandoned the faith, finding the notion of a loving God impossible to believe when there was so much suffering in the world.<sup>73</sup> Following his graduation from Middle School, he was enlisted as a trainee on a naval hospital ship, after which he worked briefly with the Mitsubishi shipbuilding company and then as an army engineer. And in 1910, after two years of uncompleted university study, he left Japan for Manchuria where he came to be employed as a freight clerk at the South Manchurian Railway station in Liaoyang. Concurrently, he came to be employed as a spy for the Japanese army under General Banzai Rihachirō, Yuan Shikai’s military advisor, and was decorated for his reporting of German military positions in Shandong prior to the Japanese attack in 1914. Meanwhile, he was introduced to Buddhism by a Sōtō Zen priest in China, and for over a year he practiced zen meditation. Following his return to Japan in 1920, after a failed attempt to establish himself as a businessman in Shandong, he sequestered himself among the ruins of Santoku-an, an old temple in his hometown of Kawaba, and chanting the *Odaimoku*. It was there that, in 1923, he heard a mysterious voice call out “Nisshō!” (“Sun-Called”), a name which he soon adopted, and on another occasion heard a voice which proclaimed “*Omae wa sukuinushi da!*” (“You are the saviour!”), an experience that led Inoue to commit himself to the teachings of Nichiren.<sup>74</sup>

In 1924, Inoue left for the capital, later reminiscing that “By the time I left Santoku-an, all my troubles had been resolved.”<sup>75</sup> His journey took him to the Miho headquarters of the Kokuchūkai, where he thoroughly embraced the Nichirenism of Tanaka Chigaku. Inoue would later credit Tanaka’s *Nichiren shōnin no kyōgi* as the

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<sup>73</sup> Large, “Nationalist Extremism”, pp.535-536.

<sup>74</sup> Kobayashi, “Inoue Nisshō”, p.122.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.123.

primary inspiration for his ideology. But whereas the thrust of Ishiwara's Nichirenist ethos lay in Nichiren millenarianism and Tanaka's emphasis on military expansion as a means for practicing *shakubuku*, Inoue embraced Tanaka's teachings on the virtues of the *kokutai* and the need to purify the nation through attacking the poisons of materialism, individualism, and democracy. As time went on, however, Inoue found himself increasingly displeased with what he perceived as inconsistencies in Tanaka's teachings, including his toleration of capitalism, as well as the inaction of the members of the Kokuchūkai. "Even if a theory and an organization is well-founded, if the members are useless then the organization is useless," wrote Inoue of his disappointment with the Tanaka organization. "I decided to follow my own path."<sup>76</sup> In 1928, he abandoned the organization and took up an invitation from a friend and former colleague in China, Takai Tokujirō, to join his Nichiren temple Risshō Gokokudō in Ōarai, Ibaraki Prefecture, where Inoue would serve as an unofficial priest. It was here that Inoue emerged as a religious leader and where his mystical fanaticism would take shape.

In 1930, Inoue left his Gokokudō ministry and relocated to Tokyo, where he set about forming the Ketsumeidan group. Among his recruits were student radicals from Tokyo Imperial University, Kokugakuin University, and Kyoto Imperial University, as well as recruits from Risshō Gokokudō.<sup>77</sup> In Tokyo, Inoue broadened his ultranationalist ties, taking up residence at a house belonging to noted "agrarianist" nationalist leader Gondō Seikyō, and through him he met Kita Ikki, his close associate Nishida Mitsugu (Zei), and Ōkawa Shūmei, a former colleague of Kita who he learned was planning a *coup-d'état* for October 1931. The discovery of the plot convinced Inoue of the urgency of action, and in a meeting on January 31, 1932, he and his entourage drew up a list of twenty targets for assassination. According to Stephen Large in his article on Inoue, the Ketsumeidan leader began to wonder in the late stages whether his student recruits would actually follow through, and with the exception of Onuma Shō, Inoue Junnosuke's assassin, and Hishinuma Gorō, the triggerman in the Dan Takuma assassination (both of whom were Gokokudō devotees), none did.<sup>78</sup> And following the assassination of Dan on

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p.125.

<sup>77</sup> Large, "Nationalist Extremism", p.548.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.553.

March 5, most of the student group were quickly rounded up by the police, and six days later, Inoue surrendered himself to the authorities. Following his arrest, Koga Kiyoshi, one of Inoue's most trusted subordinates, assumed the reins of Ketsumeidan, enlisted new members (including Ōkawa and an assortment of young army officers), and set about orchestrating a second wave of assassinations, culminating in the May 15<sup>th</sup> killing of Seiyūkai Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi. Following Inukai's assassination, the authorities promptly suppressed the remnants of the organization.

Writings on Inoue and the Ketsumeidan Incident are quick to denounce Inoue's Nichirenist ethos as a grotesque distortion of Nichiren's doctrine. Following the assassinations, the Nichiren sect firmly disassociated itself from Inoue and his group. Even Tanaka Chigaku, whose doctrine Inoue credited during his trial as the basis for his beliefs, was quick to denounce Inoue and his organization. (Immediately after the assassination of Inukai, Tanaka, in both his family daily *Dai-Nippon* and a pamphlet entitled *Nichirensnugi to terorizumu oyobi Nichiren shōnin no Nihonsnugi* ("Nichirenism and Terrorism and the Japanism of Saint Nichiren"), made clear his disapproval of terrorism.<sup>79</sup>) However, Inoue remained unrepentant in his defense of his actions along Nichirenist lines. During his trial, he declared that "[T]hrough the spirit of self-sacrifice [ . . . ], the root of evil will be knocked out, and in doing so, Nichiren will be duly glorified."<sup>80</sup> And Stephen Large suggests that the defendants' desire to emulate Nichiren in their opposition to corrupt authority helped generate sympathy for the accused.<sup>81</sup> In any case, in a surprise reprieve from execution in November 1934, Inoue and the three gunmen were sentenced to life imprisonment, with the rest of the accused receiving lesser sentences. Inoue would re-emerge as a notable far-right figure in the postwar era following his purge as a "fascist" by the Occupation in 1947, and would remain active until his death in 1967.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Hori, "Inoue Nissō", p.178.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p.178-179.

<sup>81</sup> Large, "Nationalist Extremism", p.559.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p.563.

*Kita Ikki: Nichirenism and "Japanese Fascism"*

All of the figures discussed thus far have, at one point or another, been characterized as "fascists", a term whose usage in the discussion of interwar Japanese nationalist activity has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly debate.<sup>83</sup> Within Japanese scholarship, the term "fascism" is generally used synonymously with "ultranationalism" (*chōkokkashugi* or *urutoranashonarizumu*), defined by scholar of fascism Abe Hirozumi as "an abnormally bloated view of one's racial group having a predestined historical mission."<sup>84</sup> However, the problem arises from the term's application to both pro-state forces, as represented by Ishiwara Kanji and his fellow militarists, and anti-state forces, as represented by Inoue Nisshō, Kita Ikki, Ōkawa Shūmei and other proponents of "national renovation". Japanese fascism also tends to be defined as a string of negatives: anti-capitalism, anti-communism, anti-parliamentary democracy, and anti-West, therefore fascist. However, of the three aforementioned anti-state "fascists", only Inoue can lay claim to have actively opposed all of the above; the financial assistance that Kita received from both the Mitsui *zaibatsu* and the Seiyūkai's Mori Kaku lends little credulity to the man's anti-capitalist and anti-democratic assertions.<sup>85</sup>

The one common thread among all the so-called interwar fascists is the assertion of a nationalist discourse independent from that propagated by the established authorities. And in this sense, it is not difficult to understand why Nichiren, Japan's quintessential symbol of anti-authoritarianism, was attractive to so many of Japan's interwar nationalist extremists, including the writer and ideologue most synonymous with "Japanese fascism", Kita Ikki.

Unlike Ishiwara and Inoue, whose religious nationalism formed as a result of their association with Tanaka and the Kokuchūkai, Kita, always something of a lone wolf, developed his Nichirenist beliefs independently, without any known contact with the great

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<sup>83</sup> See George Wilson's article "A New Look at the Problem of 'Japanese Fascism'" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly* 10 (1967-68) for a look at the controversy surrounding the use of the term "fascist" for nationalist leaders such as Kita.

<sup>84</sup> Abe, "Nihon ni okeru fashizumu shisō no keisei", p.45.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher W.A. Szpilman, "Kita Ikki and the Politics of Coercion", in *Modern Asian Studies* 36:2 (2002), p.487.

Nichirenist patriarch. Described by Kita biographer George M. Wilson as a “political romantic”, his early socialist leanings shifted to radical nationalism, views which hardened after his conversion to the Nichiren faith in 1916, and in the 1920s he would emerge as the far-right’s most influential thinker and ideologue. Born in 1883 on Sado Island, Nichiren’s onetime place of exile, Kita distinguished himself in his early years as a poet and calligrapher. His political activism began during his adolescent years; following his leaving school in 1900, he published a series of articles on the *kokutai* so critical that it spurred an investigation by the prefectural police.<sup>86</sup> His enthusiasm unabated, he published his first major tract in 1906, entitled *Kokutairon oyobi junsei shakaishugi* (*Kokutairon and Pure Socialism*), in which he dismissed the idea of Japan as one great family with the emperor at its head as scientifically absurd, and lambasted the Japanese public for embracing this myth.<sup>87</sup> The book was banned by the Home Ministry ten days after its first release, and it quickly fell out of the public eye. In the years following its publication, Kita abandoned his left-wing ties and gravitated to the opposite extreme of the political spectrum as an editor for the pan-Asianist organization Kokuryūkai, led by the nationalist don Uchida Ryōhei. This connection saw Kita spend the better part of the next decade in Shanghai as a Japanese army intelligence agent and observer of the Chinese Revolution. Like Inoue Nisshō, Kita’s early support for the Chinese Revolution would precede his advocacy of “national renovation” at home.

While Kita’s ties to the radical right predated his conversion to Nichirenism, the shift in his worldview that accompanied his adoption of the Nichiren faith is very clear. His conversion not only led him to abandon the Chinese revolutionary cause, as, in Kita’s view, the Chinese people’s failure to heed the words of the Lotus Sutra made the revolution futile, but also sharpened his nationalist views and his preoccupation with the defense of the Japanese state. In 1919, with anti-Japanese demonstrations erupting throughout China following the concessions made to Japan through the Treaty of Versailles, and social upheaval raging in his homeland, Kita, still based in Shanghai, wrote his seminal political tract, *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō* (*The Plan for the Reorganizaion of*

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<sup>86</sup> George M. Wilson, *Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki, 1883-1937*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, p.13.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p.27.

*Japan*), in which he alleged that “Nichiren is Japan. Nichiren is the nation. And throughout the world, anti-Japanese sentiment is seething. Throughout China, anti-Japanese activity is present. [ . . . ] Opposition to the Japanese state is opposition to Nichirenism, and brings about disgrace to the emperor.”<sup>88</sup> *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō*, a book whose importance to the radical right in interwar Japan has drawn parallels to *Mein Kampf*, is a long, sweeping work which covers political and economic reorganization, welfare measures, and finally Japan’s role in the world. According to Abe Hirozumi, Kita wrote the entire tract in a single sitting while fasting and reciting the *Odaimoku*. Abe describes the work as a call for escape from Japan’s domestic and international crises through “revolutionary empire.”<sup>89</sup> Establishment of this revolutionary empire, according to the book, would involve seizure of political power by young officers and a dedicated civilian élite for the purpose of removing the barriers between the emperor and his subjects, the elimination of big private concentrations of land and capital, and the expansion of Japan’s overseas empire “to support a population of at least 240-250 million . . . within a century,” including far eastern Russia, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>90</sup> Like Tanaka, Kita envisioned Japan leading a world federation of nations by spreading the divine way of the Buddha throughout the world.

Immediately following his return to Japan in early 1920, Kita joined the nationalist propagandist organization Yūzonsha<sup>91</sup>, a group founded by notable rightists Ōkawa Shūmei and Mitsukawa Kametarō. The organization broke up in 1923, due primarily to an emerging rift between Kita and Ōkawa, due to both disagreements over tactics and conflicts of personality. Kita’s intractable dogmatism as a result of his religious convictions appears to have been a major factor in the rift; Ōkawa chided his Nichirenist beliefs, nicknaming him “Maō” (the “prince of devils” in the Buddhist pantheon), and following Yūzonsha’s dissolution, the two stopped talking to each other altogether.

<sup>88</sup> Kita, *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō*, cited in Tokoro, *Kindai Nihon shūkyō to nashonarizumu*, p.202.

<sup>89</sup> Abe, “Nihon ni okeru fashizumu shisō no keisei”, p.41.

<sup>90</sup> Kita, *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō*, cited in Wilson, *Radical Nationalist*, p.82.

<sup>91</sup> The name Yūzonsha literally translates to the “Still-Surviving” Society. The term *yūzon* is drawn from a poem by the ancient Chinese scholar-official Dao Yuanming, who wrote “Though all paths lie overgrown, the pines and chrysanthemums still survive (*yūzon*). Group founder Ōkawa chose the name as a symbol of the supposedly eternal nature of the values it represented, in contrast to the ephemeral nature of other political movements. *ibid.*, p.97.

(Ōkawa would later praise Kita's religious convictions, regretting that at the time of their rift, he did not understand his Nichiren faith.<sup>92</sup>) The late-1920s saw Kita withdraw from active political life, devoting himself increasingly to religious activity, with Nishida Mitsugu (Zei), an influential young army officer and devoted Kita follower, serving as Kita's public mouthpiece.<sup>93</sup> In 1926, Nishida formed a nationalist organization known as Tenkentō (Heavenly Sword Party) dedicated to realizing Kita's vision of national renovation as outlined in *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō*. Ironically, Kita's withdrawal from public life saw his stature within ultranationalist circles increase considerably; through Nishida, the *Hōan* became the primary reference book for the young officers of the rebellious Kōdō-ha (Imperial Way Faction), and following the 1931 arrest of Kita's primary rival Ōkawa and his entourage following the abortive October Plot, Kita, through Nishida, came to be the central figure of the "Shōwa Restoration" movement, which sought to remove the "evil men" who surrounded the emperor and restore political power to the monarch.

As George Wilson notes, there is no evidence that Kita had any direct role in the events of February 26, 1936, or that even Nishida had any significant role in the mutiny. Kita first learned of the plan eight days before its advent, and was only given a copy of the young officers' manifesto a day after the coup had erupted.<sup>94</sup> While his sympathies clearly lay with the Kōdō-ha officers who considered him the spiritual leader of their cause, he was at the time completely withdrawn from public life and had previously dismissed Ōkawa and other would-be coup leaders as impetuous. However, his reputation as a dangerous radical and sponsor of political terrorism, in addition to the salient role of his writings in inspiring the attempted coup, led to his arrest on February 28, with the mutiny still raging. Kita and Nishida were tried by court-martial, during which Kita defended himself, explaining that he had taken no part in the coup, and moreover that he

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<sup>92</sup> Ōkawa, "Futari no hokokyō gyōja", p.108.

<sup>93</sup> Kobayashi Hideo includes Nishida in his list of notable interwar Nichirenist nationalists, together with Kita, Ishiwara, and Inoue. No further commentary was found on Nishida's religious affiliations. Kobayashi, "Nihon fashizumu no genryū: Kita Ikki no shisō to kōdō" ("The Origins of Japanese Fascism: The Thoughts and Activities of Kita Ikki"), in *Rekishi Hyōron* 386 (1982), p.15.

<sup>94</sup> Wilson, *Radical Nationalist*, p.124.

did not believe it could succeed.<sup>95</sup> But unlike in Inoue's case, the prosecution was unmoved, and, in an ironic turn-of-events, the Tōsei-ha (Control Faction) officers' most forceful attack against him was on the (accurate) grounds that he supported the theory that the emperor was an organ of the state, thus profaning the *kokutai*.<sup>96</sup> Branded as an anti-*kokutai* radical, Kita was executed in August 1937 along with Nishida. His iconoclasm and devotion to Nichiren remained with him to the end; according to various sources, Kita turned down an invitation from Nishida to join him in a final *banzai* for the emperor, and the only worldly possession he left behind was a copy of the Lotus Sutra, which he left to his son, Taiki.<sup>97</sup>

### ŌMOTOKYŌ: MILLENARIAN PROTEST AND GRASSROOTS NATIONALISM

#### *Historical Background: The Newly-Arisen Religions and the State*

Nichiren Buddhism's path to becoming an alternate voice of religious nationalism in the early-twentieth century owes much to the denomination's much-hallowed traditions of fiercely-guarded independence, zealotry, and confrontation with authority. Thus, tradition would dictate that Nichirenist nationalism would be both extremist and independent from the mechanisms of the state – an alternate voice, even if the message was essentially identical to that promulgated by the state, as in the case of Tanaka Chigaku. In the case of the Newly-Arisen Religions (*shinkō shūkyō*), and, most strikingly, the case of the religion of Ōmotokyō, their separateness from the mainstream was more the result of deep-seated mistrust and hostility from the centre. As Sheldon Garon points out, while Communism represented the unquestioned pariah in Japanese society during the interwar years, “to the leaders of the state and established religions, the “newly-arisen religions” ranked a not-

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>96</sup> The status of the emperor in Kita's political platform had always been vague. As Abe Hirozumi notes, while he considered himself an “Imperial Way” follower, he eschewed the traditional emperor cult-centred brand of nationalism, arguing that he used the “Imperial Way” trope as a politically-acceptable dressing for his nationalist ideology. Abe, “Nihon ni okeru fashizumu shisō no keisei”, pp.42-43.

<sup>97</sup> Wilson, *Radical Nationalist*, pp.134-135.



too-distant second.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, as it has often been pointed out, the new religions’ fervent displays of nationalistic fervour were, above all, aimed at ingratiating themselves to authorities who, since the Meiji Restoration, had made apparent both their lack of reservation in suppressing the activities of sects deemed antagonistic to the state, and their willingness to at least tolerate, if not support outright, pro-state religious groups. The saga of Tenrikyō in the Meiji Period was the textbook case of this relationship. The sect’s apocalyptic prophecies and calls for an egalitarian society, in addition to sect foundress Nakayama Miki’s Nichiren-like intransigence, which saw her detained by the police a total of eighteen times between 1874 to her death in 1887 for her refusal to accept the hegemony of State Shintō and her anti-authoritarian proclamations, had long drawn the ire of the authorities and marginalized the sect.<sup>99</sup> However, following the death of the foundress, the sect came to actively seek official state recognition within the Sect Shintō rubric, as the new religion of Kurozumikyō had achieved and Konkōkyō sought to achieve through participation in the Great Promulgation Campaign. Ultimately it was Tenrikyō’s enthusiastic support for Japan’s war effort against Russia in the first decade of the new century that led to its inclusion among the ranks of the official Shintō sects.

It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that nationalism within the New Religions was solely the product of political posturing. The nineteenth century had seen the traditional moral code of village life (*tsūzoku dōtoku*, or “conventional morality”) suffused with ideas of national belonging, through the expansion of road networks, the establishment of major pilgrimage circuits, the proliferation of nativist discourse, and, in the early-Meiji period, the impact of the State Shintō promulgation campaign and educational reforms. Therefore, by the time Ōmotokyō first appeared in the 1890s, the village culture that gave birth to the sect had already undergone a thorough nationalist indoctrinization, and as a consequence Ōmotokyō emerged as a much more overtly nationalistic religion than the three previously-existing *shinkō shūkyō*, Kurozumikyō, Konkōkyō, and Tenrikyō. However, Ōmotokyō’s early nationalism was virulently anti-state, and anti-Meiji Restoration, and it would be this stance that would stigmatize the

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<sup>98</sup> Garon, “State and Religion”, p.285.

<sup>99</sup> Murakami Shigeyoshi, *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980, p.44.

movement from its origins. The sect would remain a pariah in spite of the fact that it would prove itself to be the most aggressively nationalistic of the New Religions of Japan.

*The Origins of Ōmotokyō: Deguchi Nao, Kamigakari, and Millenarian Protest*

Of all the prewar New Religions, none have attracted as much scholarly attention as Ōmotokyō, mostly due to its always-stormy relationship with the state and the two occasions in which it was violently suppressed by the authorities, but also due to its ties to the ultranationalist wing in the 1920s and 1930s and alleged involvement with political terrorism. The religion was born in 1892 in the Tamba region of western Japan (present-day Kyoto Prefecture), a region renowned for its traditional mysticism, and survives today with a small but active membership of around 165,000<sup>100</sup>, with its main sanctuary in the town of Ayabe, in western Kyoto Prefecture, and its organizational centre in nearby Kameoka. Deguchi Nao, the foundress of Ōmotokyō, was born in 1836 in the town of Fukuchiyama, west of Ayabe, of an artisan family of declining fortunes. Her underemployed carpenter father died shortly after returning from a pilgrimage to Ise when Nao was nine years old, forcing the girl out to work at one of the large merchant households in the village.<sup>101</sup> Married at the age of eighteen to a heavy-drinking, light-working carpenter, she gave birth to eleven children, three of whom died in infancy, two of whom eventually went insane, and another two of whom ran away from home.<sup>102</sup> The period between her marriage and her husband's death in 1887 saw Nao and her family slide from relative prosperity into bankruptcy and destitution, with Nao eventually supporting her family selling *manjū* (steamed buns filled with jam) and, following her husband's death when she was thirty years old, selling rags and working part-time at a silk-reeling factory. The years preceding her spiritual awakening saw her gravitate towards Konkōkyō, a religion with a significant following in the Tamba region, whose

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<sup>100</sup> As of 1993. Emily Groszows Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Ōmotokyō*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, p.1.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, 28.

primary deity, Ushitora-no-Konjin<sup>103</sup>, was consequentially to become adopted as Ōmotokyō's *kami*.

In 1892, after her favourite daughter Yone became insane, Nao, then fifty-five years old, fell into a deep despair, and then into a state of spirit possession (*kamigakari*). Nao remained in this state for two weeks, after which she professed that she had been possessed by Ushitora-no-Konjin, who had told her of an imminent apocalypse, in which massive earthquakes and a devastating war would result in the complete destruction of the world, and be followed by the creation of an earthly paradise for those who had demonstrated their loyalty to the *kami*.<sup>104</sup> For a year after this experience, she was tormented by the *kami*, and was believed by all in the village to have gone mad. Attempts at exorcism failed, and it was decided by the local Konkōkyō priests that she had been possessed by a badger or a fox, animals synonymous with spiritual trickery in Japanese folk religion. Accused of arson, Nao was imprisoned in early-1893 (and released following someone else's confession to the crime); it was during her incarceration that she came to accept her role as Ushitora-no-Konjin's oracle.<sup>105</sup> It was during this time that she began putting the *kami*'s words into writing. Uneducated, Nao wrote her *Ofudesaki* (literally "the tip of the brush") in broad, simple *hiragana*, first by nail on the plaster walls of her prison cell, and later on scraps of paper. Having never learned to write, her newfound ability to do so lent considerable credence to her claims to direct contact with the deity in question. In any case, following her release from prison, the community no longer regarded her as a lunatic but as a *bona-fide* holy woman, and her newly-discovered abilities as a faith-healer and a diviner soon won her a small but committed following.

Deguchi Nao's spirit possession and emergence as a prophet and practitioner of sacred arts, while remarkable, was hardly unprecedented. The phenomenon of *kamigakari* has deep roots in Japanese folk religion, and served as the starting point of the three New Religions that preceded Ōmotokyō. And as Thomas Nadolski notes in his comprehensive history of Ōmotokyō, the Tamba region was particularly well-known for manifestations of

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<sup>103</sup> The deity is referred to simply as Konjin in Konkōkyō, and as Ushitora-no-Konjin by Ōmotokyō followers.

<sup>104</sup> Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest*, p.64.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

this phenomenon.<sup>106</sup> Also, the founders of Kurozumikyō, Konkōkyō, and Tenrikyō had, like Nao, all built their reputations primarily on their faith-healing. And furthermore, women, as many writings on Ōmotokyō point out, have long occupied a special position in Japanese folk religion in their role as *miko* (female shrine attendants), a vestige of ancient Japanese shamanism. Nor were Nao's millenarian prophecies particularly unique. Belief in a forthcoming apocalypse was central to the Tenrikyō faith, as it was to a number of Buddhist sects, notably in the Nichiren tradition.

What was unique, however, was the political dimension of Nao's doctrine, both in its acute nationalism and fierce, unconcealed criticism of the state. According to Nao's writings, Japan had once been a divine country, the pure domain of Ushitora-no-Konjin, but had since become polluted by foreign gods. "The present evil ways of doing things come from the victory of four-legged foreign demons which crossed over and triumphed in Japan," she alleged.<sup>107</sup> Nao clearly unequivocally denounced the leaders of the Meiji Restoration, accusing them of bringing misery to the masses. "There are many people at the bottom of Japanese society who, after working hard all day, still have nothing to eat. Nevertheless, government administrators at the top of society do not understand that there is such extreme suffering."<sup>108</sup> Most remarkably, her cast of "foreign demons" included the Emperor Meiji himself, whom she accused of possessing a "foreign spirit". Amaterasu, she claimed, no longer resided at Ise because it had become a centre of evil, and that the emperor was actually a "four-legged guardian deity".<sup>109</sup> She denounced the cult of the emperor as a lie and predicted that the apocalypse of which she had been foretold would result in the termination of the imperial line.

While Nao's anti-state rhetoric was alarming, it very much reflected the mood of rural Japan of the time. Discontent over the increased taxation, government intrusion into agriculture, and universal conscription the Meiji leaders had brought about was widespread, and the Tamba region in particular was a hotbed of grassroots anti-government activism – Ayabe was the site of one of the Meiji period's earliest peasant

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<sup>106</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.26.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>108</sup> Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest*, p.42.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 46.

revolts, in 1873 – activism that channeled into support for the fledgling grassroots socialist organization, the Movement for Freedom and Popular Rights (Jiyū Minken Undō), the antecedent to the Jiyūtō political party. Looking at Meiji-era Japanese society, Nao saw a world in which “the strong prey upon the weak,” and “people are thrown down and trampled like the cast off heads of rice.”<sup>110</sup> However, while Nao vehemently opposed the leaders of Meiji and their modernization and capitalist agenda, she did not share the liberal notions espoused by the Jiyū Minken Undō. Her social views remained intensely conservative, anchored in the traditional *tsūzoku dōtoku* values of piety, industry, frugality, and submission to the will of the *kami*. Her views were, above all, anti-modern and xenophobic, arguing that Japan had been a land of spiritual purity without equal in the world up until it was poisoned by the advent of the Meiji Restoration. And unlike the rural political activists of the Jiyū Minken Undō, she believed that the current society was irretrievably evil, and needed not to be reformed but to be destroyed.

By 1894, Nao had become widely known as a faith-healer and diviner, and her call for spiritual “renovation and restoration” (*tattekae tattenaoshi*), her championing of traditional rural values (*nōhonishugi*, or “agrarianism”), and her intense criticism of modernization struck a sympathetic chord among the region’s rural poor.<sup>111</sup> However, she still lacked a formal religious organization. Therefore, in spite of her previous criticism of both religions, Nao pursued affiliation with Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō; as Ooms asserts, Nao believed that her *kamigakari* qualified her to build upon the foundations laid by the earlier New Religions.<sup>112</sup> Both sects initially rejected her request; the Kameoka branch of Konkōkyō, eager to exploit her rising renown, eventually accepted her into its fold. This alliance would last for only two years. The leaders of Konkōkyō never accepted the idea that the Ushitora-no-Konjin which Nao claimed to represent was the same deity that had spoken through their founder, Kawate Bunjirō, showed no interest in her writings, and balked at her admonitions of the state and apocalyptic prophecies. Nao, acutely aware of the Konkōkyō organization’s motives for adopting her under its wing, publicly denounced

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Matsugu Miho, “Ōmoto ni okeru shinkō to soshiki no tenkai: 1916-1945 nen no Ibaraki-ken nambū o jirei toshite” (“The Development of Ōmoto Belief and Organizational Structure: Souther Ibaraki Prefecture, 1916-1945”), in *Shiron* 46 (1993), p.19.

the sect's leadership in 1896.<sup>113</sup> She officially ended her association with Konkōkyō in 1899, during which year, together with her increasingly prominent son-in-law Ueda Kisaburō (who would later adopt the foundress' surname and the regal-sounding name Onisaburō), she established the Kimmei Reigakukai (The Golden Bright Spirit Study Organization), the precursor of Ōmotokyō. The following years saw the crystallization of the Ōmotokyō doctrine. Ayabe was established as the spiritual capital of Ushitora-no-Konjin, and through various pilgrimages, Nao and Onisaburō established shrines to the deity at a number of sites of significance to Shintō, including the islands of Oshima and Toshima, and Mount Misen, northeast of Ayabe.<sup>114</sup>

### *Deguchi Onisaburō and the Formation of Ōmotokyō*

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the Ayabe cult transform itself into a full-fledged religious organization. It was also a decade of internal strife within the sect which saw Onisaburō supplant Nao as its guiding authority. Born in 1871 in Anao, Kyoto Prefecture, into a poor farming family, the future Deguchi Onisaburō was a precocious child who, following the death of his father, disappeared into the mountains of Takakuma and became an ascetic in the tradition of the *yamabushi* (mountain priests). During this period, he would, like Nao, experience *kamigakari*, an experience which would leave him convinced of his identity as a saviour of mankind. Following this experience, he enrolled in the Inari-kō school of Shintō in Kyoto under the tutelage of Nagasawa Katsutoshi. The Inari sect, pioneered by the Shintō scholar Honda Chikaatsu, was famous for its esoteric practices, notably *chinkonkishin* ("psychic studies"), a form of divination, and *yūsai* ("mysterious worship"), a form of esoteric meditation, both of which, under Onisaburō's influence, would become central features of Ōmotokyō practice.<sup>115</sup> Nao and Onisaburō first met in late-1898, and in the following year, Onisaburō married Nao's youngest daughter Sumi. As Thomas Nadolski notes, while Onisaburō was profoundly impressed

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<sup>112</sup> Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest*, p.49.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>114</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.42.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, pp.36-37.

by Nao's *Ofudesaki*, the two leaders' rival claims to messianic status complicated their relation from the beginning.<sup>116</sup> Further conflicts would soon arise. Under Onisaburō's guidance, many of Nao's followers began practicing *chinkonkishin*, much to the foundress' disapproval. And Onisaburō, acutely aware of the sect's need to present an air of respectability to the authorities, became increasingly disturbed by the foundress' stubbornness and inflexibility. Police investigation into the sect's activities had begun as early as 1903, following Nao's defiance of the Ayabe City Hall by refusing to have her granddaughter vaccinated, believing vaccination to be a polluting foreign invention. (Onisaburō secretly paid off the investigating police, silencing the affair.)<sup>117</sup> And during the same year, Onisaburō openly accused Nao of attracting police attention by making a pilgrimage to Mount Misen, a sacred mountain refuge traditionally off-limits to women.<sup>118</sup> It was during this year that he adopted the name Onisaburō, using *kanji* more appropriate for the name of an emperor, symbolic of his growing self-confidence in the organization.

Upon the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War the following year, Nao declared that the apocalyptic war of which she had been foretold had begun. Even as the Japanese navy gained the upper hand in the war, millenarian frenzy gripped Nao and her followers, and on May 14, 1905, she conducted her final rites on the island of Meshima.<sup>119</sup> Thirteen days later, the tsar's Baltic Fleet was destroyed in the Strait of Tsushima, severely damaging the foundress' credibility, with most of her followers abandoning the sect. Onisaburō himself left Ayabe, returning to his studies of Shintō in Kyoto and eventually becoming ordained as a Shintō priest. He returned to Ayabe in 1908 and reorganized Nao's sect under the name Dai-Nihon Shūsaikai (the Great Japan Society for the Cultivation of Religion) with Nao as its titular head. Two years later, Onisaburō officially acceded to the leadership of the Deguchi family, and became the undisputed head of the sect, which in 1912 officially adopted the name "Ōmotokyō" (The Religion of the Great Source). Nao succumbed to deep depression towards the end of her life, and died in 1918 at the age of eighty-one.

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<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>117</sup> Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest*, pp.63-64.

<sup>118</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.59.

<sup>119</sup> Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest*, p.65.

Under Onisaburō's leadership, the sect's membership increased dramatically. By 1912, Ōmotokyō, which through Onisaburō's Shintō ties had been brought under the wing of the Izumo shrines, counted some twenty thousand adherents.<sup>120</sup> And by this time the sect had formed a well-developed independent doctrine which combined Nao's *Ofudesaki* with the teachings which Onisaburō had inherited from Inari-kō. And while Onisaburō proved to be a wiser, more pragmatic leader, he maintained the sect's tradition of social criticism, particularly in his denunciation of war. Following the end of the Russo-Japanese War, he wrote: "Armament and war are means by which landlords and capitalists make their profit, while the poor must suffer. There can be nothing more harmful than war and more foolish than armament."<sup>121</sup> And in spite of Nao's inaccurate identification of the outbreak of the war with Russia as the beginning of the apocalypse, the sect maintained the core belief that Ushitora-no-Konjin would return to earth for the purpose of creating an arcadia. The renewal of the sect's anti-authoritarian rhetoric echoed the widespread domestic unrest that characterized the twilight years of the Meiji Period. The end of the Russo-Japanese War was accompanied by economic stagnation, widespread labour action, and the brief establishment of a socialist party in 1907, and the prevailing atmosphere of social unrest and economic malaise led many to abandon traditional patterns of worship and seek solace in new religions such as Ōmotokyō. However, the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War also saw increased government efforts to curb radicalism, and following the implication of four Buddhist priests in the High-Treason Incident (Taigyaku Jiken) of 1910<sup>122</sup>, religious organizations came to feel increased pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to the state.

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<sup>120</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.61.

<sup>121</sup> Thomsen, *New Religions*, p.130.

<sup>122</sup> In the High Treason Incident (Taigyaku Jiken), twenty-six people were arrested for their alleged participation in a conspiracy to kill one or more members of the imperial family. Four of those arrested were Buddhist priests, the best known being Uchiyama Gudō, a Sōtō Zen priest and renowned social activist in the late Meiji period, who was the only priest executed. While Gudō's innocence has never been proven, it is generally believed that he was wrongly convicted, and in 1993 his priestly status was officially restored by the Sōtō Zen sect. Victoria, *Zen At War*, pp.38-39, 46.



The outbreak of the First World War was in most respects a positive development for Japan. Japan's alliance with Britain allowed it to quickly eliminate Germany's tenuous colonial foothold in the Asia-Pacific region and issue its "Twenty-One Demands" for further territorial and economic concessions in China in 1915. The war also presented Onisaburō with an opportunity to bolster his sect and ingratiate it to the government through displays of patriotism. Following the outbreak of war, Onisaburō established a paramilitary group known as the Shinreigun (Righteous Spirit Army) as the sect's military wing. The Shinreigun units would wear military uniforms, march in columns, and sing patriotic anthems, and the group's bicycle corps would make pilgrimages to the country's major shrines.<sup>123</sup> In 1916, Onisaburō changed the name of the sect to Kōdō Ōmoto ("Imperial-Way Ōmoto"), a dramatic departure from the anti-imperial dictates of the foundress, who at this point had entirely withdrawn from the sect's activities. In adopting the idea of *kōdō* into the Ōmotokyō doctrine, Onisaburō explained that the essence of the sect's principle of "renovation and restoration" referred to the restoration of the emperor to absolute rule and the complete union of government and religion, in keeping with the ideals of ancient times, essentially a reconfiguration of Nao's doctrine to include the emperor as the pillar of the state.<sup>124</sup> Matsugu Miho, in her article on Ōmotokyō proselytization, notes that the notion of the emperor as a pillar of the state remained largely foreign to Japan's rural population at this time, and as such the sect was able to adopt imperial nomenclature without major doctrinal overhaul.<sup>125</sup> It was during the same year as the sect name-change that Asano Wasaburō, a teacher at the Imperial Navy Academy with a profound interest in the spiritual world, was drawn to the sect and relocated to Ayabe. In 1917, Asano was given the editorship of a new Ōmotokyō monthly called *Shinreikai* (World of the Divine Spirit), established with a view to amplifying the sect's teachings. Two years later, under Asano's influence, the sect embarked on an ambitious propaganda campaign with the publication of two newspapers, *Ōmoto Jihō* (*The*

<sup>123</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.78.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>125</sup> Matsugu, "Ōmoto ni okeru shinkō to soshiki no tenkai", p.21.

*Ōmoto Bulletin*), and the *Ōmoto Shimbun* (*Ōmoto Newspaper*), and the acquisition of the Osaka-based *Taishō Nichi-Nichi Shimbun* (*The Taishō Daily Newspaper*).

Like the years which followed the Russo-Japanese War, the post-World War I years were marked by deep economic depression and social upheaval in Japan, highlighted by the Rice Riots of August 1918, when an estimated 700,000 people nationwide took to the streets in protest of increases in rice prices.<sup>126</sup> The following years would be characterized by widespread labour unrest, a resurgence of tenancy disputes in rural areas, and an increase in radicalism, culminating in the 1921 assassination of Prime Minister Hara Takashi (Kei) and the establishment of the Japanese Communist Party in 1922. And like the post-Russo-Japanese war period, these tumultuous years saw Ōmotokyō's membership explode, aided in no small part by the sect's newly-established media presence. The sect was now drawing increasingly from the ranks of the urban educated classes and the military, attracted primarily by the sect's spiritualist-psychic elements, particularly *chinkonkishin*.<sup>127</sup> Other converts were drawn to the religion out of their belief in a looming apocalyptic war, a war which Onisaburō began asserting in 1919 would erupt in the year 1921, with the United States as the chief antagonist.<sup>128</sup> In December 1919, the *Ōmoto Shimbun* warned that through Japan's colonial expansion in Asia and its naval rivalry with the United States, "the general atmosphere [of Japanese-American relations] has become polluted. Does anything except cries that there will be a war between Japan and the United States strike the ear?"<sup>129</sup> Numerous high-profile converts echoed this assertion. In 1918, a navy captain, Hara Kunihiko, declared:

Japan must fight the United States, China, and Russia. [ . . . ] It will take some ten years for the Emperor of Japan to unite the world, and in that time the world will fall into deep disorder [ . . . ] Kyushu will temporarily be occupied by a foreign army. There will be

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<sup>126</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1978, p.124.

<sup>127</sup> In her article on Asano Wasaburō, Helen Hardacre notes that hypnotism and esoteric spiritualism were immensely popular in Japanese urban society in the early decades of the twentieth century. Helen Hardacre, "Asano Wasaburō and Japanese Spiritualism", in Sharon A. Minichiello, ed., *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900-1930*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, pp.136-137.

<sup>128</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, pp.93-94.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p.94.

earthquakes, devastating fires, and tidal waves [ . . . ] and great [Ushitora-no-Konjin] will cleanse the world. His Majesty the Japanese Emperor will unite all the world.”<sup>130</sup>

It was during this period that Ōmotokyō's influence permeated Japan's most hallowed institution. In 1917, Princess Tsuridono Ohikako, the niece of the dowager empress, traveled to Ayabe and subsequently became an Ōmotokyō believer, and Yamada Haruzō, educator of the future empress, joined the sect two years later.<sup>131</sup>

Not surprisingly, however, as the ranks of Ōmotokyō swelled, so grew its cast of adversaries, concerned about the sect's explosive growth and rising media clout. Liberal and conservative journalists became increasingly critical of the sect during the post-World War I years, branding it as an “evil cult” (*jakyō*) and condemning the practice of *chinkonkishin* as a form of brainwashing. And Hara's postwar Seiyūkai government, faced with the task of curbing the widespread insurgency of the times, became increasingly concerned about Ōmotokyō's rapidly-expanding influence. Lurid accounts of murder, torture, and sexual improprieties within the ranks of Ōmotokyō filled police files, and rumours spread that the sect was planning a rebellion.<sup>132</sup> This led the government to impose a ban on the sale of sect publications and on the practice of *chinkonkishin* in June of 1920. In February of the following year, the Kyoto police descended on Ayabe and arrested Onisaburō, Asano, and *Shinseikai* editor Yoshida Yūtei on charges of *lèse majesté* and violation of the newspaper law. The *lèse majesté* charge stemmed from alleged anti-imperial statements made by the Ōmotokyō leadership. On October 5, Onisaburō was sentenced to five years in prison, Asano to five months, and Yoshida and an assortment of publishers, editors, and printers to one month in prison and a fine of fifty yen.<sup>133</sup> The newspaper law violation charge was eventually thrown out, but the *lèse majesté* charge held, on the grounds that Ōmotokyō's millenarian prophecies were a threat to the social order. However, in May of 1927, with a Tokyo Grand Court appeal decision

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<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>133</sup> Miyachi Masato, “Ōmotokyō fukei jiken: Shinkō shūkyō to tennōsei ideorogii” (“The Ōmotokyō *Lèse Majesté* Incident: New Religion and the Imperial System Ideology”), in Wagatsuma Sakae, ed., *Nihon seiji saiban shiroku: Taishō (A Historical Survey of Political Trials in Japan: Taishō Period)*. Tokyo: Dai-ichi Hōki, 1969, p.273.

pending, the government officially pardoned Onisaburō and the rest of the accused as part of a general amnesty following the death of the Taishō Emperor.

### *Ōmotokyō Internationalism and Ultrationalism*

The 1921 suppression of Ōmotokyō left the sect at a crossroads. While the suppression was short-lived, with Onisaburō and his colleagues released on bail after serving only 126 days of his five-year sentence, and the religion still maintained a large following, the crackdown cost the sect much of its urban intellectual following. Asano Wasaburō, whose propaganda machine was largely responsible for launching the Ayabe sect onto the national stage, distanced himself from Ōmotokyō after his release from prison, and parted company with the sect altogether in 1925, subsequently forging a career as an independent spiritualist.<sup>134</sup> Many more of Ōmotokyō's high-profile adherents followed suit. With the sect's credibility at home severely damaged, Ōmotokyō's resilient leader decided once again to follow the spirit of the times, and reoriented his movement towards internationalism, which had become the dominant theme in Japan following the 1921 Washington Naval Conference. In 1924, with his trial still pending, Onisaburō jumped bail and left Japan, traveling first to Korea and then to Manchuria with a view to making contact with Zhang Zuolin, the powerful Chinese warlord who, with the aid of Japanese military and financial aid had detached Manchuria from the republican government's control. Onisaburō carefully outlined his objectives for his Asian expedition before departing, declaring his intention to spread the spiritual heritage of Japan and the veneration of His Majesty.<sup>135</sup>

While Onisaburō's motives for embarking on this expedition are not difficult to fathom – namely restoring his stature as a religious leader and convincing the authorities in Tokyo of his loyalty and patriotism following his arrest for *lèse majesté* – Ōmotokyō's Pan-Asianist phase came to be characterized by astonishing visions of grandeur and megalomania on the part of its leader, leading to widespread suspicions about his sanity.

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<sup>134</sup> Hardacre, "Asano Wasaburō", p.147.

<sup>135</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.127.

Following his arrival in China, he courted representatives of a wide range of religious groups, including the Daoists, the Baha'i, and the pan-spiritualist Red Swastika Society.<sup>136</sup> Through his connections with the Red Swastika Society and a trusted general of Zhang who had converted to Ōmotokyō, Onisaburō was able to organize a "spiritual army" for an expedition to Mongolia, where he hoped to found an Ōmotokyō-centred kingdom which would serve as a launchpad for a new order in East Asia. This new order, Onisaburō predicted, would expand through China and Tibet, and eventually reach as far west as Turkey and Jerusalem, uniting all of Asia under Ōmotokyō.<sup>137</sup> Adopting the twin titles of "Generalissimo and Dalai Lama" (the latter chosen to appeal to the Mongolian Buddhists among the expedition), the expedition set off in March, 1924. It was curtailed in June before the army reached Mongolia by Zhang, who, furious with his subordinates' actions, had the army's leaders summarily executed following their arrival in Beijing, (Onisaburō and his Japanese cohorts were saved by an intervention by the Japanese Consul at Mukden) thus curtailing Onisaburō's Pan-Asianist Campaign. In spite of the Mongolian fiasco, Onisaburō remained fixated on the cause of internationalism and pan-spiritualism, sponsoring the World Religious Congress in 1925, and adopting Esperanto as the official language of Ōmotokyō. Meanwhile, Onisaburō's cult of personality continued to grow, and his embrace of pan-spiritualism strengthened his conviction that he was the saviour of the world.

While Onisaburō's monumental self-assurance and sense of divine mission have led some to dismiss him as mentally deranged, Ōmotokyō enjoyed spectacular growth during the 1920s through shrewd leadership and active proselytization. As Matsugu notes, the 1921 suppression had convinced the sect's leadership of the need to decentralize its base and form ties with well-placed individuals.<sup>138</sup> Following the release of its leaders from prison, the decision was made to divide the Ōmotokyō organization into nine regional centres, each responsible for proselytization in its respective region. Towards the late-1920s, Ōmotokyō missionaries began focussing on cultural expression, promoting the sect as an embodiment of "new civilization" (*kindai bunmei*), all the while promoting the sect's

<sup>136</sup> Chinese: Shijie Hongwan Zuhui; Japanese: Kōmanjikai. *ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>138</sup> Matsugu, "Ōmoto ni okeru shinkō to soshiki no tenkai", pp.26-27.

traditional elements, faith-healing, *chinkonkishin*, and the cult of personality of the leader.<sup>139</sup> Through this method, Ōmotokyō succeeded in regaining its foothold among the urban educated classes and further expand its adherence among the rural population – still the core of the sect’s membership – and spread throughout Japan’s colonial territories and even succeeded in gaining followers in Europe, South America, and Indochina. Ōmotokyō membership peaked in the early thirties; widely ranging estimates place the sect’s peak membership at between two hundred fifty thousand and three million worldwide.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile, Onisaburō was busily expanding and cementing his personal connections, which, in stark contrast to the sect’s new internationalist platform, drew him increasingly into ultranationalist circles. Ōmotokyō’s Pan-Asianist campaign had attracted the attention of a number of influential Japanese imperialists, notably Tōyama Mitsuru, the venerable ultranationalist don and founder of the Meiji-era imperial expansionist organization Gen’yōsha (Dark Ocean Society), and his *protégé* Uchida Ryōhei, the leader of the Kokuryūkai group for whom Kita Ikki had worked as an observer in China.<sup>141</sup> Onisaburō, Tōyama, and Uchida made a joint pilgrimage to Izumo in 1929, which cemented their ties. Kita would also be approached by the Ōmotokyō leader, whom Ōkawa Shūmei, who was present at the first meeting between the two, suspected of soliciting funds from the nationalist icon.<sup>142</sup>

By the time Onisaburō was courting the leaders of Japan’s imperialist right-wing, the sect had abandoned its internationalist agenda in favour of a militaristic nationalist line even more aggressive than its First World War incarnation as Kōdō Ōmoto. The leader’s new agenda called for sweeping political and religious reform which echoed the sentiments of Kita, Inoue, Ōkawa, and other advocates of “national renovation” in its call for the abolition of the parliamentary system and the establishment of direct imperial rule:

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<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>140</sup> Murakami Shigeyoshi reports a claim by the sect’s leadership of between one and three million members. Saki Akio, another scholar of Ōmotokyō, places the figure at around one million. “The State of Social Movements”, published by the Home Ministry, reported that the sect claimed 400,000 believers, not including members of affiliated organizations such as Jinrui Aizenkai. Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.189.

<sup>141</sup> See Richard Storry’s *The Double Patriots: A Study of Japanese Nationalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1957) for a thorough overview of the evolution of these and other ultranationalist organizations.

<sup>142</sup> Ōkawa, “Futari no hokekyō gyōja”, p.110.

A constitutional, republican type of monarchy is completely inappropriate for the divine country of Japan. It goes contrary to the divine work of restoring heavenly government which is government based on national polity (*kokutai*) and a monarch protected by Heaven. [ . . . ] At a great convention of all the people it will be decided that Amaterasu is to become the ruler of the world. We will see the opening of a national convention of all the people.

At this convention it will be decided that the best government is absolute monarchy.<sup>143</sup>

In 1933, the sect formally readopted the name Kōdō Ōmoto, and revived the martial spirit which it had espoused two decades ago with paramilitary organizations, flamboyant parades of Ōmotokyō legions, and screenings of patriotic films (*aikoku eiga*) by Ōmotokyō missionaries.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, Onisaburō further entrenched himself in the radical right through the formation of a nationalist youth auxiliary called Shōwa Shinseikai (Shōwa Sanctity Society) in 1934. Warmly espoused by the prominent right-wing organizations of the time, most significantly by Onisaburō's close allies Tōyama and Uchida, the group embarked on an ambitious recruiting campaign throughout Japan in 1934 and 1935. Meanwhile, factionalism within the Japanese army and political terrorism – and the sect's known ties to the radical right – led the authorities to once again to step up their investigations into Ōmotokyō's activities. And in the end, while the sect's suppression in the mid-1930s was perhaps inevitable, Onisaburō's enthusiastic embrace of the Imperial Way cause in the mid-1930s proved to be a disastrous decision.

#### “PRESERVING THE PEACE”: RELIGIOUS SUPPRESSION IN PREWAR AND WARTIME JAPAN

##### *The Seeds of Suppression: Anti-Communism and the 1925 Peace Preservation Law*

In 1941, the writings of Nichiren were purged by the Japanese government on the grounds that they contravened the *kokutai* in their reference to Amaterasu Ōmikami as the “Divine Protector of the Lotus”, thus ending a long, drawn-out government attack on the Nichiren establishment that had begun in 1937, culminating in the widespread suppression of the

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<sup>143</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.184.

<sup>144</sup> Matsugu, “Ōmoto ni okeru shinkō to soshiki no tenkai”, p.28.

Buddhist denomination.<sup>145</sup> In contrast to the government's wholesale subjugation of Ōmotokyō in 1935, which was widely covered in the media at the time and has since received considerable scholarly attention, the government's attack on the Nichiren faith barely made a ripple at the time, and has since attracted minimal attention by historians. Much of this can be explained by the suddenness, thoroughness, and violence with which the second Ōmotokyō suppression was dealt, and also by the fact that the government's suppression of Nichiren Buddhism took place at a time when the nation was in the midst of a world war. However, it also speaks volumes about the transition in the government's policy towards religion that occurred between 1935 and 1941. As Murakami Shigeyoshi and others have noted, the government's savage suppression of Ōmotokyō in late-1935 signaled the beginning of a process of regimentation of religion and subjugation of religious organizations that failed to conform to state specifications. In the end, as Murakami notes, not even religious groups that enthusiastically espoused the war effort, such as Nichiren Buddhism, were safe from this process, a process which sought to eliminate any conceivable challenge to the state's monopoly over the dissemination of ideology.<sup>146</sup>

While the process of the regimentation of religion began during an era generally associated with the slide of Japanese governance into undisguised authoritarianism, the roots of the process are to be found in the era of "Taishō Democracy". The prevailing paradigm of the interwar years in Japan asserts the advent of the era of Taishō Democracy – when party politics and liberal thought flourished in the early-to-mid 1920s – and that of Japan's subsequent slide into authoritarianism that took place roughly between the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the invasion of Pearl Harbor in 1941. This paradigm has come under attack, primarily by those who argue that Japan in the 1920s was not democratic. Marius Jansen describes the dominant political parties of the twenties as "combinations of politicians" rather than "parties" – and combinations that were equally

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<sup>145</sup> Murakami Shigeyoshi, *Kokka Shintō to minshū shūkyō (State Shintō and Popular Religion)*. Tokyo: Kichikawa Kōbunkan, 1982, p.260.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p.260.



“bourgeois, imperial, and imperialistic.”<sup>147</sup> Paul Johnson goes further, dismissing interwar Japanese political parties as “legal mafias which inspired little respect and offered no moral alternative to the traditional institutions refurbished in totalitarian form.”<sup>148</sup> Critics of the Taishō Democracy paradigm frequently point to the adoption of the 1925 Peace Preservation Law (*Chian iji hō*), the law which was used to suppress Ōmotokyō and other religious groups in the 1930s, as an example of heavy-handed undemocratic policy-making in an era supposedly characterized by liberalism and democracy. However, other scholars, notably Sheldon Garon, have defended the paradigm, noting that coalition government of Kato Takaaki adopted the law as a conciliatory gesture to the government’s conservative wing immediately following its extension of voting right to all male citizens, and that the law was not given teeth until 1928 under the conservative, vehemently anti-communist government of Tanaka Giichi. Furthermore, as Garon has pointed out, the policies aimed at curbing leftism and other forms of radicalism had widespread popular support, lending credence to the notion that while the “democracies” of the Taishō period may have been dominated by unprogressive oligarchs, representative government did exist in the Taishō period, and it did indeed make a difference which group was in power.

By the mid-1920s, the upsurge of popular unrest and radicalism that characterized the years following the end of the First World War had subsided. Nevertheless, the perceived threat of communism was a paramount issue for Japan’s leaders. In June 1925, the coalition government of Kato Takaaki, in response to calls for tougher anti-radical laws by his conservative coalition partners, enacted the Peace Preservation Law which permitted the authorities to crack down on groups and individuals who sought to overturn the *kokutai* or the system of private ownership. The original legislation, under which violation of the law would result in seizure of property, was altered in 1928 under the government of Tanaka Giichi to include stiffer sentencing options, up to and including the death penalty.<sup>149</sup> This strengthening of the law accompanied the arrest of hundreds of suspected communists in 1928, a *putsch* which ironically, as Sheldon Garon points out,

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<sup>147</sup> Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000, pp.563-564.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, *Modern Times*, p.183.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, p.258.

found some of its strongest support among religious organizations, including some who would later fall victim to the Peace Preservation Law.<sup>150</sup> In fact, the government's first use of the law against a religious organization took place shortly before the 1928 anti-communist raids. Tenri Kenkyūkai (The Tenri Study Society) was a splinter sect which broke away from Tenrikyō in 1925 following its leader Ōnishi Aijirō's criticism of the parent organization's departure from its original teachings (which had never fully accepted the divinity of the emperor). Following the sect's distribution of a pamphlet entitled *Kenkyū shiryō* (*Study Information*) whose contents were deemed treasonous, the government ordered the arrest of Ōnishi and a large number of followers on charges of *lèse majesté* in April 1928.<sup>151</sup> The government's crackdown on communism lasted until the early thirties, after which the Peace Preservation Law would be used to suppress a wide range of grassroots movements, most significantly of the religious variety.

### *The "Second Ōmotokyō Incident"*

There still exists considerable disagreement over why Ōmotokyō was suppressed with such intensity. Murakami suggests that the suppression of the sect was an inevitable stage in the process by which the state asserted its absolute ideological authority through the imposition of the State Shintō ideology.<sup>152</sup> Matsugu Miho posits that it was Ōmotokyō's remarkable ability to form a broad base of support outside the state's control that led to its suppression.<sup>153</sup> And Sheldon Garon suggests that the Special Higher Police (Kempeitai), having been granted substantial discretionary powers for the purpose of eliminating communism in Japan and having, by the mid-1930s, thoroughly quelled the communist movement, had simply run out of underground groups to suppress and, facing the prospect of a retrenchment of their powers, turned its attention to politically suspect

<sup>150</sup> Sheldon Garon, "State and Religion", p.282.

<sup>151</sup> Ōnishi was sentenced to four years in prison in late-1928, but was released in 1930 on the grounds of mental derangement. The sect eventually reorganized under the name Tenri Honmichi in 1937. Miyachi Masato, "Tenri Kenkyūkai fukei jiken: Tennōsei zō'o no shinkō shūkyō" ("The Tenri Kenkyūkai *Lèse Majesté* Incident: An Anti-Imperial New Religion"), in Wagamatsu Sakae, ed., *Nihon seiji saiban shiroku: Shōwa-mae* (*A Historical Record of Political Trials in Japan: Early Shōwa Period*), p.258.

<sup>152</sup> Murakami, *Kokka Shintō to minshū shūkyō*, p.257.

<sup>153</sup> Matsugu, "Ōmoto ni okeru shinkō to soshiki no tenkai", p.29.

religious organizations.<sup>154</sup> Whatever the reason, the second Ōmotokyō suppression was of unprecedented thoroughness and brutality. By early 1935, widespread suspicion of Ōmotokyō's collusion with anti-government organizations had led to intense police scrutiny of the sect. While evidence of involvement in terrorist activity could not be found, the Kempeitai concluded that there were legitimate grounds for suppression of the sect for violation of the Peace Preservation Law, which aimed at "anyone who [has] formed a society with the objective of altering the national polity or form of government."<sup>155</sup> The crackdown began on December 8, 1935, with some 430 officers from the Kyoto police storming into the sect's centres in Ayabe and Kameoka. Almost five hundred followers were detained, with approximately three hundred taken into police custody, and all Ōmotokyō property in the two cities were sealed off from the public.<sup>156</sup> Meanwhile, Onisaburō and his wife were apprehended in the town of Matsue. The following year saw the police crackdown on Ōmotokyō sweep the entire country, in addition to Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, and Japan's Pacific island possessions. By the end of 1936, a total of 987 people had been arrested.<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile, the nation's newspapers sensationalized the suppression, fuelling the sect's image as a perverse cult. And Ōmotokyō's rightist allies quickly distanced themselves from the sect and its affiliates; Uchida Ryōhei, once a close ally of Onisaburō, denounced him in 1937 as a troublemaker who intended to use his religious power to usurp the state.<sup>158</sup>

The hysteria created by the February 26<sup>th</sup> Incident, which erupted less than three months after the crackdown on Ōmotokyō began, invariably further contributed to the savagery of the Ōmotokyō suppression. According to Tokushige Kōryō, an Ōmotokyō propagandist from Shikoku who was arrested in the first day of the crackdown, news of the event was accompanied by widespread torture of the incarcerated Ōmotokyō members, through which leading figures of the sect and the Shōwa Shinseikai were forced

<sup>154</sup> Garon, "State and Religion", p.293.

<sup>155</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.255.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p.258.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p.258.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p.261.

to confess to attempting to overthrow the state.<sup>159</sup> Meanwhile, in March, the government ordered the physical destruction of the sect's religious properties, buildings, and objects of veneration. The formal trial of the sect's leadership did not begin until August of 1938. In February 1940, over four years after the suppression, the Kyoto Regional Court found the defendants guilty of *lèse majesté* and violation of the Peace Preservation Law, with Onisaburō sentenced to an indefinite term of penal servitude. The defense appealed the decision, alleging pre-trial torture at the hands of the investigating police, and in July 1942, an Osaka court rejected the Peace Preservation Law conviction while upholding the *lèse majesté* charge.<sup>160</sup> Following the Osaka decision, Onisaburō and his wife were released on bail and returned to Ayabe. Their lawyers continued to press the appeal until the end of the war, when the occupational government dissolved all laws pertaining to the *kokutai*. On October 17, 1945, a general amnesty was declared that covered all the offenses against those laws, and Onisaburō was officially pardoned at the behest of Prince Higashikuni.<sup>161</sup> The venerable religious leader formally re-established the sect in early 1946 under the name Aizen-en (Garden of Divine Love), which he led until his death in 1948.

### *Silencing Popular Religion: From the Second Ōmotokyō Incident to the Repression of Nichiren Buddhism*

Widespread calls for a tougher line on “perverse religions” followed the crackdown on Ōmotokyō and the February 26<sup>th</sup> Incident. In his article “Why Have Evil Religions Flourished?”, Takashima Beihō called for a massive roundup of religious groups that practiced quackery (*inchikisei*), be them established religious organizations or “pseudo-religions” (*ruiji shūkyō*) such as Ōmotokyō.<sup>162</sup> And Sugiyama Heisuke, in his

<sup>159</sup> Tokushige Kōryō, “Ōmoto jiken” (“The Ōmoto Incident”), in Koike Kenji, Nishikawa Shigenori, and Murakami Shigeyoshi, eds. *Shūkyō dan'atsu o kataru (A Discussion of Religious Suppression)*. Tokyo: Iwahi Shinshō, 1978, pp.11-12.

<sup>160</sup> Miyachi, “Dai-niji Ōmotokyō jiken: senjika shūkyō dan'atsu no kiten” (“The Second Ōmotokyō Incident: The Starting Point of the Wartime Suppression of Religion”), in Wagatsuma, ed., *Nihon seiji saiban shiroku: Shōwa ato (A Historical Survey of Political Trials in Japan: Later Shōwa Period)*, p.95.

<sup>161</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.269.

<sup>162</sup> Takashima, “Jashūkyō”, p.419.

1937 article "Religious Racketeering", defended the police's actions against "religious racketeers" such as Onisaburō and Miki Tokuichi, the leader of the Hitonomichi Kyōdan sect, whose 1936 suppression represented the next step in the process.<sup>163</sup> Hitonomichi (The Way of Man), which at the time of its suppression was the country's fastest-growing religion, was founded in 1924 and is estimated to have gained around one million followers by 1934.<sup>164</sup> The sect, which used the Imperial Rescript on Education as its foundation and expounded a doctrine of this-worldly benefits through the worship of Amaterasu Ōmikami and subservience to the *kokutai*, fell foul of the government in April of 1936, when Miki and the rest of the sect's leadership were arrested for interpreting the Imperial Rescript in a manner that violated the *lèse majesté* laws and profaning the supreme deity of State Shintō. Miki died of natural causes while awaiting trial.<sup>165</sup> Later that same year, just prior to the outbreak of war with China, the government used the Peace Preservation Law against Seno'o Girō's New Buddhist Youth Alliance (Shin Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei) and the Student Christian Movement (SCM). In 1938, four Tenrikyō-related organizations, most notably Tenri Honmichi, the reformed Tenri Kenkyūkai, were suppressed by the Home Ministry, and in the following year, the Japanese chapter of the Watchtower Society fell foul of the Peace Preservation Law and was banned.<sup>166</sup> And as the war in Asia intensified, the government took further steps to ensure its complete control over religion, enacting the Religious Organizations Law in 1940 and inaugurating the Board of Shrine Affairs as an auxiliary to the Home Ministry. This was a long-awaited victory for the proponents of State Shintō which guaranteed its unequivocal supremacy as state religion.

The government's action against Nichiren Buddhism began three years prior to the adoption of the Religious Organization Laws. As William Woodward notes in his article on the wartime suppression of the Nichiren denomination, the sect's well-known links to Inoue, Kita, and other radical figures caused the government to undertake a serious study of Nichiren Buddhism and led officials to move in the direction of repression in the mid-

<sup>163</sup> Sugiyama Heisuke, "Religious Racketeering", in *Contemporary Japan* 5:4 (March 1937), p.617.

<sup>164</sup> Thomsen, *New Religions*, p.184.

<sup>165</sup> Murakami, *Kokka Shintō to minshū shūkyō*, p.258.

<sup>166</sup> Nadolski, *Ōmoto Suppressions*, p.278.

1930s.<sup>167</sup> The initial attack came in 1937, when an influential Shintō priest from Hyōgo Prefecture accused the sect of *lèse majesté* for its inclusion of the *kanji* of Amaterasu Ōmikami and two other prominent deities in the lower half of the Nichiren mandala. The case was dismissed by the Kobe court; however, the priest in question launched a nationwide anti-Nichiren campaign in which he urged government and military leaders to take action against the denomination. By 1940, when the government ordered the merger of all the country's Nichiren sects in conformation with the Religious Organizations Law, the campaign had gained considerable momentum. The campaign climaxed in April of 1941 when the Minister of Justice ordered the arrest of Matsui Nisshō, the general secretary of the Nichiren sect of Hommon Hokke, and five of his colleagues, on a charge of disrespecting the Grand Shrine of Ise.<sup>168</sup> The case was deliberated from November 1942 to August 1944, at the end of which the defendants were found guilty and given prison sentences of varying lengths. 1941 also saw vigorous attacks on the writings of Nichiren on the grounds that the Nichiren canon's reference to Amaterasu as the "Divine protector of the Lotus" violated *lèse majesté* laws.<sup>169</sup> In response to this charge, the Ministry of Education undertook the production of a *Shōwa Revised Edition of Saint Nichiren's Literary Works*, which reduced the original four hundred articles by Nichiren to around seventy, with all politically unacceptable phrases deleted.<sup>170</sup> The work was rejected by the Hommon Hokke sect, and the suppression of Nichiren Buddhism continued. In July of 1943, the Nichiren organization Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai, the prewar antecedent to the Sōka Gakkai, was suppressed, following its open assertion that Buddhist law superseded that of the *kami*. Its leader, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, died in prison the following year. By this time, as one Nichiren leader allegedly lamented, the government had succeeded in reducing religion in Japan to shouting "*Tennō heika banzai*" ("Long live the emperor!")<sup>171</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Woodward, "The Wartime Repression of Nichiren Buddhism", p.106.

<sup>168</sup> Nichiren leaders explained that since the Sun Goddess was enshrined in their mandala, they regarded it as unnecessary to visit the shrine or receive the Ise charm. *ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>169</sup> Murakami, *Kokka Shintō to minshū shūkyō*, p.260.

<sup>170</sup> Woodward, "The Wartime Suppression of Nichiren Buddhism", p.120.

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*, p.110.

## CONCLUSION

On the surface, it would be difficult to imagine two more dissimilar religious groups than Nichiren Buddhism and Ōmotokyō. The former is a Buddhist sect based on the writings of a thirteenth century priest with a long-established doctrine and a firmly-established role in the religious fabric of Japan. The latter is a syncretistic grassroots religious movement inspired by an uneducated rural woman in the late-nineteenth century and brought to renown by an opportunistic leader whose personal charisma remained the driving force behind a sect which throughout the first half-century of its existence remained politically suspect. Their inroads into nationalism in the early twentieth century were also in stark contrast, one drawing upon its own doctrinal traditions in its advancement of nationalism, the other essentially reinventing itself as a nationalist vehicle. And their motives for espousing nationalism were also dissimilar. In spite of the interwar Nichirenists' strong Shintō influence, the Nichiren denomination never compromised its tradition of fierce exclusivism, and used nationalism first and foremost as a vehicle for the promulgation of the divine word of Saint Nichiren. The leaders of Ōmotokyō, by contrast, saw the espousal of nationalism primarily as a means for ingratiating itself to the state and gaining official recognition for their sect, even if it meant thoroughly contradicting the foundress' teachings. But in spite of their divergent origins, the trajectories of the two sects converged in the early twentieth century, and in the years between the two world wars, Nichiren Buddhism and Ōmotokyō followed remarkably similar paths. The era of Taishō Democracy allowed both movements to flourish, and the tumultuous years of the late-1920s and early-1930s resulted in the intensification of the nationalism espoused by both sects, resulting in ultranationalism. And this ultranationalism played a central role in pushing the Japanese state towards authoritarianism, which ultimately resulted in the suppression of the two religious movements in the mid-thirties to early-forties.

The plight of Nichiren Buddhism and Ōmotokyō in the interwar years clearly illustrates the role which religious movements outside the parameters of State Shintō played in the advancement of Japanese nationalism in the early twentieth century. It also illustrates the profound difference between the political climate in the mid-to-late twenties

and that of the mid-thirties. The political climate of the late-Taishō period allowed both movements to flourish, and as both movements enthusiastically embraced the prevailing nationalist discourses of the time, the authorities proved more than willing to turn a blind-eye to Onisaburō's campaign of self-promotion as Generalissimo and Dalai Lama of East Asia while officially on bail pending *lèse majesté* charges and the participation of Kita Ikki and other nationalist figures in criminal activities.<sup>172</sup> The brutal suppression of Ōmotokyō in late-1935, however, represents the machinations of an entirely different Japanese state – a state aspiring to totalitarianism – and the subsequent *pogrom* launched against popular religion clearly indicates this aspiration. The plight of the two religions also indicates the seriousness with which the state took popular religion and religious organizations. Through its charismatic leader's aptitude for forming wide-ranging ties and his subordinates' proselytizing skills, Ōmotokyō successfully promoted itself as a champion of Japanese interests in the Asian mainland and patriotism at home. However, as Matsugu Miho points out, by the mid-1930s the state had become deeply fearful of the sect's coalition-building ability and thus moved to curb its activities. Likewise, the vociferous espousal of nationalism by Tanaka Chigaku and his followers gained him and his religious movement widespread support in political and military circles, as demonstrated by Tanaka's public appearances at military institutions and speaking tours in Japan's colonial territories and the leniency shown to the Ketsumeidan terrorists whose leader publicly identified himself with Tanaka's movement. However, like Ōmotokyō, Nichiren Buddhism's stature as a politically-active religious movement brought about its eventual demise at the hands of a Japanese state which, by the time it turned against the Nichiren denomination, was wholly intolerant of social movements independent from state control. Nichirenism and Ōmotokyō were thus doomed from the beginning – doomed by their very existence as voices of nationalism outside the state.

The theme of new religious movements and political activism in pre-World War II Japan invariably leads to comparisons with postwar religious movements such as Sōka

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<sup>172</sup> Christopher Szpilman details Kita's personal involvement in various extortion scams aimed at companies and individual politicians, some ideologically motivated (such as the Wakatsuki cabinet's allegedly lenient treatments of Korean anarchist Pak Yol in 1926) and others purely financially motivated. Szpilman, "Kita Ikki", pp.483-484.



Gakkai, whose charismatic leadership, grassroots activism, and doggedness in the face of widespread negative publicity is highly reminiscent of prewar Ōmotokyō, and the millenarian cult Aum Shinrikyō, whose involvement in terrorist activity parallels the extremism of Inoue Nisshō and the Ketsumeidan group. However, the saga of popular religion and religious suppression in post-Mao China make for a much more apt comparison with the plight of popular religious organizations in interwar and wartime Japan. The reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping permitted a veritable religious renaissance following decades of Maoist suppression, and the 1982 constitutional protection accorded to the “five great religions” (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam) created a climate of religious tolerance in the 1980s. However, in the wake of the regime’s crackdown on the protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the government began to apply more pressure on religious organizations, demanding strict adherence to state strictures from the established religions and suppressing outright those who existed outside the boundaries of the state. The Chinese government’s spectacular crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement in the mid-1990s in many ways paralleled that of Ōmotokyō in the mid-1930s. Both were large, broad-based religious movements centred around a charismatic leader, and while neither overtly challenged the state or its ideology, their size and influence made the authorities fearful of them, and their existence outside the state’s official religious framework made unequivocal suppression of their activities relatively unproblematic. And like the crackdown on Ōmotokyō, the Chinese government’s suppression of the Falun Gong was accompanied by crackdowns on other religious groups, such as the “Anointed King Sect” in eastern Anhui province whose leader Wu Yangming was arrested in 1995, and the millenarian “Lightening from the East” sect which prophesized the second coming of Christ as a woman, which the government silenced the following year.<sup>173</sup> In its permission of only state-sanctioned religious organizations to operate, and its overpowering of those that emerge outside state parameters, regardless of whether or not their tenets agree with those advanced by the

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<sup>173</sup> David Ownby, “Imperial Fantasies: The Chinese Communists and Peasant Rebellions”, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43:1 (January 2001), p.65.

authorities, the current religions policy enforced by the Chinese Communist Party is remarkably similar to that employed by the governments of prewar and wartime Japan.

It is ironic that the fervour with which Nichiren Buddhism and Ōmotokyō preached their doctrines of ultranationalism, militarism, and emperor-centred authoritarian governance was what attracted the attention of the authorities and ultimately resulted in the movements' suppression. From this point of view, their suppression represents a pyrrhic victory for the two movements, as the Japanese government's crackdown on them and other religious movements represented the transition to the sort of authoritarian regime that both Kōdō Ōmoto and the interwar Nichirenists advocated. Moreover, the two sects shared the belief in an imminent apocalyptic war culminating in the demise of the Japanese state, and as such their prophecies turned out to be eerily accurate.

## ANNEX

Nichiren was born in the year 1222, nearly seven hundred years since the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, in a fishing village in southeastern Japan, in what is now Chiba Prefecture. At the age of eleven, his parents enrolled him as a novice at a Tendai monastery, and at the age of fifteen he was ordained as a monk and given the name Renchō (“Lotus-Eternal”). The restless young monk’s zeal for learning saw him travel to Kamakura to study Jōdo-shū (Pure-Land) Buddhism, study under Tendai masters at the great centre of Buddhist learning on Mount Hiei, near Kyoto, and even pursue studies of Shintō and Confucianism in his quest for spiritual truth, the culmination of which was a conviction that the Lotus Sutra<sup>174</sup> represented the final and perfect repository of universal truth and the sole path to salvation. The Lotus Sutra, believed to be an amalgam of sermons delivered by the Buddha during the final stage of his ministry in the mountains of present-day Nepal, has long occupied a prominent place in Buddhist scripture, evoking comparisons with the Johannine writings of the Bible, including the Book of Revelations. According to Anesaki, the chief aim of the text “consists of revealing the true and eternal identity of Buddhahood in the person of the Lord Śākya, who appeared among mankind for their salvation. In other words, the main object is to identify his person with the cosmic Truth (*Dharma*), the universal foundation of all existences.”<sup>175</sup> Among the many passages of the text, one was to have a particularly powerful impact on the young monk:

Just as the light of the sun and moon  
Expels all dimness and darkness,  
So *this man*, living and working in the world,  
Repels the gloom (of illusion) of all beings.<sup>176</sup>

As Anesaki points out, Nichiren would come to identify himself with “this man,” and would consequently take it upon himself to enlighten the Japanese people to the truths of the Lotus Sutra.

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<sup>174</sup> *Saddharma pundarīka sūtra* or “The Lotus of Truth” in Sanskrit, known in Japanese as *Myōhō renge kyō*, (“The Scripture of the Divine Law of the Lotus”), or simply as *Hokekyō* (“Lotus Sutra”).

<sup>175</sup> Anesaki, *Nichiren*, p.18.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, p.30.

With his religious views crystallized, Nichiren returned to his original monastery, and retired into secluded meditation for seven days. Then, following this period of seclusion, he climbed to the summit of a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean and proclaimed the formula which to this day is recited by followers of Nichiren, “*Namu myōhō rege kyō*” (“Adoration is the Divine Law of the Lotus”)<sup>177</sup>. Following this proclamation, Nichiren proceeded to publicly condemn all contemporary forms of Buddhism, including that which was practiced at his own monastery. Enraged by his actions, his feudal lord demanded that the “preposterous monk” be put to death.<sup>178</sup> His abbot, who took pity on him, arranged for his escape to Kamakura, where he adopted the name Nichiren (“Sun-Lotus”), wrote his seminal text, the *Risshō ankoku ron*, and continued to preach his message of salvation through the Lotus Sutra. However, he continued to draw the ire of the authorities. His prophetic warnings to the rulers of Japan that unless they heeded the truths of the Lotus Sutra the country would be overrun by foreign invasion (namely the armies of the Kublai Khan) saw him condemned to death once again and then banished to Sado Island, experiences which only hardened the rebellious priest’s resolve. He ultimately came to be convinced of his identity as the incarnation of the Boddhisattva Visista-caritra (“superior conduct”, or *Jōgyō*), charged with the duty of saving Japan, which he regarded as the centre of the Kingdom of Buddha. Nichiren died in 1282, after thirty turbulent years of proselytization and persecution, passing on his teachings to six disciples. The original Nichiren sect would eventually split into thirty-one branches, the most significant being Nichiren-Shōshū (The Orthodox Sect of Nichiren), founded by Byakuren Ajari Nikkō, an original Nichiren disciple who broke from the other leading disciples in 1289 over their abandonment of Nichiren’s name so as to avoid persecution.<sup>179</sup> Since this time, the orthodox Nichiren Buddhists have fiercely defended the exclusivist tenets of Nichiren’s teachings and the concept of *shakubuku*, and it is this tradition that would define modern Nichirenist discourse in Japan.

<sup>177</sup> The chant “*namu myōhō rege kyō*” is referred to as the *Odaimoku*, and is employed by numerous Buddhist sects.

<sup>178</sup> William P. Woodward, “The Wartime Persecution of Nichiren Buddhism”, in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 7 (November 1959), pp.101-102.

<sup>179</sup> Stone, “Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus”, p.237.

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